

Un-designed Coincidences

by Dennis Lange

One of the "smaller" proofs of the authenticity of the Bible (and its accuracy) is "un-designed coincidences". Sometimes when a passage is read, there is something within the passage that doesn't make sense, something that is missing. The un-designed coincidence is that the solution to the puzzle comes through information given in a separate account in a totally "coincidental" way. Several examples follow and the points made will illustrate the nature of each un-designed coincidence.

1. In the feeding of the 5000, the gospel of Mark says the multitude sat down on green grass (6:39). John says there was much grass (6:10), but says nothing about it being green. He does mention that it occurred when the Passover was at hand. Scripture and history show that the Passover "occurred at the next full moon after the vernal equinox, the very time in Palestine when grass is abundant and green. A few weeks before this it is not abundant, and a few weeks later, it is dry." ¹ The gospels make no effort to tell the story exactly the same way (which would show collaboration and an invented story). Instead, the facts as they tell them fit together perfectly, showing that the truth is being told.
2. Matthew says that Herod heard of Jesus and said to his servants, "This is John the baptist" (14:1,2). The question is, How did Matthew know that? Matthew doesn't give a clue. But in a completely unrelated setting, Luke mentions the women who ministered to Jesus and one was Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward (8:2,3). Thus, it would be completely normal for Chuza to mention to his wife what Herod had said and then Joanna told the disciples, including Matthew.
3. In Mark's account of the withering of the fig tree, the disciples didn't see the tree until the next morning (11:20,21), even though they had returned from Jerusalem the day before (v.19). Why didn't they see it then? From Bethany to Jerusalem, there were two paths, one steeper than the other, which was longer. Going up to Jerusalem, it would be natural to take the longer route with its more gradual slope. And coming back down from Jerusalem, it would be natural to take the shorter path when its steepness would be no problem. On the way to Jerusalem, Jesus would then have cursed the tree on the gradual slope. That evening they returned on the steeper path and didn't pass the withered tree. The next morning on the gradual slope again, they would pass the tree and see that it had withered.
4. Matthew and Mark both say that when Jesus was tempted in the matter of paying taxes to Caesar or not, Herodians were in the group that came (Matt.22:16). Luke says nothing about Herodians being along, but in another situation mentions that Herod was in the city at that time. That explains, in a totally un-designed way, why Herodians were present to go along with the group (Luke 23:7).

5. Matthew says that the servants of the high priests struck Jesus with the palms of their hands and mocked, saying, "Prophecy to us, "Who is the one who hit you?" (26:68). That makes no sense when they are standing in front of Him, slapping Him. But when Luke says they blindfolded Him (22:14), what Matthew said makes sense. However, this is again proof that Matthew wasn't writing fiction, but the simple truth. A writer of fiction takes great care to make sure nothing is missing and all that he writes is believable.
6. All four of the gospels mention that when Jesus was arrested in the garden, Peter cut off the ear of Malchus, servant of the high priest. They all speak of Peter going to the house of the high priest and being accused of being a disciple. But none of the servants and soldiers who make the accusation have anything to say about the major offense of cutting off a man's ear while resisting arrest. John even says that one of those who accused Peter of being with Jesus was a kinsman of Malchus. Still, nothing is said about Peter cutting off the ear. The reason why they would not bring it up, explaining their strange silence about Peter's offense, is that Jesus healed the ear (Luke 22:51). To mention it would have opened up a can of worms about the miraculous ability of Jesus once more.
7. In Acts, Paul is called a young man and a leader when he first comes on the scene (7:58; 8:1-3). This corresponds with his own statement in Gal.1:13,14, given in an entirely different setting: "For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it; and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions."
8. The book of Acts reveals that when Paul was in Damascus, the Jews plotted against him, watching the gates day and night so they could capture and kill him. He escaped by being let down through the wall in a basket (9:23-25). In II Corinthians, he said, "In Damascus the ethnarch under Aretas the king was guarding the city of the Damascenes in order to seize me, and I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and so escaped his hands." (11:32-33). Paul's statement helps to explain why the Jews would be able, in a foreign city like Damascus, to watch the gates day and night for a man they hated. The governor was in cahoots with them.
9. On his second missionary journey, Paul took Silas along with him instead of Barnabas. Silas was with him in Corinth and then disappears from the narrative (Acts 15:40; 16:5). In Paul's Thessalonian epistles, written from Corinth, Silas is included in Paul's greeting, agreeing with the narrative in Acts.

10. In the OT, David's son Absalom rebelled against him. David's counselor, a man named Ahitophel, went over to Absalom's side. The Bible does not say why he deserted David. However, in unconnected accounts, we find that a woman named Bathsheba, who was the wife of Uriah the Hittite, was the daughter of a man named Eliam (II Sam.11:3). In a listing of the mighty men of David, we find that Eliam was the son of Ahitophel" (II Sam.23:34). **Ahitophel was the grandfather of Bathsheba.** This was the woman with whom David committed adultery. Then, he had her husband murdered. David had "defiled" Ahitophel's precious granddaughter, had her husband killed, and in the mind of Ahitophel, had ruined her. Small wonder that Ahitophel counseled Absalom to take the wives of David and have sexual relations with them in such a way that all Israel would know that they had been "defiled". (II Sam.16:21ff).

Fiction is not written like the above because the writer is very careful to fill in motives for his characters and to give details that make the actions plausible. But the writers of the Bible were simply telling the truth, each writing for a particular purpose in telling an account, and thus had no fiction to "cover up" with things unnecessary for his purpose.

(the first 9 were taken from J.W. McGarvey's Evidences of Christianity and the last from Grant Jeffrey's The Signature of God)

¹ McGarvey, J.W., Evidences of Christianity, Gospel Advocate Company, Nashville, Tennessee, 1974, Part III, p.87.