

A Review of the Thomas Ross-Shabir Ally Debate, “The
New Testament Picture of Jesus: Is it Accurate?”
3/13/2018, University of Wisconsin at Whitewater
by Thomas Ross

Shabir Ally is a very good debater, probably the leading Muslim intellectual and defender of Islam in the Western world. I was thankful to be able to debate him on the important topic. What we both agreed to specifically defined the debate topic was:

The debate topic concerns whether or not the facts of history demonstrate that the New Testament presents accurately or corrupts the original picture of Jesus as evidenced by the historical Jesus’ self-understanding and proclamation and as understood and proclaimed by His eyewitnesses and earliest followers. It is not over the preservation of the New Testament after the autographs, but over the extant facts of history as they relate to the accuracy of the New Testament’s presentation of Jesus. The question of the preservation of the New Testament after its original composition is well worth the time, but it is not the topic of this debate.

In relation to this topic, I demonstrated:

- 1.) That the New Testament was composed by eyewitnesses to Christ and His earliest followers.
- 2.) That the New Testament was too early for there to be a transformation from the Muslim “Jesus” to the Biblical Jesus, the Jesus of history.
- 3.) Since the debate was over the “extant facts of history,” I showed many, many facts of history that supported points #1 and #2 above.

The extant facts of history strongly support the authorship of the four canonical Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) by their traditional authors. Consequently, the New Testament picture of Jesus Christ as the Divine-human Son of God and Son of Man who died by crucifixion for the sins of mankind and rose again from the dead reflects early and eyewitness testimony, indeed, testimony by Christ’s closest followers. Furthermore, the traditional early dates for the Gospels set forth by the ancient historical sources strongly support the accuracy of the New Testament’s picture of Jesus Christ. What is more, extremely early pre-Pauline material such as 1 Corinthians 15:1ff. and Philippians 2:5-11 similarly supported the New Testament picture of the Lord Jesus, as did the testimonies of the Apostles Peter and Paul, of James, Jude, and the New Testament as a whole. By way of contrast, theologically liberal theories of the authorship and dating of the New Testament are based upon a rejection of all ancient evidence and are baseless speculation. Theories of “Q” sources, Markan priority and literary dependence among the synoptic Gospels, source criticism, and other similar ideas have no support in the extant ancient historical evidence. I argued that the Bible is the non-contradictory and historically accurate, indeed, infallibly inspired Word of God. Furthermore, the evidence and historical sources for the life of Christ as recorded in the Bible are vastly superior to and far earlier than the historical sources of the Quran and the life of Muhammad, so

Muslims who accept the accuracy of the latter are inconsistent if they reject the accuracy of the former.

Dr. Shabir Ally, by way of contrast, asserted the theologically liberal denial of the authorship of the four Gospels by their traditional authors and affirmed that late dates for the gospels are correct. He argued that the New Testament and the Gospels generally were contradictory, and that an evolutionary development took place from the original Jesus, who was the prophet depicted in the Quran, not the Divine Son of God who died by crucifixion as a substitutionary sacrifice and rose from the dead. Over time, this Muslim Jesus evolved into the Jesus of Christianity, through stages from “Q,” to Mark, to Matthew and Luke, and finally to John.

Comments on Thomas Ross’s Arguments

Shabir Ally did very little to address the positive evidence that I presented (much of which is explained in more detail in my book *God’s Fingerprint: Evidence for the Bible from History, Archaeology, and Prophecy*. For example, I pointed out that 1 Corinthians 15 contains a pre-Pauline creed testifying to Christ’s substitutionary death and resurrection mere months after the events took place. I referred to the pre-Pauline hymn in Philippians 2:5-11, concerning which Martin Hengel, whom Shabir mentions several times, said: “The hymn to Christ [in Philippians 2:5-11] . . . is as old as the [Christian] community itself.”¹ I mentioned that Dr. Ralph Martin in his definitive dissertation on Philippians 2:5-11, published by Cambridge University, ascribes the hymn to Stephen, the early Christian who was martyred c. A. D. 35 (Acts 7), some two years after Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection. But Philippians 2:5-11 indicates that Christ is Jehovah became man, who died on the cross and rose again from the grave, and whom all will worship. The extremely early dates for the creed of 1 Corinthians 15 and the hymn of Philippians 2 is devastating to Islam. Instead of a non-Divine “Jesus” that did not die for the sins of the world and rise again, incredibly early evidence—far before Shabir’s date for Mark to allegedly start “evolving” Christ—testifies to the Christian’s dying and rising Divine-Human Jesus as the real Jesus. What did Shabir say to this? He did not offer any explanation.

I also gave many lines of ancient evidence for Matthew and John’s writing their Gospels. If the unanimous testimony of ancient history is correct and Matthew wrote the

¹ Martin Hengel, *Between Jesus and Paul: Studies in the Earliest History of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983) 93.

Gospel of Matthew and John wrote the Gospel of John, then Islam's "Jesus" cannot possibly be the historically accurate one, for it would stand in radical contradistinction to what Christ's closest followers said about Him. I mentioned the ancient testimonies from Papias, Irenaeus, Origen, Eusebius and Jerome for Matthew's authorship, and that nobody ever disputed it at all. I gave similar sorts of testimony for John's Gospel. Furthermore, I pointed out that the headings of all four Gospels contain "complete unanimity in their attribution of authorship . . . complete unanimity over the four titles of the Gospels in a distribution extending throughout the whole Roman Empire,"² in radical contrast with writings that actually were made up, the pseudepigraphical forgeries. What Shabir needed to do was show that each of those pieces of evidence was problematic. He did not provide a single piece of counter-evidence, nor a single piece of evidence that even one of these historical sources was unreliable, nor any explanation at all for the unity in the headings for the four canonical gospels in contrast to the diversity in non-canonical forgeries. He never pointed out a single manuscript, for example, that said that someone other than John wrote John, or someone other than Matthew wrote Matthew. In a debate over "extant facts of history," his failure to provide even a single fact in favor of his rejection of Matthew's authorship of Matthew, or a single fact to weaken even one of the evidences I gave, was devastating. I had asked:

Will he give us anyone who lived in the first century AD, the second century, the third century, the fourth century, the fifth century, or even between A. D. 1 and A. D. 1000, that denied that Matthew wrote Matthew? Can he give us anyone before A. D. 1700? Does *every* extant ancient historical source, by people who could actually investigate the matter, say Matthew wrote Matthew?

Shabir could not name anyone at all, nor deny that *every* extant ancient historical source was on the Christian side. The Muslim (and skeptical) view has no ancient historical evidence for it at all.

I also gave some of the overwhelming internal evidence in John's Gospel for John's authorship. For example, I quoted:

Internal evidence . . . testifies to . . . "the disciple whom Jesus loved" as the [eye] witness and writer of the content of the Gospel (21:20-24). He was among those Jesus appeared to at the Sea of Tiberias (Galilee) after their night of unsuccessful fishing (21:7). This disciple was a particular friend of Peter and was one of the sons of Zebedee (John 21:2; cf. Matt 4:21; 10:2). The preceding chapters couple him with Peter in the events on the morning of the Resurrection (20:2-8) and also identify him as the one Jesus committed his mother to at the Crucifixion (19:25-27). . . . [H]e is the one who is called "another disciple," the one who led Peter into the court of the high priest's palace at the trial of Jesus (18:15-16). He was present at the Last Supper, where he reclined next to Jesus and was questioned by Peter (13:23-24) . . . John . . . Peter's close associate after the Resurrection (Acts 3:1-11; 4:13-20; Gal 2:9). He would have been able to hear both Jesus' public and private discourses and would have been actively engaged in the development of the church from its inception. . . .

² John Wenham, *Redating Matthew, Mark, and Luke: A Fresh Assault on the Synoptic Problem* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1992) 133-134.

[T]he author was a Palestinian Jew, not a member of the Diaspora. His knowledge of Palestinian topography was accurate. He distinguished between Bethany, the suburb of Jerusalem where Mary and Martha lived (11:1), and “Bethany on the other side of the Jordan,” where John the Baptist preached (1:28). . . . His description of the features of Jerusalem, such as the pool by the “Sheep Gate” (5:2), the “pool of Siloam” (9:7), the “Stone Pavement” (Gr. *lithostroton*, 19:1-3), and the varied references to the temple (2:14-16; 8:2-10; 10:2-3), show that he was familiar with the city before its destruction. . . . Archaeological investigations have confirmed the accuracy of many of the author’s allusions[.] . . .

[The] author personally witnessed the events he described . . . spoke easily and familiarly of the disciples and associates of Jesus (6:5-7; 12:2-10; 13:3-6; 14:5, 8, 22) and knew the background of those Jesus had only casual contact with, such as Nicodemus (3:1) or Annas (18:1-3). Small details appear frequently, such as the barley bread used at the feeding of the five thousand (6:9), the fragrance of the ointment Mary poured on Jesus (12:3), or the time at which Judas left the Last Supper (13:3-10) . . . the natural touches that come from personal memory. . . . Not only must the writer have been an eyewitness, but he also was closely acquainted with the personal career of Jesus from beginning to end. . . .

[The] author must have been John the son of Zebedee . . . one who knew Jesus personally, who had followed him throughout his career, and who had become one of the leaders in the movement that grew out of Jesus’ life and teaching. . . . [It is] a genuine document of the first-century witness.³

Shabir did not show that even one of these references was inaccurate. He simply asserted that John’s Gospel was anonymous. He also simply asserted that it was late, despite the fact that “archeologists . . . are finding that John is indispensable in recreating pre-70 [A. D.] Jerusalem.” Empty assertions against overwhelming internal and external evidence are simply not sufficient, especially since if we recognize that the Apostle John, one of Christ’s three closest followers, wrote the Gospel of John that is the end of the Islamic “Jesus.” Shabir and Islam will need to do better than simply assert that John did not write John. They will need to refute the actual evidence for it and provide a preponderance of contrary ancient evidence. However, since this is impossible, Islam has a very serious problem here. The Islamic “Jesus” is not the Jesus of history—the Jesus of the Bible, the crucified and resurrected God-Man, is the Jesus of history.

I also defended the dates for the Gospels that are given by the ancient sources, namely, Matthew: c. A. D. 40; Mark c. A. D. 43; Luke c. A. D. 48; and John c. A. D. 50-65. I gave 15 lines of evidence that Matthew was written this early, and Shabir did not attempt to refute any of them. Nor did he attempt to refute a single one of the evidences I supplied for an early date for John’s Gospel. In the question and answer time, I quoted liberal scholar Dr. Charles C. Torrey, professor of Semitic Languages at Yale University and founder of the American School of Archaeology at Jerusalem:

The Gospels as completed and published, in their present extent and form . . . can be only a little later than the middle of the [1st] century . . . [for the] latest of them. . . . At the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis in New York City . . . I challenged my New Testament colleagues to designate even *one* passage, from any of the Four Gospels, giving clear

³ Merrill C. Tenney, *John*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelain and J. D. Douglas, vol. 9 of Expositor’s Bible Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), paragraph 49688-49701.

evidence of a date later than 50 A. D. . . . The challenge was not met, nor will it be, for there is no such passage.⁴

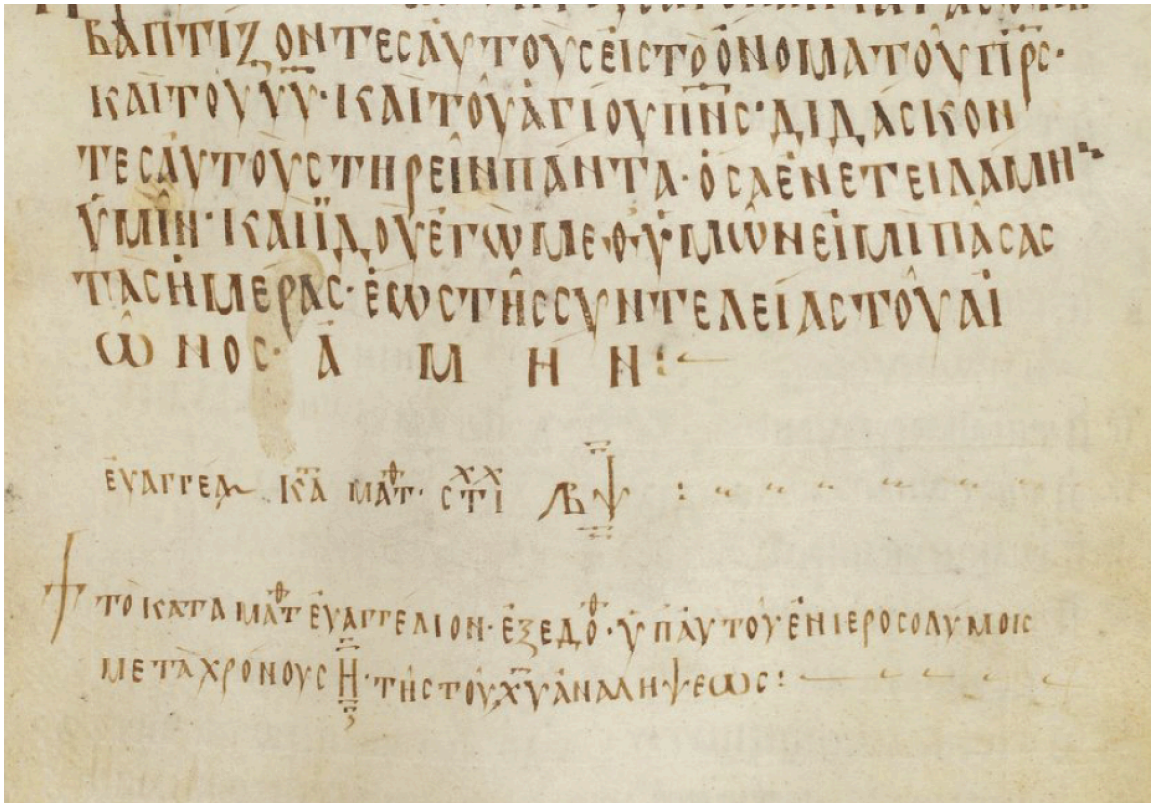
Nobody was able to answer Dr. Torrey's challenge then, and Shabir did not answer it now; he could not supply even one passage in the Gospels that required a date after A. D. 50. Shabir simply made assertions without any evidence.

Indeed, Dr. Ally did not appear to be aware that large numbers of Greek manuscripts supply the information that "Matthew published eight years after the ascension . . . Mark published two years later . . . Luke another five years later . . . [and John] published thirty-two years after the ascension of Christ."⁵ This information is readily available in the collations of Dr. Wilber Pickering's Greek New Testament.⁶ Dr. Pickering, who actually has collated many MSS, unlike most theological liberals, and unlike Shabir, points out the presence of these colophons in many NT MSS, including in family 35, which he traces to the second century A. D. Shabir seemed totally unaware of the existence of this evidence. Here is an example, from the colophon to Matthew in codex K:

⁴ Charles Cutler Torrey, *Our Translated Gospels* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1936) x.

⁵ Wilbur Pickering, ed., *New Majority Greek Text Based on Original Text Theory, ΕΥΑΓΓΕΛΙΟΝ ΚΑΤΑ ΙΩΑΝΝΗΝ*, 49.

⁶ See walkinhiscommandments.com.



It states that Matthew was composed eight years after the ascension of Christ. Many other manuscripts say the same thing for Matthew and also support the dates I argued for in the debate for Mark, Luke, and John. Why this widespread testimony among independently copied manuscripts, from different parts of the world, from different centuries, copied by different, unconnected groups of people? Because these are the actual and the correct dates.

Why is it that Shabir earned a degree from a secular university on the study of the New Testament and is totally unaware of this evidence? The secular view of the New Testament does not take the actual evidence seriously. It ignores the testimony of all ancient sources, the testimony of the manuscripts themselves, and so on, to create theories based on anti-supernaturalist bias and on a total lack of actual evidence. Taking the historical evidence seriously will not allow one to be an atheist or agnostic, nor a Muslim—it is a powerful basis for recognizing that Christianity is actually true. For that reason, it must be ignored, and one can actually get a degree from a secular university and never seriously interact with the ancient evidence for the New Testament. Indeed, as some other objections Shabir made in the debate illustrate, one can also get a degree from a secular university in New Testament and know very little about the contents of the Book or how to study it.

Instead of studying the actual evidence, secular people make up theories that reject all evidence, such as that Matthew and Luke copied from the Gospel of Mark and the alleged document “Q.” Shabir was unable to provide a single scrap of manuscript evidence for “Q,” nor any ancient reference to it. When I pointed out that an examination of seventeen different reconstructions of “Q” found not *a single verse* in Matthew agreed upon among them all as part of the hypothetical document,⁷ he did not appear to be aware of the modern scholarship recounting these facts. All the ancient sources say that Matthew, Mark, and Luke were independent accounts, with Matthew writing first, not Mark. All of Shabir’s arguments about Matthew and Luke “evolving” Mark are based upon a rejection of all the extant evidence in favor of speculation based on no actual facts at all. Nor did Shabir deal with the fact that even if “Q” existed, “Q” still recognizes that Jesus Christ is the “Son of Man,” the Divine-human figure predicted in Daniel 7:14. Even “Q,” the fantasy document built out of anti-supernaturalist bias, does not support the Muslim “Jesus.”

I also pointed out the astonishing contrast between the dates for the evidence for the Biblical Jesus’s life and that for Muhommed’s life. “The earliest biographer of Mohammed whose work is extant”⁸ is Ibn Hisham, who wrote on the Islamic prophet’s life c. A. D. 840, approximately 238 years after Muhammad’s death. The earliest and most authoritative compilation of the sayings of Muhammad (the Hadith)⁹ by Al Bukhari, dates to c. A. D. 878, c. 246 years after the death of Muhammad. Someone who rejected these extremely late sources would have to admit that we know just about nothing about Muhammad, and things taught in these collections of sayings but not in the Quran, everything from reciting the *shahada* to praying five times a day to giving *zaqat* of 2.5% of your income would be gone. We have testimony to Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection within months of the events, and multiple sources only a very small number of years afterwards—but almost two and a half centuries pass before we get the earliest extant sources on Muhammad’s life! Yet Muslims are content to pattern their lives and religion around evidence from centuries after Muhammad allegedly lived, while rejecting the Jesus of the New Testament as a “late” invention!

⁷ Stewart Petrie, “‘Q’ is Only What You Make It,” *Novum Testamentum* 3 (1959) 28-33; cf. Robert L. Thomas, *The Jesus Crisis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1998) 147-149.

⁸ Samuel M. Zwemer, *The Moslem Doctrine of God: An Essay on the Character and Attributes of Allah according to the Koran and Orthodox Tradition* (New York: Young People’s Missionary Movement, 1905), 26.

⁹ Other compilations of *Hadith* (Sahih Muslim; Ibn Daw’ud; Al Tirmidhi; etc.) are even later.

For that matter, I also argued, in agreement with Oxford historian Sherman-White, that even granting the modern secular dates for the Gospels that Shabir attempted to adopt there was still not even close to enough time to “evolve” the Biblical Jesus from a Muslim “Jesus.” An analysis of historical writings enables historians to determine the rate at which legend accumulates, and the tests show that even two generations are too short a time span to allow legendary tendencies to wipe out the hard core of historical facts. [F]or the Gospels to be legends, the rate of legendary accumulation would have to be “unbelievable.” More generations would be needed. In fact, adding the requisite time gap lands one just when the apocryphal gospels begin to appear. These *do* contain all sorts of fabulous stories about Jesus, trying to fill in the years between His boyhood and the beginning of His public ministry. These are the obvious legends sought by the critics, not the biblical Gospels. Shabir did not refute Dr. Sherman-White by providing counter-examples where, say, Alexander the Great’s life “evolved,” or Caesar’s life “evolved,” or *anyone* else’s life “evolved” in a time period comparable to that in which he alleges the Lord Jesus’ life “evolved” from the Muslim “Jesus” to the Biblical “Jesus.” Shabir provided no ancient evidence that such an evolution could happen at the incredibly rapid rate that it must have happened for the Muslim “Jesus” to be even remotely possible. He just made assertions without any evidence.

There is a lot more positive evidence that was given in favor of the Biblical Jesus being the Jesus of history, but there is no need to repeat the entire debate. I am very thankful that it should be obvious to those who watch the debate and pay attention that the question is a matter of *all* the ancient evidence, which is universally on the side of the truth of Biblical Christianity, against *no* evidence, but speculation that requires the rejection of all evidence, which is all that opponents of the Biblical Christ have, whether they are atheist opponents of the Biblical Christ or Muslim opponents.

Comments on Shabir Ally’s Arguments

I. Alleged Biblical contradictions

As one would expect, Shabir Ally made a number of objections to the Christian position that the Jesus of history is the Jesus of the Bible. However, he did not refute or even interact with the vast majority of the arguments I presented, and when he did, there frequently were problems in his response. Most of his arguments below will be examined generally in the order in which they came up in the debate.

Early in his presentation, Shabir argued that the Quran sometimes says very good things about the Bible but then also critiques it (34:00-35:00). He did not explain the positive statements made in the Quran, for they are actually highly problematic for Islam.¹⁰ Muhammed, or whoever wrote or compiled the Quran, thought that he was actually simply confirming what the Bible taught. For example, the Quran states:

Lo! We did reveal the Torah [the Old Testament], wherein is guidance and light. By its standard have been judged the Jews, by the prophets who bowed to Allah's will, by the rabbis and the doctors of the law: for to them was entrusted the protection of Allah's Book, and they were witnesses to it: therefore fear not men, but fear me, and sell not my signs for a miserable price. If any do fail to judge by what Allah has revealed, they are infidels. . . . Whoever judges not by that which Allah has revealed: such are wrong-doers. . . . And we caused Jesus, son of Mary, to follow in their footsteps, confirming that which was (revealed) before him in the Torah, and we bestowed on him the Gospel [the New Testament] wherein is guidance and light, confirming that which was revealed before it in the Torah—a guidance and an admonition to those who ward off evil. Let the People of the Gospel judge by that which Allah hath revealed therein. Whoever judges not by that which Allah hath revealed: such are evil-livers.” (Surah 5:44-47)

The Quran plainly declares that God revealed the Old and New Testaments, that they are guidance and light, and that anyone who fails to judge by what is revealed in them is an infidel, wrong-doer, and evil-liver. In fact, the Quran declares: “O People of the Scripture [Jews and Christians]! You have naught of guidance till you observe the Torah and the Gospel and that which was revealed to you from your Lord” (5:68). For that matter, the Quran records Allah's statement to Muhammad, to look to the Old and New Testaments if he had any doubts about the Quran: “And if you [Muhammad] are in doubt concerning that which we reveal to you, then question those who read the Scripture that was before you” (10:94). If Muhammad was told to test the Quran by the Scripture that was given before, the Old and New Testaments, and Jews and Christians have “naught of guidance” until they listen to and obey the Bible, and anyone who does not fail to judge by the Bible, in which is guidance and light, is an infidel, wrong-doer, and evil-liver, then Muslims should not believe that the Bible is corrupt and unreliable, but that it is the Word of God. Indeed, the Quran claims, over and over again, to confirm and uphold the Torah and the Gospel, the Old and New Testaments—Muhammad claimed he was the “messenger from Allah, confirming . . . the Scripture . . . which they [the people of the Book, the Jews and Christians] possess” (2:101; cf. 2:41, 89, 91, 97; 3:3, 81; 4:47; 6:92; 12:111; 35:31; etc.) The Quran places the Old and New Testaments on an equal level with itself as Scripture: “Believe in Allah and His messenger and the Scripture which He has revealed to His messenger, and the Scripture which He revealed aforetime. Whoever disbelieves in Allah and His angels and His scriptures and His messengers and the Last Day, he truly has wandered far astray” (4:136). “We believe in Allah and that which is

¹⁰ See, e. g., “The Testimony of the Quran to the Bible,” <https://faithsaves.net/QuranBible/>

revealed to us and that which was revealed to Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes, and that which was vouchsafed to Moses and Jesus and the prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them” (3:84). Thus, the Quran actually teaches that the Bible is the Word of God. The author of the Quran did not know that his new alleged “revelation” grossly contradicted the Bible, because he was ignorant of the contents of the Old and New Testament. Thus, Muslims must contradict the Quran in order to question or undermine the Bible.

The only testimony Shabir Ally produced to counteract serious evidence of the sort specified above was Surah 2:75-79. However, this passage does not deny the overwhelming Quranic testimony to the Bible. “[T]he Qur’an itself speaks only of punning with words (Q4.46) and concealing certain verses (e.g. those alleged to be predictions of the coming of the Prophet), rather than wholesale ‘corruption.’”¹¹ The notes in *The Study Quran*, which has been called “perhaps the most important work done on the Islamic faith in the English language,”¹² explains:

[The] earlier commentators . . . preferred to view the “distortion” [spoken of in Surah 2:75-79] as an act of faulty . . . interpretation. . . . interpretation that drifted away from the original intent. . . . [2.75’s statement] “after they had understood [the Word of God]” also supports the idea that the meaning was distorted, not the text.¹³

Shabir claimed that Surah 2:75-79 indicated that some of the books of the Bible were written by people who just claimed inspiration without merit, but that simply is not the assertion of 2:75-79.¹⁴ This Quranic text simply refers to some people misinterpreting earlier revelations and does not contradict the many other Quranic passages indicating that the Quran seeks to confirm, support, and place the Bible on an equal level to itself.

Shabir then claimed that Surah 3:78-80 indicates that Christ did not claim Divinity. While the author(s) of the Quran did indeed deny the Deity of Christ, the passage Shabir cited actually does not deal with that question. Finally, without providing any specific page numbers or explaining any specific argument, Shabir claimed that Sidney Griffith in his book *The Bible in Arabic: The Scriptures of the People of the Book in the Language of Islam* proves that the Quran never claimed that the Bible actually was

¹¹ A.J. Droge, *The Qur’an: A New Annotated Translation*, Accordance electronic ed. (Sheffield: Equinox Publishing Ltd., 2013) paragraph 1063, note on Surah 2:75.

¹² Seyyed Hossein Nasr, ed., *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary* (Broadway, NY: HarperCollins, 2015), quotation on back cover from Hanza Yusuf; many other leading Muslim scholars make similar assertions.

¹³ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, ed., *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary* (Broadway, NY: HarperCollins, 2015) 36, comment on Surah 2.75.

¹⁴ Note also the careful analysis in James R. White, *What Every Christian Needs to Know about the Qur’an* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2013) 171–180.

God's inspired Word. Unfortunately for Dr. Ally, Sidney Griffith's book does no such thing, but the large majority of Muslims watching the debate are likely to simply take his word for it and not evaluate the matter for themselves.

While the debate was not over the inspiration of the Quran, Shabir Ally claimed that the Quran contained mathematical miracles (2:32:00) which demonstrate that it is the Word of God—indeed, these alleged mathematical patterns were the only evidence Shabir supplied in the debate in favor of the Quran being God's Word. While detailed responses to these highly dubious claims by defenders of Islam have been given in many places,¹⁵ it should be sufficient to point out that Shabir Ally claimed that “even the verse numbers which were written in later” contain these “patterns.”¹⁶ Shabir's claim here proves far too much. Even apart from the fact that there are different verse numbering systems for the Quran in existence, surely Shabir does not want to claim that the people who put the verse numbers in were writing under inspiration—that would mean that Muhammad was not the last prophet of Allah, but the people who put the verse numbers in later were actually Allah's prophets—after all, their verse numbering system has the same “evidence” for its inspiration as does the Quran itself with its mathematical patterns. Indeed, you can find the same sorts of “mathematical miracles” in the Bible—though since they are not a good argument Thomas Ross does not use them as Biblical evidence—or even in a work such as Herman Melville's novel *Moby Dick*.¹⁷ Shabir is a very intelligent man, but he employs this poor “mathematical pattern” argument for the inspiration of the Quran because there is nothing better to use.

In Shabir Ally's first speech he set forth a number of alleged contradictions in the Bible. These alleged contradictions were the most critical part of his argument against the Jesus of the Bible. However, all of his alleged Biblical contradictions are easily answered. While one who asserts that the Bible is false because it is contradictory bears the burden of proof when he makes such an assertion, Shabir failed to meet the burden of proof for his contradictions. Indeed, unfortunately, Shabir rarely read to the audience, displayed on slides, or in other ways spent the time to explain the actual texts that he claimed were contradictory. On numbers of occasions he did not even supply verse references, much less read the Biblical texts and demonstrate their alleged irreconcilability

¹⁵ E. g., “Mathematical Miracles in the Qur'an or the Bible?” Elec. acc. <https://answering-islam.org/Religions/Numerics/>

¹⁶ Thomas Ross & Shabir Ally debate, “The New Testament Picture of Jesus: Is it Accurate?” University of Wisconsin at Whitewater, 2:31:00-2:32:00.

¹⁷ E. g., <https://skeptic-mind.blogspot.com/2011/11/holy-moby-dick.html/>.

by engaging in a careful examination of the passages in their immediate and broader context, much less deal with the common and easily accessible Christian answers to the alleged contradictions and show that they were insufficient. One simply needed to take Shabir's word that many of these alleged passages were actually contradictory, that is, that they asserted that a particular proposition was both true and false in exactly the same sense and at the same time. While such a methodology is not an especially scholarly one, it has the unfortunate advantage in a debate format of allowing a speaker to spend only a small amount of time citing a large number of alleged contradictions. To show that each of these passages is actually non-contradictory requires more time than it takes to quickly mention the alleged contradictions, making it just about certain that in a debate setting where both sides receive equal time that not all of the alleged contradictions can be examined and answered. Thus, in the debate itself it was necessary to give answers to as many of Shabir's alleged contradictions as time allowed without allowing them to prevent the audience from hearing as much of the overwhelming evidence for the Bible as possible, and while providing resources that gave comprehensive answers to Shabir's alleged contradictions. The resources provided were: "Answering Alleged Bible Contradictions and Difficulties," <http://faithsaves.net/Gods-Word/> (free online); David Cloud, *Things Hard to be Understood: A Handbook of Biblical Difficulties* (Port Huron, MI: Way of Life Literature, 2015); Gleason L. Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982); Norman L. Geisler and Thomas A. Howe, *When Critics Ask: A Popular Handbook on Bible Difficulties* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1992); Vern Sheridan Poythress, *Inerrancy and the Gospels: A God-Centered Approach to the Challenges of Harmonization* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012). While Muslims or others who wish to reject the Bible could simply take Shabir's assertions without critical analysis and assume that there were genuine contradictions in Scripture, those who genuinely wanted the truth could examine the Biblical passages, the answers that there were time to give, and the resources referenced, and discover the invalidity of the alleged contradictions.

Shabir claimed that Matthews 1:8-9 contains "misinformation" because the genealogy from Abraham to Jesus Christ omits three names, as can be seen by examining 1 Chronicles 3:11-12.¹⁸ However, it is very clear from both Old Testament and New Testament genealogies that names can be omitted. Matthew begins his genealogy from Abraham to Jesus Christ with the statement "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ,

¹⁸ Thomas Ross & Shabir Ally debate, "The New Testament Picture of Jesus: Is it Accurate?" University of Wisconsin at Whitewater, 39:00:00-42:00:00.

the son of David, the son of Abraham” (Matthew 1:1). Matthew was obviously not claiming that there was only one generation between Jesus Christ and David while also claiming there was only one generation between Jesus Christ and Abraham. There is no reason to think that in the verses immediately after Matthew 1:1 every descendent listed has no generational gaps any more than there were no gaps in the first verse of the chapter. Hebrews 11:12 uses the word translated “beget” in the geneologies of Matthew 1 of all of Abraham’s descendents: “Therefore sprang [Greek word translated “beget”] there even of one, and him as good as dead, *so many* as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable” (Hebrews 11:12). Hebrews did not intend to say that there was only one generation between Abraham and all of his descendents. The word “beget” in Matthew is the standard word employed in the Greek translation of Old Testament geneologies, numbers of which passed by some generations to go from, say, a grandfather to a grandson (Luke 3:36; Genesis 10:24; 2 Kings 20:18; Ezra 7:2). This is apart from broader considerations, such as the semantic domain of a “generation,” whether generations can overlap, and so on. Contrary to Dr. Ally’s claim, there is no “misinformation” in Matthew’s geneology, and both Matthew and his Jewish readers in Jerusalem would have been well aware that three names had been passed over in Matthew 1:8-9.

It is not necessary to explain why Matthew skips over Ahaziah, Joash, and Amaziah in his geneology to refute a claim of “contradiction” or “misinformation.” However, there are strong reasons for Matthew’s decision to do so under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Matthew records Christ’s legal geneology through his adopted human father Joseph back to king David and to Abraham, validating the Lord Jesus’ proper authority to reign as the King Messiah, while Luke records Christ’s geneology through his mother Mary through king David back to Adam, showing Christ is the perfect Man. An examination of Old Testament history in the books of Kings and Chronicles records that the intermarriage of the kings of Judah with the line of the pagan king Ahab, through which Ahaziah was born, had constituted a grave threat to the very existence of the monotheistic, Jehovah-worshipping Jewish kingdom—that Jewish kingdom had been taken over by paganism and Baal worship through union with the house of Ahab. In the eyes of God, therefore, the three kings omitted by Matthew were stricken from the legal

line of Christ, which was reckoned as passing from Joram to Uzziah [KJV “Ozias”],¹⁹ a good king who restored the worship of Jehovah to Israel. Three generations were omitted in accordance with the curse pronounced in the Ten Commandments on the descendants to the third generation of idolators: “I the LORD thy God *am* a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth *generation* of them that hate me; And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments” (Exodus 20:5-6). An ancient commentary on Matthew 1:8-9 explains:

Joram . . . acted very wickedly against God, as the book of Kings and Chronicles attest. He married the daughter of Jezebel . . . and Ahab made use of his counsel, and Joram was wicked against God and rose up against him. He made his own exaltation into a god or lord for himself and put his trust in his high estate. . . . He was so haughty that he killed all his brothers, whom his father had left for him as helpers and counselors. For all these reasons the Lord struck him with a dire and prolonged illness so that two days before he died he expelled his own rotten bowels.

Joram was the father of Ahaziah. Ahaziah was the father of Joash, and Joash was the father of Amaziah. Amaziah was the father of Uzziah. Quite rightly the Holy Spirit teaches us through Matthew to remove up to three generations from the number of kings and not to number them among the ancestors of Christ. They were born from the impure and accursed seed. Joram took his wife from the seed of Ahab and Jezebel . . . and he produced Ahaziah with her. Ahaziah begat Joash, and Joash begat Amaziah, in whom the fourth generation of the wicked and accursed seed reached its fruition. Ahab, the king of Israel, took Jezebel as his wife, a daughter of the king of Sidon, a very impious woman opposed to the commandments of God. Ahab committed many acts of godlessness against the Lord at her instigation. Therefore the Holy Spirit warned through a prophet that he would destroy every male from the house of Ahab. Jehu, the son of Nimshi, fulfilled this prophecy after he had been anointed by the lad who had been sent to him by Elisha. Jehu also received the promise that his children would reign over Israel until the fourth generation. Thus, the blessing given to Jehu, who had brought punishment on the house of Ahab, was of equal length as the curse that was placed on the house of Joram because of the daughter of the wicked Ahab and Jezebel, so that up to the fourth generation his sons would be cut off from the number of the kings and so his sin would descend on his sons, as had been written: “I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and the fourth generation.”

See, therefore, through that passage, how dangerous it is to marry one of the ungodly, as Joram did, and how glorious it is to punish the ungodly, as Jehu did. As far the history of Kings is concerned, Amaziah begat Uzziah. But as far as Matthew is concerned, Joram begat Uzziah . . . [who] was noble compared with the kings who had descended from the accursed seed. He was also noble in God’s opinion because Uzziah did what pleased God and in all things received help from God. . . . Uzziah was less evil than others who were born from that accursed dynasty (as the

¹⁹ Because the King James Version is a very literal translation of the Bible, it renders literally the Greek pronunciation of names into English even when the Greek pronunciation may be somewhat different from the Hebrew pronunciation. The Hebrew king named “Uzziah” or “Azariah” had his name pronounced as “Ozias” in Greek. One may compare the Hebrew pronunciation of the name “Yehoshua” in Greek as “Jesus,” names which become (when rendered from Hebrew) “Joshua” and (when rendered from Greek) “Jesus.” Of course, even the English name “Jesus” is pronounced differently in other modern languages, so that, for example, in Spanish “Jesus” becomes “Jesús” and is pronounced “Hesous.”

number of generations continued to grow) . . . so also God did not cut him off . . . from the number of Christ's ancestors[.]²⁰

Matthew's geneology in chapter one of his book is not only non-contradictory but also is profoundly accurate to Biblical redemptive history.

Shabir Ally similarly claimed that Matthew's specification of three groups of fourteen generations, for a total of forty-two generations, was inaccurate. The Apostle wrote: "All the generations from Abraham to David *are* fourteen generations; and from David until the carrying away into Babylon *are* fourteen generations; and from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ *are* fourteen generations" (Matthew 1:17) because there were seventeen persons between David and the carrying away into Babylon, so Matthew provided "misinformation" by omitting three of them. Furthermore, Shabir claimed that the number of names did not actually add up to forty-two, so Matthew made another error. It is worth reiterating that Biblical geneologies frequently contained gaps from, say, a grandparent to a grandson. Furthermore, Matthew 1:17 does not specify that there were "exactly, and no more and no less, than fourteen exact people between each of the groups listed" but, on the contrary, the word "are" in the phrases specifying the generations is not even present in the Greek text.²¹ However, the most fundamental reason for the omission of the three names is, as explained above, that Matthew provides the legal geneology of Christ explaining his right to rule on David's throne as King, and the three kings omitted are stricken from this line of theocratic and kingly authority on account of Joram's union with the pagan kingly line of Ahab and Jezebel.

While it is not necessary to explain why Matthew divides the names into three groups of fourteen to prove non-contradiction, the division has powerful reasons. As early Christians noted:

Since the Evangelist could have briefly explained the number of generations by saying, "From Abraham to Christ there were forty-two generations," why did he divide the generations three times, and why did he divide them into three parts of fourteen generations each? It was because three times when fourteen generations had been completed, the state of humankind among the Jews changed. From Abraham until David they were under judges; from David to the exile they were under kings; from the exile to Christ they were under priests. Therefore he wanted to show how, just as when the fourteen generations had been completed the state of humankind always

²⁰ Thomas C. Oden and Gerald L. Bray, eds., *Incomplete Commentary on Matthew (Opus Imperfectum)*, trans. James A. Kellerman, vol. 1 & 2, Ancient Christian Texts (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010) 15–17. See also Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew*, ed. Thomas P. Halton, trans. Thomas P. Scheck, vol. 117, The Fathers of the Church (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2008) 60-62.

²¹ One of the strengths of the King James Version of the Bible is its literal translation philosophy, so that words necessary for English grammar but not explicitly contained in the Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic original languages text of the Bible are placed in italics. The vast majority of modern Bible versions fail to reproduce this valuable practice of the KJV.

changed, so when the fourteen generations had been completed from the exile to Christ, there must similarly have been a change in the state of humankind—which indeed took place. After Christ, humankind was no longer under many judges or under many kings or under many high priests, but all generations have been subordinated under the one Christ, who is both judge and king and high priest, since he alone has the office of those three estates. Thus, because both the judges and kings and high priests were prefiguring the three offices of Christ, the first to hold those offices always bore the image of Christ. Joshua was the first of the judges; David was the first of the kings; Joshua, son of Jehozadak, was the first high priest. No one can doubt that they bore the image of Christ.²²

Thus, the division into fourteen generations has powerful justification.

Dr. Shabir Ally's claim that Matthew is inaccurate when he refers to three groups of fourteen or forty-two generations **Get reference; should be Shabir's last speech** also fails to convince. The Apostle divides the generations from Abraham to David as the line of promise culminating in David, a second group of the kings from David to Jeconiah, and the third group through the exile to the Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:17). In relation to the claim that there are not actually forty-two names, one notes that "ancient counting often alternated between inclusive and exclusive reckoning. Such variation was thus well within standard literary convention of the day."²³ However, even setting this fact aside, one simple explanation recognizes that king Jechoniah had a relative²⁴ who also reigned,²⁵ as can be seen in the books of Kings, and Matthew references this other king in Matthew

²² Thomas C. Oden and Gerald L. Bray, eds., *Incomplete Commentary on Matthew (Opus Imperfectum)*, trans. James A. Kellerman, vol. 1 & 2, Ancient Christian Texts (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010) 22–23.

²³ Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, vol. 22, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992) 53. Blomberg continues: "[F]or a good rabbinic parallel, see *m. 'Abot* 5:1–6."

²⁴ In accordance with the semantic range of the Greek word in question, "Matthew may, of course, have in mind here not 'brothers' in the strict sense but a wider range of the relatives of Jehoiachin who would be among the 7,000 "men of valor" taken with him to Babylon. . . . the two references to "brothers" in vv. 2 and 11 are [likely] designed to make the reader think of the whole people of Israel in its original potential and its historical failure which led to the exile" (R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007] 38).

²⁵ The turbulent period near the end of the kingdom of Judah is recorded in 2 Kings 23:30–24:20.

1:11 with the phrase “Jechonias and his brethren.”²⁶ Adding “Zedekiah his brother” (2 Chronicles 36:10; 1 Chronicles 3:16) to the genealogy provides forty-two names from Abraham to the Lord Jesus. There are other reasonable explanations that are worthy of

²⁶ Commenting on the phrase “Jechonias and his brethren” (Matthew 1:11) Lenski notes: 2 Kings 23:30–25:7 [records that] . . . [w]hen Josiah perished at Megiddo, his oldest son came to the throne but was carried to Egypt where he died. In his place Pharaoh appointed Jehoiakim king in Jerusalem. In this way this second son of Josiah came to the throne. After a reign of eleven years he perished at the hand of the king of Babylon, and his oldest son Jehoiachin, Matthew’s Jechoniah, came to the throne. After three months’ reign he was carried to Babylon, where he spent long years in exile. Then his uncle, Josiah’s third son Zedekiah (*Zidkiyahu*, to be distinguished from Jechoniah’s brother Zedekiah, *Zidkiyah*, 1 Chron. 3:15, 16) became king and soon was blinded and also carried into exile. Matthew is not writing a mere list of names; all the names are bound up with Israel’s history. The royal line of David perished with Josiah’s grandson Jechoniah. That is why the grandson is named in v. 11 and not Jechoniah’s father Jehoiakim. The historical complications involved are pointed out by Matthew when he writes: “Josiah begot Jechoniah *kai tous adelphous* at the deportation to Babylon.” Here *adelphoi* [does not] mean [exclusively] “brothers,” for Jechoniah had only one brother of whom we hear nothing more. These are Jechoniah’s relatives, including the uncle who occupied the throne after him. Instead of following Josiah with the mere name Jehoiakim in v. 11, and then in v. 12 going on with another mere name Jechoniah, Matthew brings in the entire tangled and tragic history. All Jewish readers would at once understand that *kai tous adelphous* referred to a generation between Josiah and Jechoniah, two sons of Josiah who reigned before Jechoniah and one who reigned after him. Any one of these three brothers might have continued the line; it was the second who did although he was deported with the first group of exiles. Though the third of the three brothers, Zedekiah, came to the throne and might have continued the line, it did not pass through him. (R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel* [Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961] 31–32)

consideration.²⁷ The genealogy focuses on David

²⁷ For example, some argue that Jeconiah is counted twice, both as a king in the division of the kings from David to the exile and as a private person in the division from the exile to Christ:

According to the book of Kings, Jehoiakim is the fourteenth from Solomon, and he himself was the son of Josiah. But Jechoniah was the first in the genealogy down to Christ and was really not the son of Josiah but his grandson and the son of Jehoiakim. According to the Gospel, however, in which Jechoniah is said to be the son of Josiah, if Jechoniah is reckoned as the fourteenth one among the preceding set of generations, the remaining set of generations down to Christ from Shealtiel would turn out to be thirteen. But if Jechoniah is placed first among the last set of generations, the preceding set of generations calculated from David to Josiah would turn out to be thirteen.

What are we to do then? Jehoiakim was removed from the number of the kings, and quite rightly so. The people of God did not seat him on his throne, as had been the custom of seating kings, but Pharaoh had done this through the nobility. Therefore, to that extent Jehoiakim was not king. If it was right to remove the aforementioned three kings from the number of the kings solely because of their mixed lineage derived from Ahab and Jezebel, even though they had been seated on their thrones by the people and by the laws, why then was it not right in like manner to remove also Jehoiakim, whom Pharaoh had made king over a land hostile to him and whom the people of God had not crowned as legal precedent demanded? Consequently, that Jechoniah, who was the son of Jehoiakim (and grandson of Josiah), was put in place of his father Jehoiakim when his father was removed from the number of the kings, as if Jechoniah had been the son of Josiah. And so he is named twice in the Gospel: once before the exile, namely, as the fourteenth in number, and again after the exile as the first in number. It happens in this way: Josiah begat Jechoniah, namely, as the fourteenth descendant. But after the exile Jechoniah begat Shealtiel, as if Jechoniah were the first in the next genealogy. And so Jechoniah here is found to have the number of two people: his father's and his own. Although this Jechoniah was one person, he had two different states. He was a king before the exile, having been crowned by the people of God; he was also made a private citizen after the exile, having been led away as a captive. Therefore before the exile he was reckoned among the kings as a king, but after the exile he was reckoned among the private citizens as a private citizen.

But how do you expect the Evangelist to have written it? If he had said, "Josiah begat Jehoiakim in the fourteenth generation, and Jehoiakim begat Jechoniah, and Jechoniah after the exile begat Shealtiel," aside from the fact that one crowned by Pharaoh (Jehoiakim) would be counted among the kings of Judah, one would moreover find fourteen kings before the exile, but after the exile one king and thirteen private individuals. But if Jechoniah had been placed among the earlier kings, one would find fifteen royal generations before the exile but thirteen generations of private citizens after the exile. In either case the Evangelist seemed to say something contrary to reason and did not show the mystery that he had set forth. You see how wisely the Evangelist wanted Jechoniah to appear twice, first as the fourteenth among the kings and then as a private citizen, the first after the exile among the generations of private citizens. Since it is consistent, I also count Jechoniah so that there are twenty-eight generations from David to Christ. What harm is there to remove Jehoiakim and to mention his son Jechoniah twice for a sound reason, so that he might explain the mystery that the Evangelist sets forth and still not lie about the number of the generations? Nor is it any objection that he is called the son of Josiah when he was really his grandson, since also grandsons are rightly called sons. (Thomas C. Oden and Gerald L. Bray, eds., *Incomplete Commentary on Matthew (Opus Imperfectum)*, trans. James A. Kellerman, vol. 1 & 2, Ancient Christian Texts (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 21)

Likewise, Hendricksen and Kistemaker argue:

There is good reason to believe that Jechoniah must be counted twice; first, as the last in the second series of fourteen; then, as the first in the final series. At first glance the decision to count him twice may seem like a totally unwarranted method of getting rid of a Gospel "discrepancy." . . . [h]owever, a little study of what Scripture tells us about Jechoniah soon reveals that two sharply contrasting pictures of this king's experiences are drawn. All is dark in 2 Kings 24:8–12[.] . . . The curse of childlessness is pronounced upon Jechoniah (Jer. 22:30). But in his imprisonment matters take a turn for the better: Jechoniah, the exile, has children, in one of whom the Messianic line is continued (1 Chron. 3:17, 18). By rereading Jer. 22:30 we now begin to understand that the childlessness predicted with reference to the young king meant no more than this, that none of his offspring would occupy David's earthly throne. Now this favorable change between Jechoniah before his deportation and afterward is in and by itself probably sufficient to justify the fact that he is counted twice. If more is needed, consider also 2 Kings 25:27–30. Cf. Jer. 52:31–34. Jechoniah is freed from prison, is treated kindly at the court of Evil-merodach, king of Babylon, at whose table he dines regularly, and is given a continual allowance. He even receives "a seat above the seats of the kings that were with him in

²⁸ and on Christ as the culmination of all the Old Testament history:

The very structure of the genealogy . . . in Matthew connects Jesus with David. [In the] three groups of fourteen . . . we are shown the origin of David's house . . . its rise and decline . . . [and] its eclipse. . . . Jesus is the climax of the three fourteens. That these fourteens express a symbolism can hardly be denied. . . . In Scripture seven frequently indicates the totality ordained by God. Fourteen, which is twice seven, also brings out this idea. So, it would seem, does three times fourteen = forty-two. This is equal to six sevens, and immediately introduces the seventh seven, reduplicated completeness, perfection. Since, in the genealogy as offered by Matthew, Jesus Christ is mentioned at the close of the entire list of three fourteens or six sevens, and since the evangelist does not stop there but continues the beautiful story of this Savior, we cannot be far wrong when we say that he pictures him as the One who not only completes or fulfils the old, but also definitely ushers in the new (9:16, 17; 26:28, 29; cf. John 3:34; 1 Cor. 11:25; 2 Cor. 3:6; 5:17; Heb. 9:15; 10:20; 12:24; Rev. 21:5). In him the new and the old meet. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the heart and center of all. Apart from him there is no salvation. He is Messiah, David's true Antitype. And in the course of redemptive history, as here symbolized in its three great stages, God's plan from eternity was being perfectly realized. . . . Matthew, therefore, by means of this genealogy and its sequel (the narrative of the virgin birth, verses 18–25) . . . [shows] that Jesus, according to his human nature, is indeed the legitimate seed of David, in fulfilment of prophecy. From Joseph, his legal father—and thus from Joseph's ancestor, David—he receives his right to David's throne. From Mary (verse 16)—and via Mary, also from David—he receives David's flesh and blood.²⁹

Clearly, Matthew's division of Christ's ancestors into three groups of fourteen people does not even begin to come close to invalidating his authenticity or accuracy, but, on the contrary, displays a remarkable beauty and accuracy while pointing to the Lord Jesus as the fulfillment and pinnacle of the three major divisions of Old Testament history to which all was moving. There are no contradictions within Matthew's genealogy nor between Matthew's record of Christ's legal line and Luke's record of Christ's physical line.³⁰

Shabir repeatedly claimed that Matthew 28:1-2 and John 20:1-2 evidence an irreconcilable contradiction in the resurrection accounts of the Gospels (43:00-48:00). According to Shabir, Matthew 28 indicates that the women visiting the tomb experienced a great earthquake and saw the angel of the Lord come down from heaven and roll the

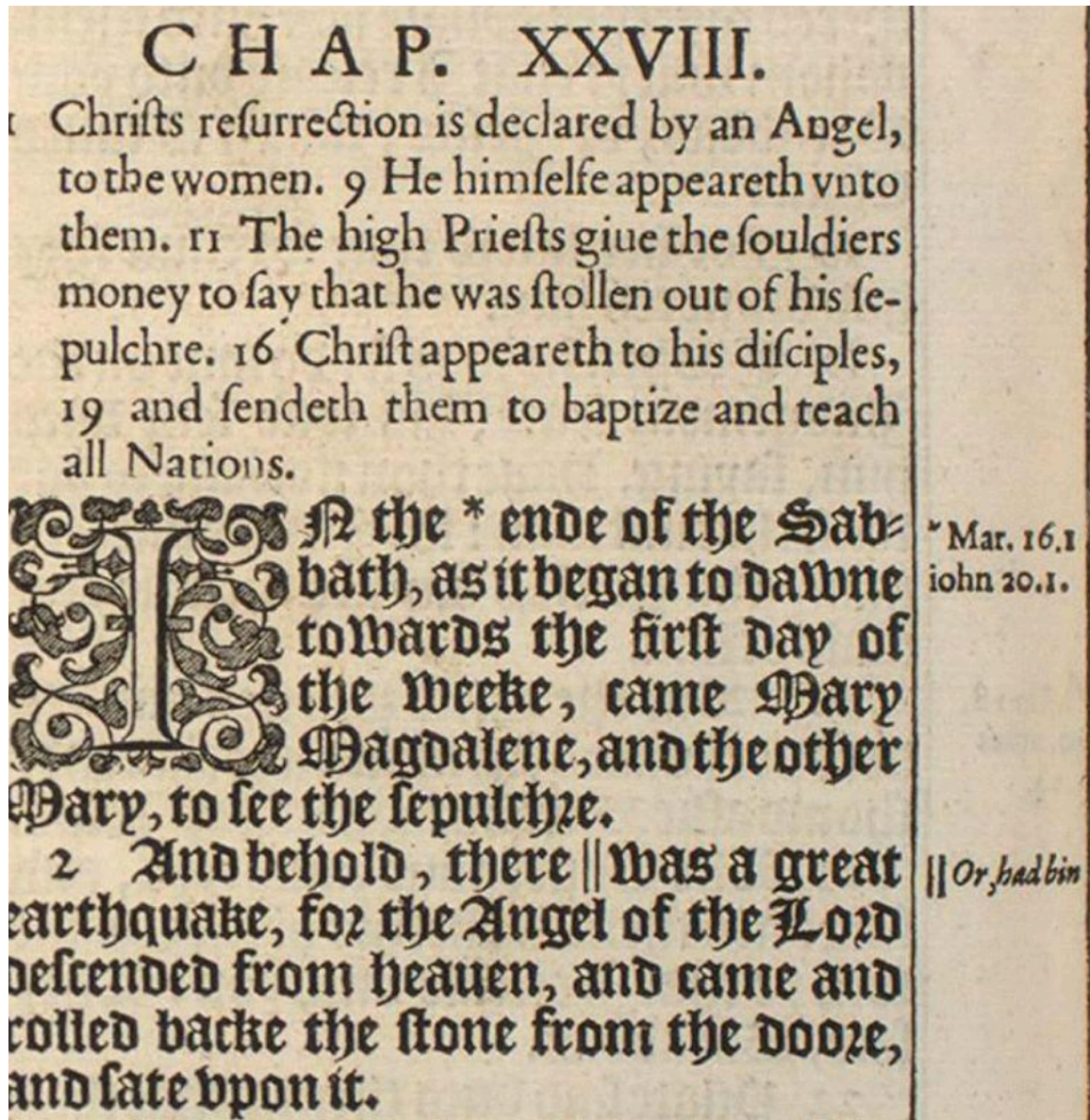
²⁸ Blomberg notes:

David . . . is the central figure throughout the genealogy. When one adds up the numerical values of the Hebrew consonants in his name (*DVD*), one arrives at the number fourteen (4+6+4). This *gematria*, as ancient Hebrew numerical equivalents to words are termed, probably accounts for the centrality of the number fourteen in Matthew's genealogy. Each of the three sections contains fourteen generations (v. 17), and David's name itself is the fourteenth entry. (Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, vol. 22, *The New American Commentary* [Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992] 53).

²⁹ William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew*, vol. 9, *New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001) 109–113.

³⁰ Note the explanation of how the two genealogies in Matthew and Luke can be reconciled set forth by Julius Africanus c. A. D. 200 and preserved in Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History: English Translation*, ed. T. E. Page et al., trans. Kirsopp Lake and J. E. L. Oulton, vol. 1, *The Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926–1932) 55–65 (I:7). It is affirmed that the explanation by Africanus was the one “our Savior's own relatives have handed . . . down” (Rufinus of Aquileia, *History of the Church*, trans. Philip R. Amidon, vol. 133, *The Fathers of the Church* [Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2016] 43–47).

stone away from Christ's grave, while in John 20:1-2 the women do not see these things. However, Shabir cannot prove that Matthew's Gospel teaches that the women saw the angel coming down from heaven in conjunction with the earthquake. Shabir never dealt with the fact that the margin of the KJV in Matthew 28:2 states that "behold, there was a great earthquake" could as easily have been translated as "behold, there had been a great earthquake."



A page from a facsimile of the 1611 edition of the KJV. The marginal note on "was" as "or, had been" (in 17th century spelling) is clearly present.

The marginal note in the 1611 edition of the King James Version still appears in all editions of the KJV that reproduce the original KJV notes, including those editions of the Authorized Version published by the Trinitarian Bible Society and by Cambridge

University Press. Furthermore, note that the same Greek verb, *ginomai*, that the KJV indicates can be rendered as “had been” in Matthew 28:2, in the same tense (the Greek aorist), is rendered with a translation including “had been” in Matthew 11:21, 23 (cf. Luke 10:13), as well as in the Greek Old Testament in various passages such as Genesis 21:9, where the exact Greek form appearing in Matthew 28:2 is rendered as “had been”: “But when Sarra saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, who had been born to Abraam, playing with her son Isaak” (Genesis 21:2, LXX; cf. Ecclesiastes 2:7, “all who had been before me”; 1 Esdras 8:61, “when we had been at that location...”; 2 Maccabees 1:22, “When this had been done...”; 2 Maccabees 15:12, “Onias, who had been high priest,”; 3 Maccabees 5:17, etc.). Shabir Ally simply assumed that Matthew 28:2 requires that the women actually were present when the angel rolled the stone away.

Shabir claimed further contradictions between Matthew 28 and John 20, asserting that the two passages are irreconcilably contradictory. Unfortunately, it is not possible to ascribe Shabir’s argument in Matthew 28:1-2 and John 20:1-2 to simple ignorance. Dr. Ally had written a work setting forth what he claimed were 101 contradictions in the Bible, to which Dr. Jay Smith wrote a response years ago—in 1998—entitled *101 Cleared Up Contradictions of the Bible*,³¹ and which he personally gave to Dr. Ally during a debate between the two of them. Shabir argued in this debate as if Dr. Smith’s book, which specifically responded to his claims of contradiction, had never been written. Dr. Smith’s response to what Shabir Ally wrote years ago remains a perfectly sufficient answer to the claims of contradiction:

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.

[Shabir Ally argued that 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. . . . 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

³¹ Jay Smith, Alex Chowdhry, Toby Jepson, & James Schaeffer, *101 Cleared Up Contradictions of the Bible*.

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.

[Shabir Ally questioned,] 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? . . . [T]he 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. . . .

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.

Shabir Ally is a very intelligent man who very strongly wants people to believe that Islam, not Christianity, is true. The fact that he must make arguments based on alleged Biblical contradictions that have already been given sufficient explanations personally addressed to him, responses to which he has had over twenty years to show insufficient but has not been able to do so, and responses which he did not rebut or acknowledge in any way during the debate, illustrates the weakness of the Muslim and skeptical case against the Bible. Would Shabir use these empty and already-refuted alleged contradictions if he had something stronger to employ instead?

Shabir Ally likewise argued that Acts 9:7 and 22:9 are contradictory; in Acts 9:7, he argued, Paul's companions heard the voice of Christ, but in Acts 22:9 they did not hear Christ's voice. However, Shabir was unable to meet the burden of proof for a genuine contradiction between the two texts—he was not able to prove that they asserted that the same proposition was both true and false in the same sense and at the same time. A comparison of the three accounts in Acts 9, 22, and 26 of Paul's conversion to Christ make it highly likely that in Acts 9:7 Paul's companions heard a sound, but did not understand the voice of the risen Christ speaking in Hebrew to the Apostle Paul. The word "hear" in Acts 9:7 and 22:9 can mean both simply to "to have or exercise the

faculty of hearing”³² and “to hear and understand a message, *understand*.”³³ The word is used both of hearing without understanding (e. g., John 12:29) and of hearing with understanding (Galatians 4:21; 1 Corinthians 14:2, etc.) Furthermore, the word rendered “voice” in Acts 9:7 and 22:7 can also be translated as “sound” (e. g., Matthew 6:2; John 3:8), and it can mean “an auditory effect, *sound, tone, noise*,”³⁴ or “the faculty of utterance, *voice*,”³⁵ or “a verbal code shared by a community to express ideas and feelings, *language*.”³⁶ Thus, simply from a consideration of the words in question it is clearly possible that in one passage Luke indicates that Paul’s companions heard a sound, but they did not understand the voice or the language in which Christ spoke to the Apostle Paul. Even if exactly the same Greek words were found in exactly the same syntactical construction, there would be no proof of contradiction; Shabir would need to prove contextually, not merely that the same words were employed, but that the same meaning was given to the words, which cannot be done.

However, the Greek syntax in the two passages is not only not identical, but supports a difference in meaning between the two texts. In Acts 9:7, the verb *akouo* (“hear/understand”) takes the Greek word *phone* (“voice/sound”) in the genitive case, while in Acts 22:9 the word *phone* is in the accusative case. In “classical usage *akouo* with the genitive (as in 9:7) means to “hear a sound” whereas with the accusative (as in 22:9) it means to “hear with understanding.”³⁷ This possibility receives support from standard Greek grammars:

[I]t is perfectly proper to appeal to the distinction in the cases in the apparent contradiction between ἀκούοντες μὲν τῆς φωνῆς (Ac. 9:7) and τὴν δὲ φωνὴν οὐκ ἤκουσαν (22:9). The accusative (case of extent) accents the intellectual apprehension of the sound, while the genitive (specifying case) calls attention to the sound of the voice without accenting the sense. The word ἀκούω itself has two senses which fall in well with this case-distinction, one ‘to hear,’ the other ‘to

³² William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000) 37.

³³ William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000) 38.

³⁴ William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1071.

³⁵ William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1071.

³⁶ William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1072.

³⁷ Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary & 2: Introduction and 1:1–14:28*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012–2013) 1639. Transliterated Greek has been supplied.

understand.’ Cf. οὐκ ἤκουσαν (Ro. 10:14) and μὴ οὐκ ἤκουσαν (Ro. 10:18). And yet the genitive can be used where the sense is meant, though not stressed, as ἤκουσα φωνῆς (Ac. 22:7), but ἤκουσεν φωνήν (Ac. 9:4; and 26:14).³⁸

In addition to the distinction between the genitive and accusative in Acts 9:7 and Acts 22:9, further grammatical and syntactical features in context support a distinction between mere hearing of sound and understanding of Christ’s voice. First, immediately after Acts 9:7 speaks of Paul’s companions hearing the sound, it indicates that they did not “see” or “perceive.” The Greek verb *theoreo* in the immediately following clause can signify not only both “to observe something”³⁹ but also “to come to the understanding of something, notice, perceive, observe, find.”⁴⁰ Within the book of Acts itself this word is translated as “perceive” twice (Acts 17:22; 27:10). Thus, the very next clause of Acts 9:7 indicates that Paul’s companions heard a sound, but did not “perceive” or “come to the understanding” of what was said by the risen Christ, which should perhaps not be surprising since Christ taught the inability of the unregenerate world to “see” or “perceive/understand” the Spirit of truth (John 14:17). Second, Acts 22:7 specifies that Paul heard the voice “saying” or “speaking” to him, employing the Greek verb tense one would expect for a continuing action, something found also in Acts 22:9’s “spake” and in Acts 26:14 for both the forms “speaking” and “saying.” In contrast, Paul’s companions “heard/understood not” (Acts 22:9), employing the Greek tense one would expect for a point action. The Apostle Paul experienced a continuing understanding of the voice and language of Jesus Christ speaking to him in Hebrew (Acts 26:14), while Paul’s companions did not understand, as a point action, the sound.⁴¹

Further considerations in relation to Acts 9 and Acts 22 merit consideration. For example, Acts 22 is Luke’s Greek translation of statements Paul originally spoke in Hebrew (Acts 22:2), so one who wishes to prove that Acts 9:7 and 22:9 are irreconcilable must not only explain the differences in semantic range among the words employed and the differences in Greek phraseology and syntax, but even explain why the Hebrew words

³⁸ A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Logos Bible Software, 2006) 506. See also James Hope Moulton, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek: Prolegomena.*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2006–) 66. Nigel Turner supports the view that “the accusative involves an *understanding* of the object while the genitive merely records the physical *hearing* of it” (Nigel Turner, *Grammatical Insights into the New Testament* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1966] 89).

³⁹ William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000) 454.

⁴⁰ William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000) 454.

⁴¹ The continuing action words employ the Greek present tense and the point action words the Greek aorist tense.

Paul actually spoke in Acts 22 must be exactly equivalent in meaning and necessarily contradictory to the Greek words recorded in Acts 9. Opponents of Biblical inerrancy simply cannot demonstrate what they need to demonstrate to prove that Acts 9:7 and 22:9 are contradictory.

Furthermore, even if, for the sake of argument, one disputed that Acts 9 refers to Paul's companions hearing the sound of Christ's words but not understanding His voice (Acts 22) speaking in Hebrew (Acts 26), there are numbers of other non-contradictory ways to explain the passages. For example, since Acts 22:7, 9; 26:14 employ Greek verb tenses employed for continuing action in relation to Paul's hearing the voice "saying" or "speaking" to him, while Paul's companions "heard/understood not" (Acts 22:9), employing the Greek tense one would expect for a point action, the text is consistent with the possibility that Paul continued to hear what Christ said in a complete message to him while Paul's companions only heard the voice/sound for a moment but did not hear the entire message. Furthermore, numbers of writers who dislike the claim that a distinction between hearing a sound and understanding Christ's voice is in view⁴² and who hold unbiblically weak views of the Bible's inerrancy⁴³ still recognize that there is no proven contradiction between Acts 9 & 22, offering solutions such as:

It is still most reasonable to conclude that these accounts are not presenting contradictory views about what Paul's companions heard. The most probable solution sees the various traditions that Luke gathered (including Acts 26:14) as from different sources. Luke then compiled the information in a conservative manner, even to the point of preserving much of the wording of his sources where both ἀκούω and φωνή carried different nuances in each source). Hence, what looks like a contradiction is in reality evidence of Luke's reticence to drastically alter the traditions as handed down to him.⁴⁴

Another scholar who rejects Biblical inerrancy comments on the alleged contradiction as follows:

Yet another possible solution may also rise from the genre of Acts as ancient rather than modern historiography. Ancient historians fleshing out minor details of a simpler account might flesh it out differently on different occasions. Such variation could also function as a deliberate rhetorical device[.] . . . The difference is less consequential than modern arguments often make it . . . it is certainly less than many differences between accounts of the same events in Josephus's *War* and his *Antiquities of the Jews*. That Josephus composed differently even in such elite works, each potentially read by the same audience as the other, suggests that ancient audiences normally saw little problem with, and probably often expected, such rhetorical variation. This proposed solution

⁴² E. g., Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996) 134.

⁴³ E. g., Daniel Wallace, "Inerrancy and the text-critical problem in Romans 5:1," elec. acc. <https://bible.org/article/inerrancy-and-text-critical-problem-romans-51>, where Wallace speculates that Paul spoke one word and his scribe wrote down a different one, making a copying mistake in the original manuscript.

⁴⁴ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 134.

may be right or wrong in the present instance, but it certainly falls within what was allowed in ancient historical writing.⁴⁵

In summary, it is highly likely that the accounts of Paul's conversion to Christ in Acts 9, 22, and 26 teach that Paul's companions heard the sound but did not understand the voice of Christ speaking in Hebrew to Paul. While this solution is highly probable, even if one sets it aside for the sake of argument there are numbers of other easy solutions to the alleged contradiction in Acts 9:7 and 22:9.

Did Shabir Ally prove that the solutions explained above for Acts 9:7 and 22:9 necessarily fail, and that no other possible reconciliation exists? Far from it—indeed, sadly, he ignored the fact that this “contradiction” was resolved in a book specifically written for him and given to him by Dr. Jay Smith over twenty years ago after Dr. Ally's debate with Dr. Smith.⁴⁶ What did Shabir do to attempt to maintain his claim of contradiction against the evidence offered during his debate with Thomas Ross, and against the easily accessible explanations of the two passages offered by others and even the explanation given to him in person and which he has had more than twenty years to consider? Dr. Ally claimed that “Peter Enns” in the book *Five Views on Inerrancy*⁴⁷ proved that there was a genuine contradiction between Acts 9 and 22, looking at the two texts “very carefully” and showing that claiming one passage referring to Paul's companions hearing a sound and the other to Paul understanding Christ's voice is not possible in Greek.⁴⁸ Dr. Enns, taking an anti-inerrantist view in the *Five Views* volume, spends only one four-sentence paragraph on the question of whether the verb “hear” followed by the accusative or the genitive express different ideas⁴⁹ and does not discuss at all the other syntactic and contextual features of Acts supporting the distinction, nor

⁴⁵ Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary & 2: Introduction and 1:1–14:28*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012–2013), 1639–1640. Keener can argue in favor of the possibility that “Luke made a mistake” even while conceding that it cannot be proven (Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary & 2: Introduction and 1:1–14:28*, vol. 1 [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012–2013] 1233), so he can hardly be accused of offering an explanation of Acts 9 and Acts 22 that is non-contradictory out of an unshakeable commitment to Biblical inerrancy.

⁴⁶ Jay Smith, Alex Chowdhry, Toby Jepson, & James Schaeffer, *101 Cleared Up Contradictions of the Bible*.

⁴⁷ J. Merrick, Stephen M. Garrett & Stanley N. Gundry, eds., *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy*, Zondervan Counterpoints Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013).

⁴⁸ Thomas Ross & Shabir Ally debate, “The New Testament Picture of Jesus: Is it Accurate?” University of Wisconsin at Whitewater, 2:41:00–2:42:00.

⁴⁹ Peter Enns, “Inerrancy, However Defined, Does Not Describe What the Bible Does,” in *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy*, ed. J. Merrick, Stephen M. Garrett, and Stanley N. Gundry, Zondervan Counterpoints Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013) 99.

does Enns even mention, much less refute, the other explanations of the alleged contradiction offered even by those who deny inerrancy.⁵⁰ Furthermore, only a few pages earlier, Enns affirms that “one can certainly argue [that] . . . the biblical account remains historically possible and therefore should be given the benefit of the doubt,”⁵¹ although Enns does not personally believe the Bible should be given the benefit of the doubt. Had Shabir Ally stated that he likes the conclusion made in a four-sentence paragraph by someone who, as an opponent of inerrancy, thinks Acts 9 and 22 are actually contradictory, although he does not even bring up many of the ways the two texts can be reconciled, much less show that they are impossible, Dr. Ally would have made an accurate statement. Regrettably, Shabir’s claim that Dr. Enns proves that Acts 9 and 22 are genuinely contradictory is a wild overstatement that appears to be based on Dr. Ally’s regrettably common logical fallacy of appeal to authority—when he can find a scholar or a group of scholars that make a certain claim, Shabir far too often simply draws the conclusion that what this scholar or group of scholars says is true, without dealing with the actual evidence for or against the issue in question.

The third and final alleged contradiction Shabir Ally listed in his opening statement was between Luke 24:51 and Acts 1:9. Shabir claimed that Luke 24:51 teaches that Christ ascended to heaven on the same day as the resurrection, while Acts 1:9 teaches that Christ ascended to heaven forty days later. Shabir Ally admitted that even if one granted everything possible one could conclude from his argument, a genuine contradiction would still not exist, because it would be possible that Christ ascended immediately after His resurrection and then returning to appear to them for forty days before finally returning to heaven, but claimed that such a view was not acceptable.⁵² Dr. Ally did not evidence any awareness of the fact that many Bible-believing Christians believe exactly what he admitted is allowed by everything one could want from his alleged contradiction, namely, that Christ ascended to the Father immediately after His resurrection to present the value of His completed sacrifice and then returned to appear to

⁵⁰ Peter Enns, “Inerrancy, However Defined, Does Not Describe What the Bible Does,” in *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy*, ed. J. Merrick, Stephen M. Garrett, and Stanley N. Gundry, Zondervan Counterpoints Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013) 99–104.

⁵¹ Peter Enns, “Inerrancy, However Defined, Does Not Describe What the Bible Does,” in *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy*, ed. J. Merrick, Stephen M. Garrett, and Stanley N. Gundry, Zondervan Counterpoints Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013) 95. Dr. Enns is discussing a different alleged contradiction in the Bible, but the flow of his argument quite strongly suggests that he would draw the same conclusion about Acts 9 and 22.

⁵² Thomas Ross & Shabir Ally debate, “The New Testament Picture of Jesus: Is it Accurate?” University of Wisconsin at Whitewater, 37:00:00.

His disciples over the course of forty days.⁵³ What is more, Shabir’s assertion of contradiction is very surprising in light of the fact that Luke and Acts are two parts of a single book (Luke 1:1-4; Acts 1:1-4), and only ten verses separate Luke 24:51 and Acts 1:9. Furthermore, it appears that Shabir forgot about this alleged contradiction later in the debate, for he later said that Luke has forty days of appearances.⁵⁴ Shabir also neglected to read Luke 24:51 or any other portion of Luke 24 to the audience during the debate, because neither 24:51 nor anything else in Luke 24 states that Christ ascended to heaven on the same day that He rose from the dead. In fact, while in the earlier portions of Luke 24 there are explicit chronological markers,⁵⁵ in Luke 24:50, only one verse before the text Shabir claims teaches Christ ascended on the same day as the day Luke records for His resurrection, the Greek continuative marker translated “and” is “*de*[,] [which is] general, unlike the explicit temporal links elsewhere in the chapter.”⁵⁶ That is, in Luke 24:50 “the expression says absolutely nothing as to the time when the event took place.”⁵⁷ The same Greek word is used for events separated by time on multiple occasions elsewhere in Luke’s Gospel.⁵⁸ What is more, careful consideration of Luke 24 makes the idea that the ascension took place on the same day as the resurrection incredible. In the words of a commentator who does not believe in Biblical inerrancy:

Luke . . . does not state . . . that there was . . . n[o] . . . interval at all . . . there is no ἐν αὐτῇ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ (ver. 13) [trans, “in the same day”]. . . . But it is incredible that he can mean that, late at night (vv. 24:29, 33), Jesus led them out to Bethany, and ascended in the dark. So remarkable a

⁵³ E. g., “The whole theme of Christ’s ascension is divided with reference to two events: the ascension on the resurrection morn and the final ascension after forty days” (Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 5 [Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1993] 262). Chafer gives a detailed exposition of what took place in these two phases of Christ’s ascension and numbers of serious arguments in favor of the existence of both phases (*Ibid*, pgs. 262-273)—the reconciliation of an alleged contradiction between Luke and Acts is not one of them, since Shabir’s alleged contradiction is not a serious threat to the consistency and truthfulness of Scripture.

⁵⁴ Thomas Ross & Shabir Ally debate, “The New Testament Picture of Jesus: Is it Accurate?” University of Wisconsin at Whitewater, 1:26:00.

⁵⁵ E. g., “Now upon the first day of the week” (Luke 24:1); “And, behold, two of them went that same day” (Luke 24:13), etc.

⁵⁶ Alan J. Thompson, *Luke*, Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2016) 380.

⁵⁷ Frederick Louis Godet, *Commentary on Luke*, trans. E. W. Shalders, Godet’s Commentaries on Luke, John, Romans, and 1 Corinthians. Accordance electronic ed. (Altamonte Springs: OakTree Software, 2006) P2271.

⁵⁸ Some probable instances include Luke 16:1, 17:1, 18:1, 20:27, 41, 45; 21:1.

feature would hardly have escaped mention. Probably δέ [trans., “and”] both here and in ver. 44 introduces a new occasion.⁵⁹

Thus, it is clear that in “his Gospel . . . Luke offers no date for the ascension. He furnishes only a brief account because he intends to open the Acts with a full account of this act and there furnishes us the exact date.”⁶⁰ It is unfortunate that Shabir ignored the fact that only one verse before Luke 24:51 the Gospel of Luke specifically does not indicate that the events of Luke 24:50ff. took place on the same day as the resurrection by employing a general continuative marker, a marked contrast with the explicit phrases specifying events that did indeed take place on the same day Luke employed earlier in chapter 24. Nor does Shabir deal with the fact that an ascension on the same day as the resurrection in Luke 24 would require the disciples to be stumbling around in the dark for a night-time ascension. Shabir’s alleged contradiction between Luke 24 and Acts 1 disappears if one simply carefully reads the two chapters, and he never refuted or even acknowledged the many problems with his alleged contradiction in the debate.⁶¹

Dr. Shabir Ally did not seriously challenge any of the ancient evidence for the apostolic authorship of the Gospels, for their historical accuracy, or for their early dates. The most significant part of his case against the Bible rested upon a handful of alleged errors of fact and contradictions that are easily reconciled. Why would Shabir Ally, probably the West’s leading defender of Islam, use such weak arguments against the Bible? Shabir needed to employ these sorts of arguments because there is nothing better with which to attack the infallible Word of God. “The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever” (Isaiah 40:8).

⁵⁹ Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to S. Luke*, International Critical Commentary (London: T&T Clark International, 1896) 564.

⁶⁰ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Luke’s Gospel* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961) 1209.

⁶¹ The only support Shabir provided for his claim of a contradiction between Luke 24 and Acts 1 was the alleged support of “James Dunn” (Thomas Ross & Shabir Ally debate, “The New Testament Picture of Jesus: Is it Accurate?” University of Wisconsin at Whitewater, 0:46:00ff.) who allegedly proves a same-day ascension in Luke 24 in his three-volume set *Christianity in the Making*. However, in Dunn’s discussion of Luke 24 and Acts 1 he suggests in only one sentence that a reader might have the “impression” that Christ ascended the same day as He rose (James D. G. Dunn, *Beginning from Jerusalem*, vol. 2, *Christianity in the Making* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009] 146) and never extensively deals with the evidence to the contrary nor even affirmatively states that Luke thought that the ascension took place on the same day as the resurrection when he wrote Luke 24. Regrettably, Shabir’s citation of James Dunn appears to be another example of Dr. Ally’s regular employment of the fallacy of appeal to authority and the fallacy of the prevelant proof. Rather than proving that Luke 24 actually requires a contradictory account of the ascension from the version given ten verses later in Acts 1, Shabir is content to simply state that it is so, followed by citing a scholar who makes a claim—or in this case, citing a scholar who did not even make Shabir’s claim, much less proved Shabir’s claim, but simply made an assertion about the reader’s possible “impression” reading Luke 24.

It is tell-tale that when Dr. Ally was asked what he believed the “biggest contradiction” was that “invalidates” the Bible and the Christ revealed therein Shabir did not appeal to any of the alleged historical or factual contradictions he set forth earlier in the debate but to theological problems he has as a Muslim with the Biblical God and His revealed way of salvation—the biggest “contradictions” were not errors of fact or of history, but the fact that the Bible teaches the Trinity, that Christ is one Person with two natures, and that Christ’s death redeems sinful people.⁶² These affirmations were allegedly “logically incoherent.” Of course, Christianity does not teach that God is one and three in the same sense, which would actually be contradictory, but that God is one being or essence who exists in three subsistences or Persons (1 John 5:7; Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14). Islam may dislike this teaching, but claiming that in one way God is one and in another way He is three simply is not contradictory, nor should it be surprising that there are elements in the way God exists that are above our full comprehension. Likewise, Christianity does not claim that Christ is one and two in the same sense, which would be contradictory. Christianity teaches that Christ is one Person who possesses two natures, a human nature and a Divine nature (Isaiah 7:14; 9:6; John 3:13; 1 Timothy 3:16; John 1:1-18). Islam may dislike this Biblical truth, but it simply is not logically contradictory to affirm that in one Person while having two natures. Finally, Shabir did not demonstrate that there was anything logically contradictory about Christ’s redemptive and substitutionary death. Shabir misrepresented the Christian doctrine of redemption as an angry Father and a loving Christ, while the Bible teaches that because of God’s existence in three Persons He was able to take the penalty of sin away from fallen men and upon Himself through the Trinitarian Persons’ unified and distinct work of redeeming fallen sinners as the Father’s purposed, the Son purchased, and the Spirit applied salvation. While Islam may not like this teaching, nor the idea that Christ as the God-Man represented fallen mankind—although one suspects the dislike does not extend to other instances of representation, such as senators representing their states in Congress, ambassadors representing their countries, and so on—the Biblical doctrine is not logically contradictory. Islam may (falsely) claim that Christ’s redeeming work is immoral, while illogically recognizing that God is the One who determines what is moral and immoral, so God cannot be immoral, but to say that one disagrees with the morality of an act is very different than saying that it is logically impossible. Shabir Ally’s fundamental reason for believing that there are contradictions in the Bible is his precommitment to

⁶² Thomas Ross & Shabir Ally debate, “The New Testament Picture of Jesus: Is it Accurate?” University of Wisconsin at Whitewater, 2:20:00-2:21:00.

Islam, and what really requires him to affirm the existence of historical and logical contradictions in Scripture is not a dispassionate evaluation of factual data, nor exhaustive study of Acts 9 and 22, or Luke 24 and Acts 1, but his faith in the Islam and consequent rejection of Christian theology that is necessarily true if the Bible is indeed the Word of God.

II. “Evolution” creating the Christian Jesus?

In addition to his argument from alleged Biblical contradictions, Dr. Shabir Ally’s other key argument was that there was an evolution in the portrayal of Jesus Christ. He argued that the earliest, accurate picture of Jesus was what the Quran claimed, namely, the Muslim prophet “Jesus.” This “Jesus” allegedly evolved through time into the Christian Jesus who was equal to the Father and the Holy Spirit in the Trinity. This evolution, Shabir argued, was evident in the Gospels. Mark, which he alleged was the earliest Gospel, was the least evolved. Matthew and Luke showed more evolution, while John’s Gospel showed the most evolution of all, although even in John the Christian Jesus was allegedly not present; John’s Gospel presented Jesus as a demigod, a semi-divine figure who was an intermediary in creation, but not as God Himself. Furthermore, Shabir claimed that the Apostle John did not write John, just as Matthew, Mark, and Luke were not allegedly written by Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

Dr. Ally made the very curious assertion that the Gospels were evolving, as evidenced by his list of several alleged contradictions, to make Jesus into a “non-Jew so he does not need to follow the Law” (48:00). Nothing in the New Testament states or breathes a hint that the Lord Jesus was not Jewish. John’s Gospel, which Shabir (incorrectly) claims is the most “evolved” of the New Testament documents, plainly records others referring to the Lord Jesus as a “Jew” and has Christ identify Himself as a “Jew” (John 4:9, 22), and Christ’s perfect and sinless obedience to the Law is at the very core of Christianity, for without it the Lord Jesus could never have satisfied the Law’s penalty as the perfect substitutionary sacrifice (Galatians 4:4-5). Nor is it clear how, even if one granted the handful of contradictions that Shabir advanced, such as that Acts 9 and 22 disagree about whether or not Paul’s companions heard Christ’s voice and Matthew is wrong to omit three names from his genealogy, the conclusion even remotely follows that the writers of the New Testament were seeking to make Jesus into a “non-Jew.” None of Shabir’s alleged contradictions are even remotely related to this

conclusion. Shabir’s astonishingly dubious argument⁶³ that the New Testament was seeking to make Jesus into a “non-Jew,” in light of how poorly it represents the content of the New Testament, should lead one to greater skepticism about the accuracy of Dr. Ally’s use of his other sources.

Shabir Ally claimed that “Q” does not contain a narrative of Jesus Christ dying and rising again, evidencing, in his mind, that these historical facts were later “evolutionary” ideas (1:54:00). Dr. Ally did not provide any manuscript evidence for the existence of “Q,” nor did he provide any reference to “Q” in any ancient document whatsoever; the only evidence he claimed for it was that the Synoptic Gospels contained similar accounts, and that various modern scholars claimed that “Q” existed. He never refuted or even attempted to refute the evidence Thomas Ross reproduced against “Q” from actual statistical comparisons of the Greek text of the Gospels, and he did not cite any actual hard data from modern scholars who liked the “Q” hypothesis, committing, again, the fallacy of prevalent proof by simply stating that so-and-so believed in “Q” as if that were evidence in favor of its existence. Nor did Shabir explain how his alleged “evolution” could account for the pre-Pauline evidence for Christ’s death and resurrection within mere months of the event (1 Corinthians 15:1ff.) and His Deity within a similarly tiny timeframe (Philippians 2:5-11). Nor did Shabir explain why even the hypothetical “Q” document still refers to Christ’s cross and to His second coming in glory, which requires His resurrection (Q 14:27; 17:23ff.).⁶⁴ Furthermore, the reason “Q” does not have an extended narrative of Christ’s death and resurrection is because it does not contain an extended narrative about anything at all—it is a hypothetical source of sayings invented by modern liberal scholarship. If one can create a hypothetical source of sayings without any evidence then it is possible to put whatever one likes into such a source and keep out whatever one likes. A Christian could apply a “Q” hypothesis to the Quran and claim that everything in the Quran that disagrees with Christianity is a later addition to an original “Q” form of the Quran where only what agrees with Christianity, such as monotheism, Christ’s virgin birth, and so on, is found. Muslim objections that there is no evidence that a “Q” Quran ever existed could be dismissed by stating that

⁶³ Shabir’s curious argument that “in Mark, John the Baptist obviously has some superiority over Jesus” is similar (2:11:00). No text from Mark’s Gospel was cited. Of course, Mark begins his Gospel by teaching that Jesus Christ the Son of God is Jehovah in the flesh, for whom John the Baptist was but His lowly forerunner (Mark 1:1-4; Isaiah 40:3).

⁶⁴ James McConkey Robinson, Paul Hoffmann, and John S. Kloppenborg, eds., *The Critical Edition of Q: Synopsis Including the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, Mark and Thomas with English, German, and French Translations of Q and Thomas*, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis; Leuven: Fortress Press; Peeters, 2000).

modern writer so-and-so believes in the “Q” Quranic hypothesis. Both the “Q” source of the Gospels and the “Q” source for the Quran are equally credible—or incredible.

Shabir claimed that various passages in the Synoptic Gospels, when compared with passages in the Gospel of John, showed that an “evolution” was taking place from the one to the other. In so doing, he neglected to provide a satisfactory explanation for the unproven assumptions underlying his evolutionary argument. Thomas Ross asked Shabir during a cross-examination the following question:



16.) Is it true that the “architect of the two-source hypothesis [Q & Mark as allegedly copied by Matthew and Luke] and classical advocate of Markan priority is Heinrich-Julius Holtzmann,” who wrote in 1892, c. 1800 years after the Gospels were composed, while either the absolutely overwhelming or absolutely unanimous testimony of every extant record for century after century from the time the Gospels were written was that they were independent accounts?

Shabir was not able to provide any historical evidence for the idea that Matthew and Luke were copying from and “evolving” Mark and Q within 1,800 years of the composition of the documents in question. His assumption that Matthew and Luke were copying Mark and “Q” is a rejection of all the historical evidence—the actual data uniformly support the origin of Matthew and Luke as independent documents not dependent upon Mark or the mythical “Q” document.

Thomas Ross had also asked:



17.) Is it true that just in the last few decades, anti-supernaturalists have coined at least twenty-two divergent and contradictory hypotheses of evolutionary literary dependence among the synoptic Gospels, while, in the sharpest contrast, the unanimous testimony of the ancient external evidence “results in one conspicuous conclusion . . . [t]he assumed dependence of Matthew and Luke on Mark is totally without historical foundation . . . [and there is an] absolute failure in mustering any support among” the ancient sources?

Shabir Ally provided no evidence that his particular evolutionary hypothesis about Matthew and Luke copying Mark and Q is the correct one, and the other twenty-one (or more) alternative evolutionary speculations are incorrect.⁶⁵ Since his position has no facts behind it, but simply speculation and a rejection of all the actual historical evidence, there are few limits to what one can imagine, but even fewer to what one can prove. Furthermore, those who developed anti-supernaturalist ideas of a “Jesus” who allegedly evolved through stages of oral tradition into the Savior testified to in the Gospels “never actually carried out empirical research to arrive at their ‘laws of development.’ Rather . . . [anti-supernaturalist] New Testament form critics simply accepted . . . theories . . . crucial aspects of [which] . . . are now uniformly rejected by contemporary folklorists, and for good reason.”⁶⁶ The unanimous testimony of the ancient external evidence “results in one conspicuous conclusion . . . [t]he assumed dependence of Matthew and Luke on Mark is totally without historical foundation . . . [there is an]

⁶⁵ Eta Linnemann, *Is There a Synoptic Problem? Rethinking the Literary Dependence of the First Three Gospels*, trans. Robert Yarbrough (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1992) 39.

⁶⁶ Paul Rhodes Eddy and Gregory A. Boyd, *The Jesus Legend: A Case for the Historical Reliability of the Synoptic Jesus Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007) 296.

absolute failure in mustering any support among”⁶⁷ the ancient sources. For Shabir to claim evolutionary development he needed to first demonstrate the validity of his assumptions about the origin of the Gospels, which he completely failed to do.

Shabir Ally had argued that an allegedly lower view of Christ in Mark was evolving into a higher view in Matthew and Luke and then an even higher one in John. However, Thomas Ross showed that the comparison of passages among the Gospels Shabir cited that allegedly proved the “evolution” was quite arbitrary and could easily prove any one of the Gospels was “evolving” from any of the other Gospels. Dr. Ally claimed that Matthew and Luke were “evolving” from Mark, but one could find texts that just as easily affirm the opposite:

**Christ’s Identity Allegedly “Evolves” so that Allegedly Later Gospels Call Christ “Lord” While Earlier Ones Say “Rabbi”
(Mark 9:5 & Matthew 17:4; Mark 13:35 & Matthew 24:42)**



“Evolving” from Mark to Matthew: “Lord” in Matthew, not in Mark? (Mark 9:5; Matthew 17:4) Shabir’s take, ignoring the many times Mark records Christ calling Himself “Lord” and others calling Him “Lord” and Mark’s repeated and explicit identification of Christ as Jehovah)

❧ **OR IS IT “evolving” from Matthew and Luke to Mark: “Lord” in Mark, but not in Matthew or Luke?** (Mark 9:14-29; Matthew 17:14-20; Luke 9:37-43) Mark 9:24: “**Lord**, I believe,” addressed to Christ—statement not in shorter accounts of Matthew & Luke)

One could as logically argue that Luke and John were “evolving” into Mark using the same sort of argument Shabir Ally made for exactly the opposite conclusion:

⁶⁷ F. David Farnell, “The Synoptic Gospels In The Ancient Church: The Testimony To The Priority Of Matthew’s Gospel 1.” *Master’s Seminary Journal* 10:1 (Spring 1999) 84.

**Christ's Identity Allegedly "Evolves" so that Allegedly Later Gospels Call Christ "Lord" While Earlier Ones Say "Rabbi"
(Mark 9:5 & Matthew 17:4; Mark 13:35 & Matthew 24:42)**



- ❧ **OR IS IT "evolving" from Luke to Mark: "Son of God" in Mark, "righteous man" in Luke?** (Mark 15:39; Luke 23:47); both statements were actually made, of course.
- ❧ **OR IS IT "evolving" from John to Mark: Christ "worshipped" in Mark, episode not in John?** "when he saw Jesus afar off, he ran and worshipped him" (Mark 5:6; episode /pericope not recorded in John)

Similarly, one could argue that John was "evolving" into Matthew, Mark, and Luke:

**Christ's Identity Allegedly "Evolves" so that Allegedly Later Gospels Call Christ "Lord" While Earlier Ones Say "Rabbi"
(Mark 9:5 & Matthew 17:4; Mark 13:35 & Matthew 24:42)**



☞ MORE "evolution" from John to Matthew/Mark/Luke: Jesus is Jehovah who calms the storm when men cry to Him in Matthew/Mark/Luke, episode not in John? (Matthew 8:18-27; Mark 4:35-41; Luke 8:22-25, quoting Psalm 107:25-30)

Examples could be multiplied—Matthew's Gospel records Christ stating: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matthew 28:19), but this Trinitarian affirmation is absent from John. Surely John has a lower Christology that is "evolving" into the higher one in Matthew, then? The assumption that a lower view of Christ as merely a Muslim prophet gradually evolved into the Christian view of Christ as the eternal Son, equal in nature to the Father, is at the very core of Shabir Ally's argument against Christianity and his case in the debate. However, he provided no ancient sources that made this argument, and no hard historical data in favor of it whatsoever, nor did he successfully deal with the severe problem that all the actually extant ancient data disagree with his conclusion. This bedrock element of his case rested on the quicksand of a comparison of passages among the Gospels that proved nothing dressed up with the historical fallacy of prevalent proof. Shabir Ally claimed that "scholars" have proven that this alleged evolution has taken place, but the "proof" turns out to be nothing other than empty assumption when subjected to rigorous historical analysis.

Shabir Ally likewise claimed that Matthew and Luke eliminated "embarrassing" passages found in Mark as evidence for the evolution of the portrayal of Christ in the Gospels. However, this assertion could as easily prove that John, the most allegedly

“evolved” of the Gospels, actually was “evolving” into Mark or one of the other Synoptic Gospels. John records Christ’s statement “my Father is greater than I” (John 14:28), while this declaration is absent from the Synoptics—surely such an “embarrassing” declaration was eliminated by Matthew, Mark, and Luke as they “evolved” Christ to a higher level. John records that Christ got tired: “Jesus therefore, being wearied with *his* journey, sat thus on the well” (John 4:6). Can God get weary? Surely not—surely such an “embarrassing” statement in John is absent from Matthew, Mark, and Luke because of the “evolution” of Christ to a higher plane in the Synoptics. Similarly, John records Christ saying: “The Son can do nothing of himself” (John 5:19), another statement absent from the Synoptics—surely the low Christology of the Johannine Jesus is evolving into a higher Christology in the Synoptic Gospels. Contrary to all such empty speculations, all the Gospels contain statements clearly affirming the true Deity of Christ and Christ’s true humanity. The “least evolved” Gospel, Mark, begins with an affirmation that Jesus Christ is Jehovah for whom John the Baptist was preparing the way (Mark 1:1-4 & Isaiah 40:3), and the “most evolved” Gospel, John, also teaches Christ’s true Deity (John 1:1-3; 20:28). The “least evolved” Gospel, Mark, speaks of Christ’s allegedly “embarrassing” human limitations (Mark 13:32) just like the most evolved Gospel does (John 14:28; 5:19; 4:6, etc.). Furthermore, Christians do not find statements of their Lord’s true humanity embarrassing—they rejoice greatly at that blessed truth, and allegations that they embarrassed or ashamed by anything in any of the Gospels, or that Matthew and Luke were (allegedly) embarrassed or ashamed when they (allegedly) copied and “evolved” Mark are, in truth, ideas that should embarrass those who advocate them. While the differing emphases of the various Gospels will lead to variety in the number and sort of passages proving the various facets of Christ’s character, the same single Person, with His two natures, true God and true Man, appears in all four of the canonical Gospels—just as they appear in the very earliest pre-Gospel, pre-Pauline testimonies to Christ such as Philippians 2:5-11.

Shabir Ally spent a great deal of time attacking the Gospel of John. Such assaults were absolutely essential to his case, since, if John’s Gospel is actually the product of the Apostle John, one of Christ’s three closest followers, it is almost impossible to maintain that the Muslim “Jesus” is the real figure of history, rather than the Biblical figure of Jesus Christ trusted in by Christians. How did Dr. Ally attempt to question the accuracy of John’s Gospel and establish an alleged evolutionary development in the Gospels?

Shabir Ally argued that because the Synoptic Gospels do not use the term “beloved disciple,” the reference in the fourth Gospel to the beloved disciple is fictional (1:24:00). It should not be surprising that the Apostle John, in a Gospel so full of the love

of God to sinful men (John 3:16, etc.), should, amazed that the Father, Son, and Spirit would so love him as to redeem him and even put him into the ministry, refer to himself as “the beloved disciple.” Shabir’s argument here is amazingly weak—consistently applied, the idea that if the author of a book refers to himself with a unique term the author must not really be the author would eliminate a huge percentage of authors from writing their own works. **See if the Quran gives a unique term to Muhammed so Shabir’s argument would eliminate the Quran.** Why would an intelligent man like Shabir provide essentially no response at all to the positive case for John’s authorship of his Gospel and instead spend his time on such astonishingly weak counter-arguments? Is it not because the case for John’s authorship of his gospel is very, very strong?

Shabir likewise claimed that John’s Gospel changes Christ’s words—it is not as careful to accurately record what Christ said as Matthew, Mark and Luke, according to Dr. Ally (1:01:01). However, the text of the Gospel itself indicates that its author had an extremely high view of Christ’s words. God’s people must hear the words of the Son (John 12:47), receive His words (John 12:48, 17:8), keep His words (John 14:23), have His words abiding in them (John 15:7) and remember His words are from the Father (John 14:10). John records Christ’s prayer to the Father: “I have given unto them the words which thou gavest Me; and they have received them” (John 17:8; John 14:26) in the canonical New Testament Scriptures (John 14-16), and records that believers receive “the word which Jesus had said” (John 2:22), that Christ is the One who “speaketh the words of God” (Jn 3:34) that men must receive Christ’s words in the same way that they receive the words of the Old Testament may believe them (John 5:47), and “the words that I [Christ] speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63). John closes the New Testament canon by warning of damnation to those who add or take away from God’s actual words (Revelation 22:18-19). While the Synoptic Gospels contain statements of this kind in relation to Christ’s words (Matthew 24:35; Mark 8:38; 13:31; Luke 21:33, etc.), John records many more of these statements than the Synoptic Gospels do—thus, if anything, John’s Gospel would be the least likely of all the Gospels to alter Christ’s words. The internal evidence is overwhelming in favor of John being extremely careful to record the actual words spoken by the Lord Jesus. The external evidence is likewise overwhelming—just as there is no evidence for any other author of the fourth Gospel than John the Apostle and strong ancient testimony in favor of the Apostle, so there is no ancient testimony against John’s accurately recording Christ’s actual words and strong testimony in favor of this taking place, while archaeology provides remarkable confirmation of John’s accuracy, leading the honest person to consider that if John is trustworthy where it can be tested, it should be assumed to be accurate elsewhere unless

strong evidence to the contrary is provided. Did Shabir provide strong evidence against John's accurately recording Christ's actual words? No—he did not interact with the internal evidence at all, did not refute one single piece of the external evidence, and provided no ancient evidence at all in favor of his affirmation of inaccuracy—all he did was mention the name of one scholar who claimed that John did not accurately record Christ's very words. Shabir did not give any arguments made by this scholar against John's accuracy, and an examination of the reference Shabir made evidences that this author just made the assertion without providing any evidence at all for it.⁶⁸ A historical fallacy of appeal to authority by Shabir Ally is by no means sufficient to overturn the overwhelming evidence in favor of John's accurately recording Christ's actual words in his Gospel.

Thomas Ross had asked Shabir Ally the following questions:⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Shabir cited Richard Bauckham, who allegedly wrote a book called *Jesus: A Very Short History* and allegedly proved that John does not cite Christ's words accurately (Thomas Ross & Shabir Ally debate, "The New Testament Picture of Jesus: Is it Accurate?" University of Wisconsin at Whitewater, 1:00:00-1:01:00). No page number was cited and no actual argument or actual data in favor of Shabir's contention were supplied. The book in question is actually not entitled *Jesus: A Very Short History* but *Jesus: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), and Shabir refers to page 17, which contains Dr. Bauckham's opinion but contains no citation of any data or evidence.

⁶⁹ For the quotations, see William Lane Craig, "Rediscovering the Historical Jesus: The Evidence for Jesus." *Faith and Mission* 15:2 (Spring 1998) 17; Robert L. Thomas, ed., *Three Views on the Origins of the Synoptic Gospels* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2002), 280; Harald Reisenfeld, *The Gospel Tradition* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1970) 22ff.; Craig A. Evans, "Review of Der Mündliche Faktor Und Seine Bedeutung Für Die Synoptische Frage by Armin D. Baum," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 21:1-4 (2011) 265.



10.) Scholars have noted that in first century Palestine “the ability to memorize and retain large tracts of oral tradition was a highly prized and highly developed skill. From the earliest age, children in the home, elementary school, and synagogue were taught faithfully to memorize sacred tradition. The disciples would have exercised similar care with the teachings of Jesus.” Scholars have noted that the “Synoptic tradition as a whole, which comprises about 30,000 words, could be memorized, especially so in the case of the words of Jesus, which comprise about 15,000 words. Greeks could memorize Homer’s famous works, which were much larger, and rabbis could memorize the whole of Torah, and some even memorized the Babylonian Talmud (almost 2,000,000 words).” In light of these facts, could not hundreds or even thousands of people memorized Christ’s teachings from the very beginning?



11.) Matthew 13:52 refers to “scribes”—a word used of people who had professional responsibilities in writing documents and recording speeches—among Christ’s disciples. Luke’s Gospel indicates that the written accounts of “many eyewitnesses . . . from the beginning” were examined for the production of the Gospel (Luke 1:1-4). Furthermore, as a former tax-collector (Matthew 10:3) in the Roman civil service, the Apostle Matthew would have been well educated and necessarily able to write; indeed, he would have been “professionally qualified to write shorthand.” Do these facts not support that people were producing written records of Christ’s preaching and teaching, as One who they believed was speaking the very Words of God, from the very beginning, that is, “In Jewish practice of the day, especially in rabbinic circles, disciples kept private notes for their rabbinical instruction. . . . [J]ust as the Rabbis’ pupils had their own private notes . . . so [Christ’s followers] began . . . to write down . . . the tradition concerning Christ in the same way”?

In response to these questions, Shabir Ally had made the curious argument that since Christ’s early disciples thought He was coming back soon they therefore would not take care with Christ’s words. On the contrary, since the Jews took such great care with those whom they considered merely human teachers, people who thought Christ was the Messiah and a tremendous miracle-working Prophet—which Islam concedes about the Lord Jesus—would have taken tremendous care to ponder His words. How much the more people who considered Christ’s words to be those of God manifest in the flesh? Furthermore, it is obvious that thinking that Jesus Christ would return soon to judge you and the entire world would make you be extremely careful to pay attention to His Words, not careless about what they were! There is every historical reason to believe that large numbers of those who heard Christ speak would have memorized His words and also written them down—facts we see alluded to within the Biblical text itself (Matthew 13:52; Luke 1:1-4).

Thomas Ross had argued that the internal and external evidence was overwhelmingly in favor of the authorship of John’s Gospel by the Apostle John. The book claims to be by an eyewitness and member of the innermost circle of three (Peter, James, and John; Matthew 10:2; 17:1; Mark 13:3; 14:33; Luke 8:51) within the larger circle of the twelve Apostles (John 13:23; 19:35; 21:24) who testified about what he had

seen and heard⁷⁰ from his Savior and Redeemer. Mr. Ross had introduced the quotation below from Tenney in the debate:

Internal evidence . . . testifies to . . . “the disciple whom Jesus loved” as the witness and writer of the content of the Gospel (21:20-24). He was among those Jesus appeared to at the Sea of Tiberias (Galilee) after their night of unsuccessful fishing (21:7). This disciple was a particular friend of Peter and was one of the sons of Zebedee (John 21:2; cf. Matt 4:21; 10:2). The preceding chapters couple him with Peter in the events on the morning of the Resurrection (20:2-8) and also identify him as the one Jesus committed his mother to at the Crucifixion (19:25-27). . . . [H]e is the one who is called “another disciple,” the one who led Peter into the court of the high priest’s palace at the trial of Jesus (18:15-16). He was present at the Last Supper, where he reclined next to Jesus and was questioned by Peter (13:23-24). Undoubtedly he belonged to the Twelve and was probably a member of the inner circle. Obviously he was not Peter nor one of those mentioned in the third person in the main body of the Gospel. Presumably he was John, for he was Peter’s close associate after the Resurrection (Acts 3:1-11; 4:13-20; Gal 2:9). He would have been able to hear both Jesus’ public and private discourses and would have been actively engaged in the development of the church from its inception. . . .

[The author was] a Jew who was acquainted with Jewish opinions and learning and with the details of Jewish customs. The author’s vocabulary and general style are Semitic; though the Gospel was written in Greek. The OT is frequently quoted . . . [T]he author was a Palestinian Jew, not a member of the Diaspora. His knowledge of Palestinian topography was accurate. He distinguished between Bethany, the suburb of Jerusalem where Mary and Martha lived (11:1), and “Bethany on the other side of the Jordan,” where John the Baptist preached (1:28). Some of the sites he alluded to, such as Aenon (3:2-3) and Ephraim (11:5), are not described elsewhere; but, obviously, they were actual places well known to him. His description of the features of Jerusalem, such as the pool by the “Sheep Gate” (5:2), the “pool of Siloam” (9:7), the “Stone Pavement” (Gr. *lithostroton*, 19:1-3), and the varied references to the temple (2:14-16; 8:2-10; 10:2-3), show that he was familiar with the city before its destruction. (The devastation was so complete by the middle of the second century that the face of the city had changed entirely. The buildings had been razed, and the surface of the land had been buried under their rubble. Following the Second Revolt of 133–135, Hadrian built a new town, Aelia Capitolina.) Archaeological investigations have confirmed the accuracy of many of the author’s allusions[.] . . .

[The] author personally witnessed the events he described . . . spoke easily and familiarly of the disciples and associates of Jesus (6:5-7; 12:2-10; 13:3-6; 14:5, 8, 22) and knew the background of those Jesus had only casual contact with, such as Nicodemus (3:1) or Annas (18:1-3). Small details appear frequently, such as the barley bread used at the feeding of the five thousand (6:9), the fragrance of the ointment Mary poured on Jesus (12:3), or the time at which Judas left the Last Supper (13:3-10) . . . the natural touches that come from personal memory. . . . Not only must the writer have been an eyewitness, but he also was closely acquainted with the personal career of Jesus from beginning to end. The author was aware of the thinking of the disciples, and apparently he shared their interests and hopes. He reports the private discourses of Jesus at some length[.] . . . Also, he shows knowledge of Jesus’ inner consciousness that would have been possible only to a close associate (6:6, 61, 64; 13:1-3, 11; 18:4). . . .

⁷⁰ Note that Acts 4:19-20 connects the Apostle John and the Johannine corpus (Gospel of John, 1-3 John, Revelation). Anderson explains:

Peter and John . . . as speaking . . . the only time John is mentioned as speaking in the book of Acts[.] . . . The narrative is followed by two statements. The first statement [Acts 4:19] . . . is echoed by Peter in Acts 5:29 and 11:17, and it sounds . . . typically Petrine[.] . . . On the other hand, the statement of [Acts 4:20] . . . is clearly a Johannine logion . . . [like] 1 John 1:3 . . . John 3:32 . . . the only other time seeing and hearing verbs are used together and in the first person plural, as they are in Acts 4:20, is 1 John 1:3 . . . [a] first-century connecting of John the Apostle with a Johannine saying. (Paul N. Anderson, “Interfluent, Formative, and Dialectical—A Theory of John’s Relation to the Synoptics,” in Hofrichter, Peter L., ed., *Für und wider die Priorität des Johannesevangeliums: Symposium in Salzburg am 10 März 2000* [Hildesheim: Olms, 2002] 47-48)

The language of Acts 4:20 clearly is the Johannine style of 1 John 1:1, 3 (cf. also John 3:32; 5:37; Revelation 4:1; 5:11; 6:1, 3, 5, 7; 8:13; 22:8).

[The] author must have been John the son of Zebedee. Peter did not write the fourth Gospel for it mentions him frequently in the third person. James the son of Zebedee did not write it, for he was executed by Herod Agrippa I prior to A.D. 44 (Acts 12:2). The remaining possibility is John, who fits the requirements of its authorship . . . well. . . . [T]his Gospel was written by one who knew Jesus personally, who had followed him throughout his career, and who had become one of the leaders in the movement that grew out of Jesus' life and teaching. . . . [It is] a genuine document of the first-century witness.⁷¹

Thus, as “far therefore as . . . internal evidence is concerned, the conclusion towards which all the lines of inquiry converge . . . [is] that the fourth Gospel was written by a Palestinian Jew, by an eye-witness, by *the disciple whom Jesus loved*, by John the son of Zebedee.”⁷² Regrettably, Shabir Ally did not refute one jot or tittle of this internal evidence, but simply continued to claim that the Gospel was written by someone else.

Similarly, Thomas Ross had pointed out the overwhelming evidence in favor of the Apostle John's authorship of his gospel. Ancient historical testimony to John's authorship of his gospel is overwhelming and “with one voice names the apostle John as the author of the fourth gospel”⁷³:

Irenaeus: “We have learned from none others the plan of our salvation, than from those through whom the gospel has come down to us . . . by the will of God, handed down to us in the Scriptures[.] . . . [T]he Apostles . . . had perfect knowledge . . . invested with power from on high [from] the Holy Spirit[.] . . . Matthew . . . issued a written gospel . . . Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, did also hand down to us in writing what had been preached by Peter. Luke also, the companion of Paul, recorded in a book the gospel preached by him. Afterwards, John, the disciple of the Lord, who also had leaned upon His breast [John 13:23], did himself publish a gospel during his residence at Ephesus in Asia.”⁷⁴

Anti-Marcionite Prologue: “The Gospel of John was revealed and given to the churches by John, just as Papias of Hierapolis, the close disciple of John, related[.]”⁷⁵

⁷¹ Merrill C. Tenney, *John*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin and J. D. Douglas, vol. 9 of *Expositor's Bible Commentary*. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), paragraph 49688-49701.

⁷² Brooke Foss Westcott and Arthur Westcott, eds., *The Gospel according to St. John Introduction and Notes on the Authorized Version*, *Classic Commentaries on the Greek New Testament* (London: J. Murray, 1908), xxiv (cf. v-xxviii).

⁷³ Christoph Ernst Luthardt, *St. John the Author of the Fourth Gospel*, trans. Caspar René Gregory (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1875), 1. The historical testimony is even “not shattered, but confirmed by the Alogi,” while “doubt as to John's authorship of the fourth gospel never has been raised in the Church” (*Ibid*, 15). Indeed: “Early church tradition is unanimous in support of traditional authorship of the four Gospels” (Robert L. Thomas, ed. *Three Views on the Origins of the Synoptic Gospels* [Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2002] 273).

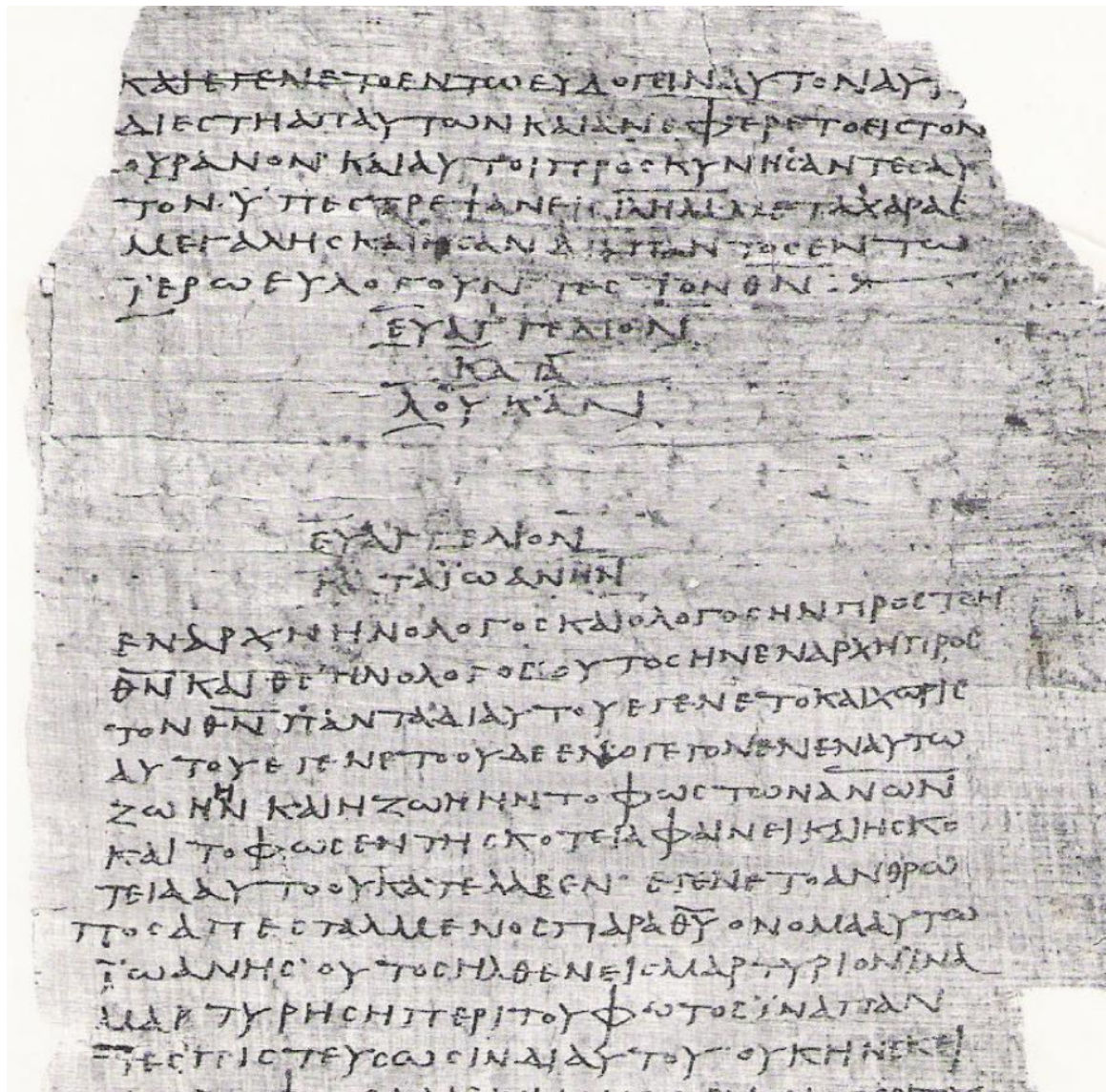
⁷⁴ Irenaeus of Lyons, *The Writings of Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, trans. Alexander Roberts and W. H. Rambaut, vol. 1, *Ante-Nicene Christian Library* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1868–1869), 258–259 (*Against Heresies* 2:1:2).

⁷⁵ Engelbert Gutwenger, “The Anti-Marcionite Prologues.” *Theological Studies* 7:3 (September 1946) 395; English translation by Robert Pearse, “The ‘Anti-Marcionite’ Prologues to the Gospels,” available at http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/anti_marcionite_prologues.htm.

Clement of Alexandria: "John . . . urged on by his disciples, and, divinely moved by the Spirit, composed a . . . Gospel. . . [a] tradition of the primitive elders."⁷⁶

Origen: "[T]he four Gospels . . . are the only indisputable ones in the Church of God[.]. . . [T]he first was written by Matthew . . . [t]he second is by Mark . . . the third by Luke . . . [l]ast of all that by John. . . Why need we speak of him who reclined upon the bosom of Jesus, John, who has left us one Gospel, though he confessed that he might write so many that the world could not contain them? [John 21:25]."⁷⁷

Furthermore, the heading "according to John" is found in the manuscripts of John's Gospel, and the manuscript evidence never ascribes authorship to anyone else.



⁷⁶ Clement of Alexandria as cited in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 6:14:7; Kirsopp Lake, *The Ecclesiastical History: English Translation*, vol. 2, The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926–1932), 47–49. Note that Clement's reference to a plurality of primitive elders, rather than, say, a single elder, passing on this information indicates that John's authorship was widely accepted and received among the churches.

⁷⁷ Origen, *Commentary on Matthew*, vol. 1, cited in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 6:25:1-9.

The end of Luke's Gospel and the beginning of John's Gospel in P⁷⁵ (Papyrus Bodmer XIV-XV), an early papyrus that dates to c. A. D. 175-225.⁷⁸ The specifications "Gospel according to Luke" and "Gospel according to John" are clearly visible.⁷⁹

The evidence strongly supports the heading's presence from the very first, since it was necessarily present as soon as any church had more than one canonical gospel. Since John was the last of the four canonical gospels to be composed, it would have circulated almost immediately in churches that had at least one of the other canonical gospels, requiring an almost immediate specification in the earliest copies of Johannine authorship. Shabir Ally never refuted any of this external evidence. He did not even attempt to refute all of it, nor did he even attempt to produce any ancient historical source that argued against the Apostle John's authorship of his gospel.

Shabir Ally claimed that John 21 was an "obvious addition by the community" (1:27:00), speaking of an alleged community of "Johannine people" who were willing to pretend to be the Apostle John and make up the Gospel. Of course, neither Dr. Ally, nor theological liberals who he is relying upon, have provided a shred of evidence that there ever was such a group of people, as there is no historical data at all in favor of their existence and a unanimous historical testimony against them and in favor of the Apostle John's authorship of his Gospel. Furthermore, Thomas Ross demonstrated the overwhelming evidence in favor of the unity of John's Gospel—prologue (John 1:1-18), body, and epilogue (John 21). Ross not only pointed out the complete lack of manuscript or any other sort of concrete evidence for any portion of John being added later rather than being composed by the Apostle, but also positively indicated the impossibility of cutting up the Gospel into parts by the astonishing literary artistry and unity of the entire work. He pointed out:

The prologue consists of 496 syllables, appropriately since 496 is both a triangular number and a perfect number and is also the numerical value of the Greek word *monogenēs* ["only begotten"] . . . used in 1:14, 18. . . . [T]he number 496 . . . links the Prologue and the Epilogue together. For, while the Prologue has 496 syllables, the Epilogue (a considerably longer passage) has 496 words. That the correspondence should be between the number of syllables in the Prologue and the number of words in the Epilogue is quite appropriate, because the Prologue is a poetic composition, in which one might expect the number of syllables to be important, whereas the Epilogue is a narrative. . . . [W]e cannot think that the identification of the Beloved Disciple as the author of the Gospel is a later, secondary accretion to the Gospel. The Gospel, with its Epilogue and its

⁷⁸ Philip Comfort, *Encountering the Manuscripts: An Introduction to New Testament Paleography & Textual Criticism* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2005), 150.

⁷⁹ P⁷⁵ is stored in the Vatican Library (Vatican City); the MS was digitized by the Center for the Study of New Testament Manuscripts (csntm.org).

two-stage conclusion has been designed to reveal . . . at the end the role of the Beloved Disciple in its making[.]⁸⁰

Thomas Ross also pointed out that “20:30–31 and 21:24–25 form together a carefully composed two-stage conclusion to the Gospel. This requires that ‘written’ has the same sense in both 20:30–31 and 21:24. In both cases it refers to the writing of “this book,” not of a [non-existent, hypothetical] source”⁸¹ consisting of only part of John’s Gospel. Shabir Ally’s only response to this evidence was to claim that the “beloved disciple is known to be an invention by many scholars” (2:12:00). No refutation of the internal and external evidence to the contrary was supplied; a particularly egregious example of the historical fallacy of prevalent proof was all that Dr. Ally mustered against the actual factual data.

Interestingly, Shabir used as proof that John had “evolved” a Jesus not found in the earlier Gospels the fact that John calls Christ the personal *Logos* or “Word of God” (John 1:1-3, 14; 1:28:00). Ironically, the Quran actually calls Jesus the Word of God (Surah 3:45; 4:171), a fact discussed in the debate itself, yet Shabir claims the Quran contains the “unevolved” original figure of Jesus Christ. Why is a title for Christ shared by the Gospel of John and the Quran evidence that John’s Gospel has “evolved” Jesus, but the Quran has the original “unevolved” figure?

Dr. Ally claimed that only John’s Gospel portrays Christ as the One through whom the worlds were made (1:28:00), evidencing that John’s Gospel was an endpoint of an “evolution” of Christ from a simple prophet into Deity. While the reader should not be surprised that many texts teach Christ is the Creator in John since his Gospel emphasizes Christ’s Deity while other Gospels emphasize other aspects of the Lord Jesus’ glorious Person, Shabir failed to explain why the pre-Pauline Christ-hymn in Philippians 2:5-11 explicitly identifies Christ as the Creator and as Jehovah in c. A. D. 35, before any of the Gospels. For that matter, the Gospel Shabir claims is the earliest and least “evolved,” Mark, begins by identifying Jesus Christ as Jehovah, the eternal God for whom John the Baptist was the forerunner (Mark 1:1-4; Isaiah 40:3) in a passage that identifies the One for whom the Baptist prepared the way as the Creator (Isaiah 40:12). If the fact that John identifies Christ as Creator is a product of a long period of evolution, why is Christ identified as Creator in early pre-Pauline, pre-Gospel testimony, and also in the allegedly

⁸⁰ Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006) 362, 364, 368; cf. 358-411. 496 is the triangle of 31, that is, the sum of all integers from 1 to 31, and it is a perfect number in that it is equal to the sum of its divisors, the third perfect number after 6 and 28.

⁸¹ Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006) 362.

least “evolved” of the Synoptic Gospels? Shabir failed to explain or even acknowledge the existence of problems such as these with his argument against John’s Gospel.

Consistent with his claim of historical evolution, Shabir Ally claimed that the Gospel of John did not present Christ as the “true God” but as a quasi-deity, borrowing a line of argumentation employed by the Watchtower Society, because, Shabir alleged, Christ is not called “the God” or *ho Theos* with the Greek article (1:06:00). He likewise mentioned that in John 17:3 the phrase “the only true God” is employed of God the Father. However, exactly the same Greek phrase employed for the Father in John 17:3 is employed of Christ in 1 John 5:20,⁸² the only other text where the exact phrase “the true God” appears in Scripture, in an epistle by the same author, John, who wrote the Gospel of John. So just as the Father is called “true God” (John 17:3), Christ is called “the true God and eternal life” in 1 John 5:20. What is more, at the very climax of John’s Gospel, Christ is actually called “the God” or *ho Theos*—the apostle Thomas’s statement “My Lord and my God” (John 20:28), addressed to Christ, represents the Greek *ho Kurios mou kai ho Theos mou*. The Lord Jesus is also called “the God” with the Greek article in Hebrews 1:8: “But unto the Son *he saith*, Thy throne, O God [*ho Theos*], *is* for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness *is* the sceptre of thy kingdom.” The Watchtower Society’s distinction followed by Shabir between articular and nonarticular *Theos*/“God” is actually based on a highly faulty understanding of the Greek language and the Greek article, and it is unfortunate that Dr. Ally, despite having decades of experience debating leading Christian scholars, would make a painfully invalid and unscholarly Watchtower Society argument about the Greek article in connection with Christ as God, as well as ignoring the only other place the phrase “the true God” appears in the New Testament outside of John 17:3 in an attempt to remove Christ from that status.

Shabir also never acknowledged or dealt with the fact that merely two verses after John 17:3 Christ claims to have the same Divine glory as the Father and to be the Creator

⁸² Note that in 1 John 5:20 it is clearly Christ, not the Father, who is referred to in the statement “This is the true God, and eternal life.” Christ is elsewhere called “true” with the same Greek word (e. g., John 1:9; cf. John 14:6); Christ is regularly called the *life* (John 1:4; 11:25; 14:6; 1 John 1:1-2), while the Father is not called “the life” elsewhere in Scripture. The near demonstrative pronoun “this” points to the closest referent, “his Son Jesus Christ” in 1 John 5:20. Indeed:

The demonstrative pronoun, *houtos*, in the Gospel and Epistles of John seems to be used in a theologically rich manner. Specifically, of the approximately seventy instances in which *houtos* has a personal referent, as many as forty-four of them (almost two-thirds of the instances) refer to the Son. Of the remainder, most imply some sort of positive connection with the Son. What is most significant is that *never* is the Father the referent” (Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996] 327).

John 17:3 refers to the Father as “the true God,” and 1 John 5:20 refers to the Son as “the true God,” because the one God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, along with any one of the three Persons who share the undivided Divine essence, can be called “the true God.”

who eternally existed before the world came into existence (John 17:5). It is perfectly obvious that John 17:3 is not denying the true Deity of Christ when only two verses later that very true Deity is plainly asserted.

Shabir's claim that an alleged evolution of the picture of Christ from the alleged early merely prophetic "Jesus" through the alleged non-Divine synoptic "Jesus" to the alleged semi-divine Johannine "Jesus" suffers from the severe problems that the Deity of Christ is taught in all the Gospels—for example, Mark, the gospel Shabir claims is the earliest, begins with a quotation from Isaiah that identifies Jesus as Jehovah (Mark 1:1-3; Isaiah 40:3)—from the fact that John was not a late invention but a product of one of Christ's three closest human followers, a fact that Shabir produced not a single piece of ancient evidence to contradict, from the fact that John over and over again presents Christ as the one true God, not as a semi-divine being, and from the fact that extremely early, pre-Gospel, pre-epistle, pre-Pauline testimony to the Deity of Christ exists. For example, Philippians 2:5-11, which was mentioned in the debate as being the pre-Pauline Christ-hymn probably composed by the early Christian martyr Stephen, who was martyred only two years after Christ's death, presents Christ as "equal with God" (Philippians 2:5) and as Jehovah to whom every knee will bow (Philippians 2:10-11; Isaiah 45:23). The "evolution" that Shabir insisted was yet incomplete when John's Gospel was composed was actually present from the very beginning, present in all the New Testament documents by all New Testament authors, and even present in the Old Testament predictions of the Messiah (e. g., Isaiah 9:6).

III. Miscellaneous Arguments by Dr. Shabir Ally

Shabir Ally made a variety of other arguments. These will be briefly reviewed below.

Near the end of the debate, **put in time** Dr. Ally made his only attempt to deal with the overwhelming external evidence that had been set forth by Thomas Ross in favor of the authorship of the Gospels by Christ's eyewitnesses and Apostles—he claimed that all later sources were simply repeating tradition they derived from Papias. Shabir never

dealt with the fact that Papias was not repeating late heresay, but had heard and seen the Apostle John⁸³ and other first generation Christians⁸⁴ personally. Wenham notes:

Papias emphasizes that he got his information from those who had known the apostles Andrew, Philip, Thomas, James, John, Matthew and others, and . . . is writing self-consciously as a particularly well-informed person, who has multiple sources and who is only removed from Matthew himself by a single link. . . . Thus he had informants of great reliability whose reports his readers could safely trust . . . testimony of the highest quality.⁸⁵

Shabir Ally gave no ancient historical evidence to support setting aside or questioning the reliability of the testimony of Papias.

Furthermore, the historical facts are that “the church fathers were not merely unthinkingly reflecting Papias . . . they (e.g., Irenaeus, Clement, Tertullian, Origen) were renowned scholars in their own right who had information from widespread and independent sources. They did not need to rely solely on Papias for their information.”⁸⁶

Indeed, “[T]here is in . . . the writings of Irenaeus . . . no hint of dependence [on Papias].

Indeed, Irenaeus was sufficiently close to the authorities of Papias to have gathered his own information. . . . Both Papias and Irenaeus . . . are competent to give us reliable and independent information about . . . gospel origins.”⁸⁷ Not a shred of evidence exists that the huge number of ancient historical sources cited by Thomas Ross were merely copying from Papias—and Shabir did not attempt to provide any evidence for his assertion. Nor did Dr. Ally even attempt to provide any refutation of the positive evidence indicating that ancient Christian historical sources engaged in very careful research, rather than just repeating the alleged inventions of Papias. Thomas Ross had provided the evidence of Eusebius as an example of the historical accuracy of early Christian sources:

⁸³ Irenaeus of Lyons, “Irenæus against Heresies,” in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 1, The Ante-Nicene Fathers [Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885] 563; C. Stewart Petrie, “The Authorship of ‘The Gospel According to Matthew’: A Reconsideration of the External Evidence,” *New Testament Studies* 14 [1967] 21-22.

⁸⁴ E. g., Papias was “very familiar with Aristion . . . [one of the] seventy-two disciples of the Lord” that Christ sent out to preach in Luke 10. (A. C. Perumalil, “Are Not Papias and Irenaeus Competent to Report on the Gospels?” *The Expository Times* 91:11 [1980] 334-335). See also Robert H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) 1026–45 & Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994) 609–20.

⁸⁵ John Wenham, *Redating Matthew, Mark, and Luke: A Fresh Assault on the Synoptic Problem* [Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1992] 124-125.

⁸⁶ F. David Farnell, Ph.D, “The Synoptic Gospels In The Ancient Church: The Testimony To The Priority Of Matthew’s Gospel 1.” *Master’s Seminary Journal* 10:1 [Spring 1999] 84).

⁸⁷ (A. C. Perumalil, “Are Not Papias and Irenaeus Competent to Report on the Gospels?” *The Expository Times* 91:11 [1980] 332, 337).

Eusebius's Accuracy:



Eusebius . . . has not been inventing things; in fact, Eusebius's narrative is built upon a dazzling array of published sources and archival materials, some forty-nine different authors, and over a hundred different books . . . and his literal fealty to the text of the Bible spilled over into a literal fealty to almost every other kind of text. Where the classic historians tended to put speeches and words into the mouths of their characters, Eusebius is utterly scrupulous in citing letters, quotations, and official documents. The early Christians' handling of history . . . cannot be discounted (Allen C. Guelzo, *Making History: How Great Historians Interpret the Past*, Course 8818, The Great Courses, Lecture 8, "The Christian Claim to Continuity," (30:00-32:00))

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quotations, and official documents. The early Christians' handling of history . . . cannot be discounted.⁸⁸

An unsubstantiated assertion by Shabir Ally that later Christian sources were merely copying the unverifiable assertions of Papias is utterly insufficient to overthrow the historical testimony set forth by Thomas Ross. There is strong evidence both that Papias is reliable and strong evidence that other ancient sources were based on further evidence and data, rather than blindly following Papias. Christianity is a religion based upon the conviction that the Creator of the universe became incarnate, was crucified, and rose from the dead in genuine space and time and history, and early Christian historiography evidenced a carefulness for historical accuracy befitting the Christian belief that God Himself placed upon history by accomplishing redemption within it.

Dr. Ally argued that Thomas Ross cited only conservative scholars. This was simply not the case; both conservative and liberal scholars were cited. However, Ross's argument was not based upon the number of scholars cited, but upon the actual ancient historical data, which is of high quality and which is unanimous in its testimony to the Christian Jesus, to the traditional authorship of the Gospels, and which overwhelmingly favors the Christian position. Shabir Ally did not provide any ancient evidence at all

⁸⁸ Allen C. Guelzo, *Making History: How Great Historians Interpret the Past*, Course 8818, The Great Courses, Lecture 8, "The Christian Claim to Continuity," (30:00-32:00). Note that there are strong grounds for concluding that the Gospels contain the actual words, the *ipsissima verba*, of Christ, and not just His "genuine voice" or *ipsissima vox*. Similar but non-identical statements in the Gospels do not prove a *vox* perspective; as one would expect from any good teacher, Christ often repeated His teachings in slightly different words both on different occasions and even on the same occasion (cf. Mark 10:23-24; John 14:10-11; cf. Exodus 20 & Deuteronomy 5). While one Gospel may certainly contain one part of a discourse and another Gospel a different portion of the same discourse or of a similar one given at a different time, "much evidence favors the *ipsissima verba* perspective[.] . . . [P]resuppositional probability must [also] be on the side of the Gospels' containing the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus" (Robert L. Thomas, ed., *The Jesus Crisis* [Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1998] 368, 372-373). Indeed, not only does the Biblical text itself indicate that the Gospels contain the very words of Christ, not just His "voice" (Matthew 24:35; Mark 8:38; Luke 21:33; John 12:48; 14:10, 23, 26; 15:7, 26; 16:12-13; 17:8, etc.), but first century Jewish culture supports the presence of Christ's actual words in the Gospels:

The art of reproducing another person's statements in one's own words, and of abstracting points of view and ideas from someone's words, has been carried to considerable lengths in the Hellenized West. But the art was not practi[ced] in ancient Israel. A person's views were conveyed in his own words. Authentic statements contained the authority and power of the one who uttered them; this we know from the Old Testament.

This also applies to Rabbinic Judaism[.] . . . We see above all the method—which was taken to extreme lengths—of subjecting authoritative sayings to thorough penetration and exegesis. But reverence and care for the *ipsissima verba* of each authority remains unaltered. In the colleges no attempt was made to give a synopsis of the views of the old masters; their words were quoted—together with the name of the one who had uttered them. . . . [The] extremely ancient . . . practice . . . in Judaism . . . is formulated [as]: "It is a man's duty to state (a tradition) in his teacher's words." . . . The pupil is thus duty bound to maintain his teacher's exact words. (Birger Gerhardsson, *Memory and Manuscript: Oral Tradition and Written Transmission in Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity, with Tradition and Transmission in Early Christianity*, combined ed. with new preface, trans. Eric J. Sharpe [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998] 130-3)

Thus, there is every reason to believe that when the Gospels make statements such as: "These words spake Jesus" (John 8:20), the words that follow are the actual words of the Lord Jesus Christ. (See also Donald E. Green, "Evangelicals and *Ipsissima Vox*," *Master's Seminary Journal* 12:1 [Spring 2001] 49-68).

showing that the Muslim “Jesus” existed before this figure was invented by the author or authors of the Quran.

Shabir stated that Ross provided no first century evidence that Matthew wrote Matthew (39:00). However, even on Dr. Ally’s late dating for the Gospels there would have been multiple Gospels extant in various churches before the end of the first century—indeed, since Dr. Ally claims that Matthew and Luke used Mark’s Gospel, from the very origin of Matthew and Luke, if one grants Shabir’s argument, churches would have had both Mark and one of these other Gospels as soon as they were published. Therefore the fact that the headings of the Gospels unanimously affirm Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John as the authors of their respective Gospels requires a first century origin for these designations, since as soon as more than one Gospel was present in a church a method of distinguishing the two documents would necessarily have existed. Nor did Shabir provide any ancient evidence at all that Papias, Irenaus, and the many other witnesses cited in favor of the traditional authorship of the Gospels were inaccurate or that their historical research or affirmations should be set aside. His entire case was based upon citing one or more persons in modern times who rejected the testimony of the ancient historical evidence and concluding that these modern individuals should be followed, almost always without even explaining the reasoning made by these modern writers, and always without proving that their reasoning was valid. Shabir made no serious attempt to deal with the unanimity of authorial ascription for the canonical Gospels—present because their actual authors, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were well known and universally recognized—and the chaotic disagreements in the authorial ascriptions in the pseudepigraphical writings present because of their anonymous or inaccurate authorship.

It is also noteworthy that Shabir Ally never gave a single piece of factual data contradicting the dates for the Gospels accepted by early Christianity and defended by Thomas Ross. Dr. Ally did not give a single piece of ancient evidence against a date for Matthew c. A. D. 41, Mark c. A. D. 43, Luke c. A. D. 48, and John c. A. D. 50-65, nor a single piece of evidence in favor of the later dates after A. D. 70 defended by theological liberalism. The fact is that every extant ancient first century source, from the extremely early pre-Pauline creed in 1 Corinthians 15, the pre-Pauline hymn in Philippians 2, the canonical Gospels, the rest of the New Testament, and all extra-biblical sources present the Christian Jesus, while the Muslim “Jesus” is nowhere to be found, and there was neither time for the alleged evolution from the Muslim “Jesus” to the Christian Jesus nor any evidence that it ever took place.

Shabir Ally claimed that Christ was inaccurate in His statement about the small size of the mustard seed (59:00; Matthew 13:32; Mark 4:31; Luke 13:19); it was not

accurate, Shabir claimed, to call the mustard seed the “least of all seeds” (Matthew 13:32) or “less than all the seeds that be in the earth” (Mark 4:31), because, while the mustard seed is tiny, about the size of a grain of sand, there are seeds present somewhere else on the face of the planet that are smaller. It should be noted that the phrase “least of all seeds” could also be translated as an elative adjective instead of a superlative adjective, that is, as “very small among all the seeds,”⁸⁹ and that one could argue that Christ is employing hyperbole, somewhat similar to how one might say “I was in the traffic jam forever” without one’s audience understanding that one was literally in traffic for all eternity or an unhappy employee might complain, “I have the worst of all bosses!” without really meaning that his boss was actually worse than Hitler, Stalin, Pol-Pot, or other monstrous persons in history. However, as Archer points out, “it is highly questionable whether Jesus was discussing all plant life on planet Earth when He made this statement. No one yet has proved that ancient Palestinians planted anything that bore a smaller seed than that of the black mustard, and that was the framework within which Jesus was speaking.”⁹⁰ While it is worth noting that the phraseology of “the seeds that be in the earth” (Mark 4:31) refers to seeds sown in the ground in Palestine contextually,⁹¹ not, say, to seeds in treetops in the Amazon rain forest in South America, even apart from this fact it is clear contextually that the mustard was “the smallest of the different kinds of seeds Jews were accustomed to sow in their fields,”⁹² and that is all that Christ was referring to. Much stronger arguments than this are necessary if one wishes to overthrow the Bible.

Dr. Ally claimed that Mark’s Gospel claims a particular incident happened “when Abiathar was the high priest” (1:00:00). Shabir did not quote the text, Mark 2:26, to which he alludes. Archer explains:

A careful examination of Mark 2:26 reveals that Christ did not actually imply that Abiathar was already high priest at the time of David’s visit. He simply said, “*Epi Abiathar archiereōs*,” which means “in the time of Abiathar the high priest.” As things turned out, bloody King Saul soon had Ahimelech and the entire priestly community of Nob massacred by Doeg the Edomite (1 Sam. 22:18–19); and Abiathar the son of Ahimelech was the only one fortunate enough to escape. He

⁸⁹ Cf. Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996) 301.

⁹⁰ Gleason L. Archer, *New International Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, Zondervan’s Understand the Bible Reference Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982) 329.

⁹¹ Greek *epi + ges*; (cf. Matthew 13:32, “seed into the good ground [Gk. *epi & ges*]); Matthew 13:5, “deepness of earth [*ges*]”; Mark 4:5, “depth of earth [*ges*]”; Luke 21:23, “in the land [*epi & ges*, contextually clearly Palestine]”; Mark 6:47; 8:6; 14:35; John 6:21, etc.

⁹² D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Gospel of Mark: An Expository Commentary* (Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 1994), 120.

fled to join David (v. 20) and served as his priest all through David's years of wandering and exile. Naturally he was appointed high priest by David after David became king, and he shared the high priesthood with Zadok, Saul's appointee, until David's death. Under these circumstances it was perfectly proper to refer to Abiathar as the high priest—even though his appointment as such came somewhat later, after the incident at Nob—just as it would be proper to introduce an anecdote by saying, "Now when King David was a shepherd boy," even though David was not actually a king at the time he was a shepherd boy.

According to W.F. Arndt and F.W. Gingrich (*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* [Chicago: University of Chicago, 1957], p. 286), *epi* with the genitive simply means "in the time of"; and that is the meaning that applies in Mark 2:26 (the same construction as Acts 11:28 ["in the time of Claudius"] and Heb. 1:2 ["in the time of the last of these days" (*ep' eschatou tōn hēmerōn toutōn*)]). The episode did happen "in the time of" Abiathar; he was not only alive but actually present when the event took place, and he very shortly afterward became high priest as a result of Saul's murdering his father, Ahimelech. If Jesus' words are interpreted in the way he meant them, there is absolutely no variance with historical fact.⁹³

This explanation was personally handed to Dr. Ally over twenty years ago by Dr. Jay Smith.⁹⁴ It is unfortunate that Shabir will continue to use arguments against the Bible even though more than two decades ago their invalidity was personally demonstrated to him.

Shabir Ally, while not citing the passage, claimed that Mark 11:13 is problematic, because Christ cursed a fig tree while "the time of figs was not yet." (1:05:00). However, this alleged error is easily answered. Fig trees in Palestine would develop their foliage and their figs at somewhat different times of the year, but if there were no fruit when the tree was in full foliage, no fruit would appear on it subsequently:

In the fig tree, the fruit appears coincident with, and sometimes even before, the appearance of the leaves. If the leaves alone appear, there will be no fruit that year. The fact that this tree had an abundance of foliage ahead of season held out the promise of a corresponding precocity in regard to its fruit. . . . [However, Christ] . . . found nothing but leaves"—actual inspection revealed that there were no figs under the leaves. The tree did not fulfill its promise. . . . "The time of figs was not yet" . . . the comment is historically correct; the season for ripe figs was in June, more than a month away. This explanatory comment underlines the fact that there was no reason for expecting the tree to have figs beyond the promise of its preseasonal foliage. It stresses the precocity of the tree.⁹⁵

Christ cursed the fig tree as an illustration of the coming judgment upon Israel for the nation's rejection of their Messiah:

Events have meaning beyond their face value; they become significant as they are interpreted. . . . His act was an example of prophetic realism similar to the symbolic actions of the OT prophets (e.g. Isa. 20:1–6; Jer. 13:1–11; 19:1–13; Ezek. 4:1–15). The prophets frequently spoke of the fig tree in referring to Israel's status before God (e.g. Jer. 8:13; 29:17; Hos. 9:10, 16; Joel 1:7; Micah 7:1–6), while the destruction of the fig tree is associated with judgment (Hos. 2:12; Isa. 34:4; cf. Lk. 13:6–9). In this context the fig tree symbolizes Israel in Jesus' day, and what happens to the

⁹³ Gleason L. Archer, *New International Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, Zondervan's Understand the Bible Reference Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982) 362.

⁹⁴ Jay Smith, Alex Chowdhry, Toby Jepson, & James Schaeffer, *101 Cleared Up Contradictions of the Bible*, #80.

⁹⁵ D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Gospel of Mark: An Expository Commentary* (Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 1994) 317–318.

tree the terrible fate that inevitably awaited Jerusalem. The explanation was already put forth by Victor of Antioch, in the oldest existing commentary on Mark, that Jesus had “used the fig tree to set forth the judgment that was about to fall on Jerusalem.” This is certainly the evangelist’s understanding of the episode, for in the Gospel of Mark Jesus’ action in the Temple is firmly embedded within the fig tree incident. The a-b-a structure of Ch. 11:12–21 (fig tree—cleansing of the Temple—fig tree) serves to provide a mutual commentary on these two events. Just as the leaves of the tree concealed the fact that there was no fruit to enjoy, so the magnificence of the Temple and its ceremony conceals the fact that Israel has not brought forth the fruit of righteousness demanded by God. Both incidents have the character of a prophetic sign which warns of judgment to fall upon Israel for honoring God with their lips when their heart was far from him (cf. Ch. 7:6).⁹⁶

Nothing at all in the narrative of Christ’s action with the fig tree denies the inerrancy of Scripture,⁹⁷ much less proves that the Gospels “evolve” the Christian Jesus from an earlier Muslim prophet.

Shabir claimed that conservative scholars become liberal, but liberal scholars never become conservative. He claimed that conservative scholars sometimes become liberal, or even atheists, atheists sometimes become Christians, but “it hardly happens that one who has become familiar with the critical scholarship . . . becomes a conservative Christian scholar.”⁹⁸ Numbers of examples could be cited to show that Shabir’s claim is false, but Dr. Eta Linnemann, whose works were referenced in the debate, stands as a leading counter-example to Shabir’s claim:

She studied . . . [the] full range of biblical, philosophical, theological, and church-historical subjects, in Marburg, Tübingen, and Göttingen. Notable professors at Marburg were Bultmann and Dinkler in NT, Balla and Fohrer in OT, and Benz, Maurer, and Zscharnack in church history and dogmatics. At Tübingen her professors included Fuchs and Michel in NT, Würthwein and Elliger in OT, Rückert and Ebeling in church history and dogmatics, and Weischedel and Krüger in philosophy. At Göttingen she heard, among others, Gogarten, Wolf, Käsemann, and Trillhaus. . . . [She was] assigned . . . to write interpretations of biblical texts for religion teachers in the German public school system. Out of this labor arose her critically acclaimed book on Jesus’ parables, which was accepted as a doctoral dissertation by the *Kirkliche Hochschule* (Ecclesiastical College) of Berlin. Overseeing this work were Karl Kupisch, Ernst Fuchs, and Martin Fischer. She received her doctoral degree *summa cum laude* on July 13, 1961.

From April 16, 1961 till March 31, 1966 she taught in a seminary in Berlin, lecturing in New Testament, church history, and religious education. On April 1, 1966 she received appointment to occupy the chair of Protestant theology and religious pedagogical methodology at the Teachers’ College of Braunschweig. There she became associate professor on February 14, 1967. In the midst of these labors she requested permission to *habilitieren* (submit a second doctoral dissertation, required in the German theological system for the *venia legendi*, the right to full privileges as university professor), a request she made to the Protestant faculty at the Phillipps University in Marburg. Her dissertation there was entitled *Studien zur Passionsgeschichte* (*Studies of the Passion Story*). She received the *venia legendi* for NT on February 11, 1970 and was named

⁹⁶ William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974) 400.

⁹⁷ Concerning the chronology of the fig tree episode, see Vern Sheridan Poythress, *Inerrancy and the Gospels: A God-Centered Approach to the Challenges of Harmonization* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012) 144–148.

⁹⁸ Thomas Ross & Shabir Ally debate, “The New Testament Picture of Jesus: Is it Accurate?” University of Wisconsin at Whitewater, 1:20:00-1:22:00.

honorary professor at Marburg on August 10, 1971. She became full professor at Braunschweig in 1972. . . . [On] November 5, 1977 . . . at the age of fifty-one she says she gave her life to Christ. It was a month later that she “repented of my perverse theological teaching” and declared her earlier work and writing rubbish. She has elaborated on this part of her life in her first post-conversion book, *Historical Criticism of the Bible*. . . . Her initial book on historical criticism appeared in German in 1986 and has since been published in Dutch (1987), English (1990), Indonesian (1991), and Norwegian (1994) editions. Sales of the English edition alone have far exceeded 10,000 copies. A second monograph dealing with the synoptic problem appeared in both German and English editions in 1992 and has likewise sold several thousand copies. . . . [S]he has conducted two extended speaking tours in the United States, speaking at several dozen colleges and seminaries and before numerous church groups. She has also produced a number of essays, among them one called “Pauline Authorship and Vocabulary Statistics,” a second entitled “Historical Critical and Evangelical Theology,” a third entitled “The Lost Gospel of Q—Fact or Fantasy?” which recently appeared in *Trinity Journal*, and fourth “Is There a Gospel of Q?” which appeared in *Bible Review*. Still unpublished, to this writer’s knowledge, is a close analysis of a portion of Robert H. Stein’s *The Synoptic Problem*. An example of her German language article production is “Echtheitsfragen und Vokabelstatistik” (“Questions of Authenticity and Vocabulary Statistics”), in which she investigates the use made of statistics to call in question the traditional authorship of most NT books.⁹⁹

It simply is not the case that only conservative scholars become liberal while liberal ones do not become conservative. A more accurate assessment would be that usually by the time people end up with teaching positions in universities or seminaries they have their minds made up and rarely switch one way or the other, and conservative professors rarely become liberal while liberal ones rarely become conservative. What does happen, on the other hand, with some frequency is that impressionable young college students who claim to be Christians but are not genuinely born again (John 3:3) and consequently do not know the Divine Author of the Bible personally, and who come from weak or even apostate churches (or, perhaps better, “religious organizations”), and who know nothing at all about the arguments for or against the Bible, reject Scripture and adopt theologically liberal positions when they are given one-sided presentations at secular universities by liberal professors. The overwhelming majority of the time at a secular university or a liberal seminary only liberal, anti-inerrancy books are assigned, and only arguments for anti-supernaturalism are given—the conservative response is ignored. Should it be surprised that impressionable young people who know nothing about the topic at hand become liberal in such a situation? On the other hand, at a very high number of conservative schools, just as in conservative works on Old or New Testament Introduction, both the liberal arguments against Scripture and the conservative case for the Bible are given—and in such settings the large majority of students adopt a conservative position. Conservative students at conservative universities and seminaries are much more likely to know the arguments for and against the Bible than are students at liberal universities and seminaries. Thus, the true situation about the strength of the

⁹⁹ Robert W. Yarbrough, “Eta Linnemann Friend Or Foe Of Scholarship?” *Master’s Seminary Journal* 8:2 (Fall 97) 165-168.

conservative and liberal arguments is almost exactly the opposite of what Shabir implies; when both sides of the matter are presented, the conservative case is recognized by the large majority as far stronger than the liberal case—although, of course, the number of people adopting a position does not of itself prove either the validity or invalidity of the position in question.

Standard works of Old and New Testament Introduction assigned at schools committed to orthodox Christianity and to higher criticism illustrates this difference. The conservative evangelical Gleason Archer's *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* contains a detailed examination of higher critical theories followed by a refutation of these theories¹⁰⁰ and even a special section dedicated to "Liberal Scholarship in the 20th Century."¹⁰¹ In contrast, classical theologically liberal works such as S. R. Driver's *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*¹⁰² ignore arguments for orthodoxy or against liberalism, as do the overwhelming majority of modern higher critical works. Liberal refutations of conservative works defending the inspiration of the Bible are somewhere on the "endangered species" to "extinct" range, and chapters in liberal works on the Bible such as "Conservative Scholarship in the 20th Century" are totally absent. Archer, after his survey of liberal scholarship, rightly concludes:

Now that we have completed a survey of the history and development of modern higher criticism, it seems appropriate to point out certain basic presuppositions which fatally vitiate the Liberal methodology of handling evidences on anything better than a subjective basis and renders their scholarly endeavors a mere exercise in futility. This may sound like a harsh judgment, but for one who has been trained in the laws of legal evidence and who observes how grossly these guidelines observed in a law court are basically ignored in practice from Astruc to von Rad, we can hardly come to any other conclusion.

The Holy Bible is assumed to be a mere piece of religious literature to liberal scholars, purely human in origin and reflective of an evolution of religious thought, a product of Hegelian dialectic process (thesis, antithesis and synthesis). Far from being an authentic revelation of a personal God and His will for the human race, it is assumed to be a mere invention of human minds, devoid of any demonstrable trustworthiness or authority whatever, except insofar as the modern critic personally approves of it and endorses it as valid. No serious account is taken of the many infallible proofs of divine inspiration with which the sixty-six books of the Bible abound. Even to suggest an investigation of these evidences is absolutely unthinkable in the minds of the Liberal establishment. To propose any kind of objective examination is to invite ridicule and scorn from the practitioners of the Documentary Hypothesis or Form Criticism or Canonical Criticism who maintain a rigid control of the Biblical studies department in most of our present day universities and state-supported seminaries throughout the Western World.

¹⁰⁰ Gleason Archer Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, 3rd. ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994) 88-192

¹⁰¹ Gleason Archer Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, 3rd. ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 571-581.

¹⁰² S. R. Driver, *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1914)

The amazing feature about this Bible-denigrating procedure is its flagrant violation of the rule against circular reasoning which underlies all evidential logic. To the rationalistic mind-set of the *Aufklärung* and the Encyclopedistes of the mid-eighteenth century it was well-nigh inconceivable for any educated thinker to take seriously the truth-claims of Holy Scripture, and those who undertook to do so were ridiculed as benighted and naive, no matter what scholarly attainments they had achieved in their education. If they really believed that the Bible was the Word of God, they were *ipso facto* outdated traditionalists who could be safely ignored. . . . One of the most amazing features of the modern Liberal scholarship is its complete ignoring of the overwhelming evidence afforded by the multitude of fulfilled predictions with which the Bible abounds. . . .

From the standpoint of legal evidence, such a cavalier trampling upon the rights of a defendant in a criminal court proceeding would be completely disallowed. Yet the Scriptures are treated to the same procedure as that practiced by the Spanish Inquisition. Confined in a dungeon without a possibility of contact by any friend or relative or legal counsel, the hapless prisoner was confronted only by stern inquisitors who announced to him, “We know you are guilty already, and no testimony in your defense will be allowed.” In this case, then, the Bible is assumed to be of mere human origin, and therefore no evidence of divine authorship can be seriously entertained. There is little possibility for one who has gone through Liberal training to learn how to understand and preach the Bible as the Word of God or to come through that training with any measure of religious conviction. He may learn how to pick and choose elements in the Scriptures that appeal to him as being valid, but since the validation has to come from the human critic, it ends up with no greater measure of authority than that possessed by the human judge, thus the doctrinaire specialists fall into many fallacies that essentially go back to a naive belief in their own superior judgment.¹⁰³

The situation for the New Testament is the same as that for the Old Testament. For example, Rudolf Bultmann, recognized as, among anti-supernaturalists, “the most influential New Testament scholar of the twentieth century . . . [who] influenced a whole generation of scholars, including members of the Jesus Seminar and other recent critics of the Gospels,”¹⁰⁴ wrote:

The historical [critical method] includes the *presupposition* that history is . . . a closed continuum of effect . . . not rent by the interference of supernatural, transcendent powers and that *therefore there is no “miracle”* . . . historical science cannot perceive . . . [nor] reckon on the basis of . . . God . . . act[ing] in history. . . . [T]here cannot be any exceptions in the case of biblical texts[.] . . . [This is] the one presupposition that cannot be dismissed.¹⁰⁵

Elsewhere Bultmann wrote: “The idea of . . . miracle . . . is no longer tenable. . . . [this] does not require proof but is presupposed as axiomatic, and . . . we cannot free ourselves from that presupposition at will.”¹⁰⁶ Does Bultmann prove that no miracles took place in history and that the best explanation for the Bible is one that excludes the intervention of God? No—he declares that the impossibility of the miraculous is the one indissmissible “presupposition” that “does not require proof,” and affirms that “there cannot be any

¹⁰³ Gleason Archer Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, 3rd. ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994) 577–578.

¹⁰⁴ Mark L. Strauss, *Four Portraits, One Jesus: A Survey of Jesus and the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007) 350.

¹⁰⁵ Rudolf Bultmann, “Is Exegesis Without Presuppositions Possible?” in *Existence and Faith*, ed. Schubert M. Ogden (New York: Meridian Books, 1960) 291–292.

¹⁰⁶ Rudolf Bultmann, *Interpreting Faith for the Modern Era*, ed. Roger A. Johnson (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991) 257.

exceptions,” including in the case of the events recorded in the Bible. Consider Bultmann’s treatment of the resurrection accounts:

Bultmann’s treatment of the resurrection of Jesus . . . was accomplished without a historical investigation of any sort. He concludes at the very outset, “Is it not a mythical event pure and simple? Obviously it is not an event of past history.” . . . Thus, the historicity of the resurrection was rejected *a priori* as a myth, without any attempt to investigate the facts. Even the importance of such historical research was rejected.¹⁰⁷

By means of contrast, conservative New Testament introductions contain detailed examinations of higher critical theories as well as responses to liberal arguments.¹⁰⁸

Dr. Mark Roberts, who passed from denying the infallible inspiration of the Bible during his undergraduate studies at Harvard University to becoming a theological conservative as he continued his studies through his Harvard Ph. D., noted:

After finishing Religion 140, I could not trust the Gospels to provide historically accurate knowledge of Jesus. . . . [However, in] my undergraduate years I began to think critically [through my studies in philosophy], not only about the New Testament but also about the methodologies and presuppositions of New Testament scholarship. Sometimes, I discovered, academic consensus was built on the shifting sand of weak philosophy, peculiar methodology,⁴ and atheistic theology. Perhaps other approaches were possible, ones that involved rigorous New Testament scholarship and led to a more positive appraisal of the Gospels’ reliability. . . . My road to confidence in the Gospels took a strange twist during my junior year. I enrolled in a seminar . . . called “Christians, Jews, and Gnostics.” . . . I began to see the Gospels as more reliable than I had once thought, in part, as I compared them to the wildly fictional portraits of Jesus in the Gnostic Gospels. . . . [I chose to] pursue graduate work in New Testament. . . . Without exception, my grad school teachers echoed [higher critical] conclusions about the historical limitations of the New Testament Gospels. . . . Yet I began to see how often their interpretations were saturated by unquestioned philosophical presuppositions. If, for example, a passage from the Gospels included a prophecy of Jesus concerning his death, it was assumed without argument that this had been added later by the church because prophecy didn’t fit within the naturalistic worldview of my profs.

The more I spent time with some of the leading [liberal] New Testament scholars in the world, the more I came to . . . recognize the limitations of their scholarly perspectives. I saw how often conclusions based on unsophisticated assumptions were accepted without question by the reigning scholarly community, and taught uncritically as if they were, well, the Gospel truth.

I also discovered how rarely my professors entertained perspectives by scholars who didn’t share their naturalistic worldview. Evangelical scholars were usually ignored simply because they were conservative. This fact was driven home once when I was on winter break in Southern California. I needed to read a few books for one of my courses, so I went to the Fuller Seminary library because it was close to my home. What I found at Fuller [a relatively evangelical school] stunned me. Fuller students were required to read many of the same books I was assigned, and also books written from an evangelical perspective. Whereas I was getting one party line, Fuller students were challenged to think more broadly and, dare I admit it, more critically. This put an

¹⁰⁷ Gary R. Habermas, *The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence for the Life of Christ* (Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing Company, 1996) 48; citing Bultmann, “New Testament and Mythology,” p. 38.

¹⁰⁸ See, e. g., the careful examination of liberal theories in conservative works such as D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005) & Theodor Zahn, *Introduction to the New Testament*, trans. Melancthon Williams Jacobus, 3 vol. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1909).

⁴ For example, ever since I first learned about the “criterion of dissimilarity,” a scholarly tool for establishing the validity of historical claims about Jesus, it seemed to me that this was obviously and woefully inadequate, even though it was accepted without hesitation by many critical scholars. For a brief critique of the criterion of dissimilarity, see <http://www.markdroberts.com/htmlfiles/resources/unmaskingthejesus.htm#sep1405>.

arrogant Harvard student in his place, let me tell you. It also helped me see how much my own education was lopsided. Only once in my entire graduate school experience was I assigned a book by an evangelical scholar.⁹¹⁰⁹

Theologically conservative schools are far more likely to present both the case for and against the inspiration of the Bible than liberal schools are—the liberal schools ignore the evidence for the other side.

The fact that students at theologically conservative Christian schools are far more likely to be exposed both to liberal attacks on the Bible and the Christian response to those attacks while students at liberal and secular schools are likely to only get an anti-Bible viewpoint presented with Christian responses censored and ignored is also evident in the statements Shabir Ally made himself during the debate. Dr. Ally strongly desires that people become Muslims, and he seeks to prepare carefully when he is engaged in public dialogues, but he appeared surprised and unprepared when Thomas Ross actually defended the authorship of the New Testament documents, the independence of the Gospels, the dates for the Gospels advocated by the early Christians, and the other arguments for classical Christianity presented during the debate, explaining, in part at least, why he made no responses at all to the overwhelming majority of the ancient historical evidence presented by Thomas. Shabir’s ignorance of the fact that “the colophons in 50% of the MSS, including Family 35 [one of the most accurate families of Greek MSS], say that Matthew was ‘published’ eight years after the ascension of the Christ . . . Mark was published two years later . . . Luke another five years later,”¹¹⁰ and “John was ‘published’ thirty-two years after the ascension”¹¹¹ indicates a lack of study of the Greek manuscripts themselves and of conservative sources that take the ancient witnesses seriously; because liberal and higher critical sources overwhelmingly ignore the evidence, and Shabir’s studies overwhelmingly are based on liberal or higher critical works on Christianity, he was not aware of the facts of the matter. Indeed, Shabir was

⁹ Professor Krister Stendahl assigned a commentary on Matthew by Robert H. Gundry (*Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1982]). Ironically, this book was roundly criticized by many evangelicals as buying too much into non-evangelical approaches to the Gospels. [Note: Robert Gundry was removed from the Evangelical Theological Society by a 70% vote because of his rejection of Biblical inerrancy—he is hardly “evangelical.”]

¹⁰⁹ Mark D. Roberts, *Can We Trust the Gospels? Investigating the Reliability of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007) 16–19.

^{a110} Wilbur N. Pickering, *God Has Preserved His Text! The Divine Preservation of the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Seattle, WA: Amazon Digital Services) 15.

¹¹¹ Wilbur N. Pickering, ed., EUAGGELION KATA IWANNHN, 49, elec. acc. “Complete Greek New Testament with f³⁵,” <http://www.walkinhiscommandments.com/pickering2.htm>; see also Wilbur N. Pickering, ed., EUAGGELION KATA MATΘAION, 51; EUAGGELION KATA MARKON, 46; EUAGGELION KATA LOUKAN, 71, *ibid.*

confident enough in his ignorance that he asserted that the “world of critical scholarship”¹¹² was unaware of the widespread evidence for early dates in the Greek manuscripts of the New Testament themselves. Similarly, Shabir not only failed to demonstrate that “Q” should be defended despite the fact that an examination of seventeen different reconstructions of “Q” found not a single verse in Matthew agreed upon among them all as part of the hypothetical document,¹¹³ but he appeared unaware of this fact.¹¹⁴ Shabir admitted that he was unaware of any scholars¹¹⁵ who advocated the early dates for the Gospels argued for by Thomas Ross, despite numbers of highly scholarly works making the case for them,¹¹⁶ because universities advocating higher criticism just ignore evidence for the other side.

An astonishing instance of Shabir Ally’s ignorance of the traditional Christian position appeared in his affirmations that he thought the traditional Christian view, taught for “hundreds of years,” was that Mark was copying from Matthew and Luke!¹¹⁷ Every extant writer in the early centuries of church history that discussed the subject recognized the synoptic Gospels as independent, eyewitness testimony—indeed, no other hypothesis appears in the historical record for approximately 1,700 years after the time of Christ. The unambiguous testimony of the Gospels themselves,¹¹⁸ of the earliest uninspired documents, and of the united testimony of the “distinguished scholars . . . [of the early]

¹¹² Thomas Ross & Shabir Ally debate, “The New Testament Picture of Jesus: Is it Accurate?” University of Wisconsin at Whitewater, 1:37:00-1:38:00.

¹¹³ Stewart Petrie, “‘Q’ is Only What You Make It,” *Novum Testamentum* 3 (1959) 28-33; cf. Robert L. Thomas, *The Jesus Crisis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1998) 147-149.

¹¹⁴ Thomas Ross & Shabir Ally debate, “The New Testament Picture of Jesus: Is it Accurate?” University of Wisconsin at Whitewater, 1:45:00.

¹¹⁵ Thomas Ross & Shabir Ally debate, “The New Testament Picture of Jesus: Is it Accurate?” University of Wisconsin at Whitewater, 52:00:00.

¹¹⁶ E. g., from a conservative viewpoint, John Wenham, *Redating Matthew, Mark, and Luke: A Fresh Assault on the Synoptic Problem* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1992); from a liberal viewpoint, John A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1972).

¹¹⁷ Thomas Ross & Shabir Ally debate, “The New Testament Picture of Jesus: Is it Accurate?” University of Wisconsin at Whitewater, 2:10:00.

¹¹⁸ The Greek terms employed in Luke 1:1-4 indicate that Luke’s sources for his Gospel did not include Matthew or Mark. See Paul W. Felix, “Literary Dependence and Luke’s Prologue,” *Master’s Seminary Journal* 8:1 (Spring 1997) 61-82; “the prologue preclude[s] Luke’s use of another canonical gospel as a source, but allow for his familiarity with other written sources. He depended on many sources . . . [and] followed chronological order, not an order supplied by Mark. So the prologue does not support any type of literary dependence among the canonical gospels, but points to their independence of each other” (*Ibid*, 61; see the discussion on 68-71, 79-82).

church . . . who had information from . . . widespread and early sources . . . [and] who lived quite close to the [time of the] composition of the gospels” was exclusively in favor of literary independence.¹¹⁹ So far was Dr. Shabir Ally from having carefully interacted with the historic Christian view of the Gospels and then rejecting it, based on (alleged) evidence to the contrary, that he was able to obtain a degree in Biblical literature from a secular university committed to theological liberalism, spend decades after his graduation reading works of higher criticism, and yet *not even know* that every ancient historical source and Christianity as a whole for the overwhelming majority of its history believed the synoptic Gospels were independent accounts with no Gospel copying from another one, rather than accepting modern theories of literary dependence!¹²⁰ Institutions committed to New Testament higher criticism do not refute the views of Bible-believers and of historic Christianity. They ignore or censor these views, doing so to such a complete extent that one can graduate from an institution committed to higher criticism and be in total ignorance of basic ideas of orthodox Christianity.

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¹¹⁹ Robert L. Thomas, ed., *Three Views on the Origins of the Synoptic Gospels* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2002) 215, 220.

¹²⁰ Thomas Ross also can personally testify that in his university studies in New Testament from a liberal perspective the historic Christian perspective advocated in all the extant sources was totally ignored, not a single orthodox work was ever assigned, and higher criticism was assumed without proof in every instance.

Dr. Ally very frequently committed the historical fallacy of prevalent proof and its associated fallacy of appeal to authority. As mentioned in the debate, David Hackett Fischer in his classic book *Historians' Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought* defines the “fallacy of prevalent proof” as:

[M]ak[ing] mass opinion into a method of verification. . . . Many . . . scholars . . . have attempted to establish a doubtful question by a phrase such as “most historians agree . . .” or “it is the consensus of scholarly opinion that . . .” or “in the judgment of all serious students of this problem” . . . [without providing] empirical evidence. . . . [T]he fallacy of the prevalent proof commonly takes this form—deference to the historiographical majority.¹²¹

Dr. Shabir Ally regularly and repeatedly committed this fallacy throughout the debate. Indeed, Thomas Ross had prepared to point out this fallacy because Shabir commits this historical error constantly in his attacks on the Bible and defense of Islam. For example, he said that the *Daily Study Bible* by William Barclay questions the canonicity of 2 Peter,¹²² but provided no actual concrete evidence against 2 Peter other than Mr. Barclay’s opinion. Thomas Ross, in his thirty-second response, provided four ancient historical sources that evidence the recognition of 2 Peter as canonical in the second century A. D.—that is, four more sources than Dr. Ally provided to deny the canonicity of

¹²¹ David Hackett Fischer, *Historians' Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought* (New York: Harper, 1970) 51-53.

¹²² Thomas Ross & Shabir Ally debate, “The New Testament Picture of Jesus: Is it Accurate?” University of Wisconsin at Whitewater, 1:29:00.

2 Peter. Shabir followed his reference to Mr. Barclay with one to *The Historical Figure of Jesus* by E. P. Sanders¹²³ which Dr. Ally said was “essential” for one who “needs to prepare for a debate like this.” Shabir then claimed that Sanders demonstrated that Jesus, in the Gospels, claimed the kingdom of God would come in His lifetime, a failed prophecy. Shabir did not reference any text in the New Testament or explain how Sanders allegedly proved that the New Testament contained a false prophecy—only Sanders’ opinion was cited. In response, Thomas Ross referenced the specific Biblical passage that skeptics attempt to use to make Sanders’ claim actually does nothing of the kind when one examines the immediate context (Matthew 16:28-17:9).

Thomas Ross later reproduced some of the actual factual data Dr. Eta Linnemann used to argue for the independence of the synoptic Gospels:

Dr. Linnemann noted:

[A] quantitative Synoptic comparison (in which mere agreement in content is not taken into account) had the following results: In the cross-section examined, just 22.19 percent of the words in parallel passages are completely identical; on the average, given 100 words in Mark, Matthew will have 95.68 differences and Luke 100.43. This means that the verbal similarities are comparatively small and extend chiefly to identical accounts of Jesus’ words and to specific and unalterable vocabulary that is required by the nature of what is being related.

These data are quite normal if one assumes the original and independent free formulation of the same events and circumstances. The same data furnish no basis for assuming literary dependence. . . . [D]ifferences in parallel passages amount to nothing more than the perspectival contrasts that one would expect when eyewitnesses are involved [with] . . . supplementary verses . . . as additional information.¹²⁴

Shabir’s did not dispute any of the evidence for independence above, but simply stated that “many . . . have written refutations . . . [of] Dr. Linnemann . . . [her argument] doesn’t cut it.”¹²⁵ Dr. Ally neither named the people who allegedly refuted Dr.

¹²³ Thomas Ross & Shabir Ally debate, “The New Testament Picture of Jesus: Is it Accurate?” University of Wisconsin at Whitewater, 1:30:00-1:33:00. It should be noted that Thomas Ross replied that he did not remember whether he had read portions of the book or not. With over 50,000 books in his Logos Bible Software library, and many thousands in his Accordance Bible Software library, and being aware of E. P. Sanders and his work, it was very reasonable that Mr. Ross could not recall every particular book he had searched for, read various chapters in, etc. over the course of several decades of study on the topic of the debate, and the book by Sanders referenced by Shabir was one of those works. Shabir neglected to mention that Sanders, in the book which Dr. Ally claimed was “essential” to understand the higher critical approach, quoted another author who had written “[T]here are no miracles” to which Sanders declared: “[This] view . . . has become dominant in the modern world, and I fully share it” (E. P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* [New York: Penguin Books, 1993] 143). Sanders contextually does not provide evidence against miracles, but simply presents it as his presupposition which he brings to the study of Christ, although Shabir Ally claimed in the debate that anti-supernaturalist presuppositions were not the reasons for higher critical conclusions against the accuracy of the New Testament.

¹²⁴ Eta Linnemann, *Is There a Synoptic Problem? Rethinking the Literary Dependence of the First Three Gospels*, trans. Robert Yarbrough (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1992) 11-15, 67.

¹²⁵ Thomas Ross & Shabir Ally debate, “The New Testament Picture of Jesus: Is it Accurate?” University of Wisconsin at Whitewater, 2:10:00.

Linnemann's facts, nor cited a single factual error in her argument, nor cited a single piece of hard data that contradicted her evidence.

Thomas Ross had pointed out that the internal evidence points overwhelmingly in favor of the Apostle John as the author of the fourth Gospel, and that this powerful internal evidence was also favored by incredibly strong external historical evidence. **I am here. Use the examples of Peter Enns and his “known by many scholars” against John thing—and really the entire debate, which could be summarize as lots and lots of specific facts and evidence against opinions of some modern anti-supernaturalist scholars.**

put in name and quote. For example,

Dr. Ally repeatedly argued that the Gospels had a theological purpose; therefore, he claimed they were not giving historical facts (e. g., 2:25:00). It is certainly true that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John wanted everyone to believe that Jesus is the Messiah and embrace Biblical Christianity. However, that the Apostles had a purpose in writing does not mean that what they recorded is inaccurate. If what the Gospels record is true, and the Lord Jesus really is the risen Savior of the world, it is only reasonable that those who were willing to brave persecution and death to spread that truth would want everyone to believe it. Furthermore, there are very few ancient writings that are written without some kind of purpose that the author is hoping people will adopt. As Eddy & Boyd explain:

If [the] “bias” argument against the Gospels were carried through consistently, all historical reporting by people who fervently believed and were emotionally invested in what they report would have to be dismissed. Historical information often is initially reported by those who fervently believe what they report. Since the hypothetical ideal of the historian as a detached, objective observer is a rather modern concept (some would argue, a modern *myth*), it is hard to imagine ancient reporters passing on material they *did not* in some sense passionately care about.

Moreover, it is virtually impossible to imagine certain events being reported by anyone, ancient or modern, in an emotionally detached manner. Consider, for example, Holocaust survivors reporting what transpired in Nazi concentration camps. While historians always must take their limitations and biases into consideration, can anyone imagine dismissing the basic reliability of the survivors’ various reports on the grounds that they were, “emotionally involved” and believed “fervently in the story they [were] telling”? If what they are reporting is remotely close to what actually happened, would it not be positively bizarre if they were *not* “emotionally involved” and believed “fervently in the story they [were] telling”?

So it is, we contend, with the Gospel authors. If the Jesus they knew was remotely like the Jesus they report, we cannot imagine them being anything other than “emotionally involved” and invested in “the story they [were] telling.” Indeed, it is difficult to understand why they wrote what they wrote unless they were passionately committed to the story they were telling. For given the religious-political environment they were ministering in, these authors would have known that proclaiming this message would likely instigate hostility from both Jews and Romans—which, of course, it did. . . .

[T]here is no such thing as an unbiased, objective author/reader. To write or research *anything* is to do so *from a distinct perspective*, complete with already-established assumptions that frame everything that is experienced, remembered, spoken, and heard. And this is as true of [liberal scholars] as it is of any conservative scholar or ancient author. Yet, this does not keep always-already biased skeptical scholars from believing that *their* readers should take *their* reconstructions and conclusions as more or less reliable reflections of the past. If the particular biases of these contemporary scholars do not prevent *them* from doing (what they want others to accept as) reliable history, why should we think that the bias of the Gospel authors prevents them from communicating . . . reliable history? . . . [T]t seems that hermeneutical humility should lead us to grant to ancient authors the same possibilities . . . we grant to ourselves. Certainly they, like us, are biased. Yet they, like us, are capable of communicating . . . reliable history when they want to. Bias, which is inevitable, does not necessarily undermine accuracy, whether we are talking about the bias of modern historians, Holocaust survivors, or ancient writers. As H. E. W. Turner has pointed out, “There is nothing anti-historical in writing history from a standpoint.”¹⁰⁵ Indeed, if part of the bias of the Gospel authors includes an interest in preserving actual history, as we have argued is the case (e.g., Luke 1:1–4), the emotional investment of the authors may actually *enhance* their reliability. As with Holocaust survivors, their fervent belief in the story they tell and emotional investment in reporting it like it happened may well have motivated them to do the work necessary to get the story right.¹²⁶

Indeed, the theological purpose of the human authors of the Gospels increased, rather than decreased, their commitment to historical accuracy—they were testifying to the “God of truth” (Isaiah 65:16) about the Son of God who is the truth (John 14:6) and controlled by the Spirit of truth, who led them into all truth (John 16:13) in writing the Word of truth (John 17:17). Shabir Ally needs to demonstrate that those who professed to place such an extremely high value on truth, who taught that the devil was the father of lies (John 8:44), and that all liars would be tormented eternally in the lake of fire

¹⁰⁵ H. E. W. Turner, *Historicity and the Gospels: A Sketch of Historical Method and Its Application to the Gospels* (London: Mowbray, 1963), 64.

¹²⁶ Paul Rhodes Eddy and Gregory A. Boyd, *The Jesus Legend: A Case for the Historical Reliability of the Synoptic Jesus Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007) 397–399.

(Revelation 21:8) overcame their theological convictions to lie *despite* their theology—to claim that they lied *because of* their theology is totally inadequate.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the debate was a great example of the strength of the historical evidence for the Lord Jesus Christ and the inspired records of His life in the New Testament. The actual historical data very strongly favor:

1.) That the New Testament was composed by eyewitnesses to Christ and His earliest followers.

2.) That the New Testament was too early for there to be a transformation from the Muslim “Jesus” to the Biblical Jesus, the Jesus of history.

These assertions are supported by massive amounts of ancient historical evidence. By contrast, the higher critical, atheist, agnostic, and Muslim attacks on the Gospels are based on empty speculation, anti-God presuppositions, and a rejection of the actual evidence of history. The Jesus of history is the Jesus of the Bible—in real, historical space and time the eternal Son of God left the glories of heaven to become incarnate through the virgin Mary, lived a sinless life, died a substitutionary death to pay for the sins of the world, rose bodily from the grave, and ascended back to heaven again. Under the infallible inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Christ’s earliest followers accurately recorded His words—therefore it is incumbent upon all men to hearken these words of the Lord Jesus Christ: “Repent ye, and believe the gospel” (Mark 1:15) “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:16-18).

--spear thrust in John is allegedly obviously fictional—contrast it with what is *really* obviously fictional, such as crucifixion in the time of Moses as recorded in the Quran.

--examine the contradictions within the Quran that I touched on.

1:26:00 in—Luke has Christ only appearing in Jerusalem area—of course, Luke never says “Christ only appeared in the Jerusalem area.”

1:28:00: Only John calls Jesus the Logos of God, an evolutionary development. But the Quran recognizes this term.

1:28:00: Only in John's Gospel is Christ the Creator of the world. But Philipp 2:5-11, He is such two years after the resurrection, before Paul's conversion, and before all the Gospels! Also much earlier in Paul, 1 Cor 8:6; in Hebrews; find in the other Gospels.

00:34:00: Sydney Griffith is very clear that the Quran teaches that that the previous Scriptures contain some mistakes.

2:11:00: "In Mark, John the Baptist obviously has some superiority over Jesus." No text quoted.

"As for the beloved disciple, this is known to be an invention by many scholars." (2:12:00). That is the response to the evidence to the contrary!