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DR. BILAL PHILIPS'  
THE TRUE MESSAGE OF  
JESUS CHRIST

رسالة عيسى الصحيحة  
تأليف: د. بلال فيليبس

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A **REPLY, REFUTATION**  
AND **REBUTTAL**

— BY —

A. YOUSEF AL-KATIB

TIME  BOOKS

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*The True Message of Jesus Christ:*  
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## Abbreviations

### *English Translations of the Bible:*

ASV .....	American Standard Version
BBE .....	Bible in Basic English
Darby .....	Darby Bible
ESV .....	English Standard Version
ISV .....	International Standard Version
KJV .....	King James Version
MKJV .....	Modern King James Version
NIV .....	New International Version
NKJV .....	New King James Version
RSV .....	Revised Standard Version

### *Books of the Bible:*

1Ch .....	1 Chronicles
1Co .....	1 Corinthians
1Jn.....	1 John
1Ki .....	1 Kings
1Pe .....	1 Peter
1Sa .....	1 Samuel
1Th.....	1 Thessalonians
1Ti.....	1 Timothy
2Ch .....	2 Chronicles
2Co .....	2 Corinthians
2Jn.....	2 John
2Ki .....	2 Kings
2Pe .....	2 Peter
2Sa .....	2 Samuel
2Th.....	2 Thessalonians
2Ti.....	2 Timothy
3Jo.....	3 John
Acts.....	Book of Acts
Amos.....	Book of Amos
Col .....	Colossians
Dan .....	Daniel
Deu .....	Deuteronomy
Ecc .....	Ecclesiastes
Eph.....	Ephesians



Est .....	Esther
Exo .....	Exodus
Eze .....	Ezekiel
Ezr .....	Book of Ezra
Gal .....	Galatians
Gen .....	Genesis
Hab .....	Habakkuk
Hag .....	Haggai
Heb .....	Hebrews
Hos .....	Hosea
Isa .....	Isaiah
Jas .....	James
Jer .....	Jeremiah
Job .....	Book of Job
Joel .....	Book of Joel
John .....	Gospel of John
Jon .....	Jonah
Jos .....	Joshua
Jude .....	Book of Jude
Jdg .....	Judges
Lam .....	Lamentations
Lev .....	Leviticus
Luke .....	Gospel of Luke
Mal .....	Malachi
Mark .....	Gospel of Mark
Mat .....	Gospel of Matthew
Mic .....	Micah
Nah .....	Nahum
Neh .....	Nehemiah
Num .....	Numbers
Oba .....	Obadiah
Phm .....	Philemon
Php .....	Philippians
Pro .....	Proverbs
Psa .....	Psalms
Rev .....	Revelation
Rom .....	Romans
Ruth .....	Book of Ruth
Son .....	Song of Solomon

Tit ..... Titus  
Zec ..... Zechariah  
Zep ..... Zephaniah



## Chapter 1. Introduction

In *The True Message of Jesus Christ*, Dr. Bilal Philips claims that Jesus Christ was merely a prophet of *Allāh* who reaffirmed the central message that was later revealed to Muhammad. Dr. Philips argues that although Jesus claimed to be the Son of God in the Bible, modern translations of the Bible are corruptions of the original revelations given by *Allāh*. Only the *Qur'ān*, which downgrades Jesus' status from the Son of God to a prophet, reflects God's true, uncorrupted message.

This *Reply to The True Message of Jesus Christ* demonstrates that Dr. Philips' arguments are flawed and suffer from serious weaknesses on multiple levels. First, Dr. Philips' claims are not historically grounded. Second, he misconstrues the text and meanings of the Bible. Third, he employs circular reasoning to support his assertions. Fourth, the claims Dr. Philips makes with respect to the corruption of the Bible conflict with even the teachings of the *Qur'ān* on the divine inspiration of the Torah and other Hebrew and Christian scriptures.

Some of Dr. Philips' claims about the Bible are correct, though ultimately, they relate to minor or ancillary points, such as discrepancies in extant biblical manuscripts as to a king's age when he began to rule. While such minor discrepancies exist, they should be expected in the copying and transmission of texts over thousands of years and they do not suggest deliberate falsification of the text for dogmatic purposes. Such discrepancies do not alter the overall message of the Bible—that “God so loved the world that he gave His one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life” (John 3:16).

*The True Message of Jesus Christ* fails to persuasively demonstrate that man has corrupted the Bible, that the *Qur'ān* is God's true and divinely inspired book and that Jesus' true message is that He is merely a prophet of *Allāh*, rather than God's sacrificial lamb, offered “as the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2). Ultimately, the book fails to defeat the hope given to all who put their faith and trust in Jesus Christ.



## **Chapter 2. Use of Sources to Challenge Christianity**

### **A. Overview**

Dr. Philips' first flaw is the way in which he uses sources to cast doubt on the reliability of the Bible. He combs through the literature of Western scholars and even some Christian clerics, searching for any arguments he can find that question Jesus's historicity or the divine inspiration of the Bible. He then reproduces these arguments without any original commentary or logical flow.

### **B. Problems with Dr. Philips' Approach**

There are several problems with his approach:

#### **1. Sources that Cannot Be Found**

The sources, for the most part, cannot be found. He cites, for example, magazine articles published decades ago, which cannot be found anywhere on the Internet or accessed to study the full context of the statements quoted and the claims made or to even verify whether Dr. Philips is quoting them correctly. He frequently cites articles published by major magazines and newspapers such as *Time* magazine and *The Times*, London, which if they existed would normally be found with relative ease, since these publications have online archives. *The Times*, for example, has an archive going back to the Nineteenth Century! Yet Internet searches on Google only turn up Islamic proselytization websites and Islamic tracts rather than the original sources. Therefore, the reader is unable to verify that Dr. Philips is accurately quoting from the original sources and to obtain the full context of the material being quoted. Examples of articles that he quotes that cannot be found or verified online are as follows:

- Dr. J.K. Elliott's article published in *The Times*, London (10th Sept., 1987) entitled "Checking the Bible's Roots" (quoted on p. 10).

## 2. Dr. Philips Only Proves that There Are Scholars Who Challenge the Reliability of the Bible

Even if the sources are properly being quoted and used within the proper context, the use of these sources at most only proves that there is a group of scholars and clerics who do not ascribe to the divine authority of the Scriptures. One need not enter into a prolonged study or publish a book to prove this point; it is common knowledge that there have been learned atheists and scholars who have rejected Christianity and the Bible since the very origins of Christianity. In his classic work, *Confessions*, St. Augustine goes to great length in explaining how he was one of these “learned scholars” before he encountered God at Ostia and surrendered to Jesus.

Dr. Philips has done no service to the debate over the truth of Christianity by combing through some obscure sources, finding some scholars who argue that the Christian Scriptures are not reliable and then quoting them verbatim in his book. He would have done a better service to the debate had he actually developed arguments in his favor or attempted to show contradictions in the Scriptures or other indicia of unreliability rather than merely reproduce the conclusions of other scholars without giving the reader the chance to review, challenge or engage these other scholars.

In the West, where democracy protects free inquiry and freedom of religion, thought and expression, it comes without surprise that not everyone believes in the divine inspiration of the Scriptures. Yet the use of these sources in attempting to prove the unreliability of the Christian Scriptures is no more useful than a compilation of scholarly sources challenging the divine inspiration of the *Qur’ān* as evidence of the unreliability of the *Qur’ān*. Without actually engaging the underlying evidence treated in the sources, the compilation serves nothing more than proving that there are some scholars who doubt the divine inspiration of the *Qur’ān*, a point that need not be proven.

## Chapter 3. Individual Claims and Replies

### A. The Authors of the Gospels Are Unknown

#### 1. Matthew

##### a) *Matthew as Anonymous*

#### (1) Argument

Dr. Philip writes (p. 20):

Although Matthew, Luke and John are the names of disciples of Jesus, the authors of the Gospels bearing their names were not those famous disciples, but other individuals who used the disciples' names to give their accounts credibility. In fact, all the Gospels originally circulated anonymously. Authoritative names were later assigned to them by unknown figures in the early church.<sup>30</sup>

He issues the following reference to support his claim with respect to the Book of Matthew:

"Although there is a Matthew named among the various lists of Jesus' disciples...the writer of Matthew is probably anonymous."  
The New Encyclopaedia Britannica, vol. 14, p. 826.

#### (2) Response

##### (a) The Encyclopedia Britannica Argument is Invalid

Dr. Philips failed to include the entire excerpt, which states<sup>1</sup>:

Although there is a Matthew named among the various lists of Jesus' disciples, more telling is the fact that the name of Levi, the

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.britannica.com/topic/biblical-literature/The-Synoptic-Gospels>.



tax collector who in Mark became a follower of Jesus, in Matthew is changed to Matthew. It would appear from this that Matthew was claiming apostolic authority for his Gospel through this device but that the writer of Matthew is probably anonymous.

There are several problems with Dr. Philips' argument:

- He cites Encyclopedia Britannica, which is not a definitive or authoritative source on religious doctrine;
- The source he cites does not definitively state whether the author of Matthew was the apostle Matthew; it simply states that the writer is "probably anonymous."
- If Matthew was in fact "claiming apostolic authority for his Gospel through this device" (*i.e.*, the device of authoring the book "Matthew"), then this would further give support to the theory that it was Matthew the apostle rather than another third party that authored the book.
- The Encyclopedia Britannica article, based on the fact that Levi's name, meaning to "take," is changed to "Matthew," meaning "gift of the Lord" in Hebrew, concludes that a book in the Bible named "Matthew" could not have possibly been written by the apostle Matthew because the word "Matthew" is used as a title rather than as a personal name. Such an argument does not hold water; Matthew was an actual name used in biblical Judea. The fact that one man's name was changed to Matthew cannot be used as a basis to conclude that the name was a mere title that others, including the author of the Gospel of Matthew, could not have validly held and been identified by.

#### (b) Matthew's Use of Texts from Mark

Some critics dispute the Apostle Matthew's authorship of the Gospel on the basis of the Gospel's apparent reliance on Mark's account. However, reliance on another account does not undermine Matthew's authorship. An eyewitness can reaffirm the accounts told by another witness or even a non-witness without undermining his or her own testimony of the accounts in question. The NIV Study Bible summarizes expresses this point clearly (p. 1439):

The early church fathers were unanimous in holding that Matthew, one of the 12 apostles, was the author of this Gospel. However, the results of modern critical studies—in particular those that stress

Matthew's alleged dependence on Mark for a substantial part of his Gospel—have caused some Biblical scholars to abandon Matthean authorship. Why, they ask, would Matthew, an eyewitness to the events of our Lord's life, depend so heavily on Mark's account? The best answer seems to be that he agreed with it and wanted to show that the apostolic testimony to Christ was not divided.

*b) Rejection of the View that the Apostle Matthew wrote the Gospel of Matthew*

(1) Argument

Dr. Phillips writes (p. 21-22):

J.B. Phillips, a prebendary of the Chichester Cathedral, the Anglican Church of England, wrote the following preface for his translation of the Gospel according to St. Matthew: "Early tradition ascribed this Gospel to the apostle Matthew, but scholars nowadays almost all reject this view. The author, whom we can conveniently call Matthew, has plainly drawn on the mysterious "Q", which may have been a collection of oral traditions. He has used Mark's Gospel freely, though he has rearranged the order of events and has in several instances used different words for what is plainly the same story."

(2) Response

Matthew's drawing on third sources, including the mysterious "Q" and the Gospel of Mark, does not undermine the eyewitness testimony of that author. It is possible that the author drew on third party sources to corroborate his own testimony or to supplement it if he was not in a particular place in a particular time. For example, church tradition holds that Matthew only became an eyewitness of Jesus's life after he was called by Jesus. Therefore, he could not have been an eyewitness to all of the events that precede his calling. This includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Jesus's genealogy, written of in Matthew 1;
- The birth of Jesus, written of in Matthew 2;
- The narrative of John the Baptist, in Matthew 3;
- The temptation of Jesus, in Matthew 4.

In fact, Matthew 9 is the first time we hear of Matthew the tax collector (Levi) in the Gospel of Matthew. The fact that Matthew used other sources for earlier chapters of his Gospel or even as supplements for later chapters does not preclude the possibility that the Gospel was written by an Apostle. The Apostle Matthew could not have been in all places at all times; it would not be unusual for him to rely on other sources to complete his Gospel.

## 2. Mark

### a) *Argument*

Dr. Philips writes (p. 19):

The New Testament Gospel of Mark, though considered by Church scholars to be the oldest of the Gospels, was not written by a disciple of Jesus. Biblical scholars concluded, based on the evidence contained in the Gospel, that Mark himself was not a disciple of Jesus. Furthermore, according to them, it is not even certain who Mark really was. The ancient Christian author, Eusebius (325 C.E.), reported that another ancient author, Papias (130 C.E.), was the first to attribute the Gospel to John Mark, a companion of Paul.<sup>29</sup> Others suggested that he may have been the scribe of Peter and yet others hold that he was probably someone else.

Dr. Philips further cites The Encyclopedia Britannica to argue that the writer of the Gospel of Mark is unknown. He writes (p. 20):

"Though the author of Mark is probably unknown..." *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol. 14, p. 824.

### b) *Response*

#### (1) Who Was Mark?

##### (a) Tradition

Tradition holds that this book was written by John Mark, who accompanied Paul and Barnabas on their missionary journeys, and caused Paul and Barnabas's split based on Paul's view that John Mark was unreliable.

##### (b) The Companion of Paul and Barnabas

According to the Zondervan *NIV Study Bible*, there is no direct internal evidence of authorship, but it was the unanimous testimony of the early church that the Gospel of Mark was written by John Mark (“John, also called Mark,” Acts 12:12, 25; 15:37), an assistant accompanying Paul and Barnabas on their missionary journeys and whom Paul did not want to bring with them because John Mark had withdrawn in Pamphylia:

Acts 13:5 And when they arrived in Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. They also had John as their assistant.

...

Acts 13:13 Now when Paul and his party set sail from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia; and John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem.

...

Acts 15:36 Then after some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they are doing."

Acts 15:37 Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark.

Acts 15:38 But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work.

Acts 15:39 Then the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another. And so Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus;

Acts 15:40 but Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God.

Acts 15:41 And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

### (c) The Disciple Who Fled Naked in the Garden

John Mark, the companion of Paul and Barnabas noted above, is also viewed by Church tradition to be the “young man” noted in Mark 14:51, who followed Jesus after his arrest.

Mark 14:51 Now a certain young man followed Him, having a linen cloth thrown around his naked body. And the young men laid hold of him,

Mark 14:52 and he left the linen cloth and fled from them naked.

The notes of *The NIV Study Bible* state (p. 1526):

*A young man.* Not specifically identified, but this anonymity may suggest that this was John Mark, writer of this Gospel. *a linen garment.* Ordinarily the outer garment was made of wool. The fine linen garment left behind in the hand of a guard indicates that the youth was from a wealthy family.

If the “young man” in Mark 14 is in fact the author of the Book of Mark, then Mark would have been an eyewitness.

#### (d) Papias’s Account of John Mark

According to *The NIV Study Bible*, the most important evidence of John Mark’s authorship comes from Papias (c. 140 AD), who quotes an earlier source as saying:

- John Mark was a close associate of Peter, from whom he received the tradition of the things said and done by the Lord;
- This tradition did not come to John Mark as a finished, sequential account of the life of our Lord, but as the preaching of Peter—preaching directed to the needs of the early Christian communities;
- Mark accurately preserved this material.

#### (e) Mark as Peter’s Scribe

The conclusion drawn from this tradition is that the Gospel of Mark largely consists of the preaching of Peter arranged and shaped by Mark. According to this tradition, Mark was a disciple of Peter and so an “apostolic man” who received from Peter’s preaching the tradition of the things said and done by Jesus.

#### (2) Modern Scholarship

It is true that some modern scholars doubt the Markan tradition and regard the author as unknown. Delbert Burkett, *An introduction to the New Testament and the origins of Christianity*, Cambridge University Press (2002), p. 156.

With respect to the Encyclopedia Britannica citation, Dr. Philips again does not reference the entire citation, which states<sup>2</sup>:

Though the author of Mark is probably unknown, authority is traditionally derived from a supposed connection with the Apostle Peter, who had transmitted the traditions before his martyr death under Nero's persecution (c. 64–65). Papias, a 2nd-century bishop in Asia Minor, is quoted as saying that Mark had been Peter's amanuensis (secretary) who wrote as he remembered (after Peter's death), though not in the right order. Because Papias was from the East, perhaps the Johannine order would have priority, as is the case in the structure of the Syrian scholar Tatian's Diatesseron (harmony of the Gospels).

Attempts have been made to identify Mark as the John Mark mentioned in Acts 12 or as the disciple who fled naked in the garden (Mark 14). A reference to "my son, Mark," in I Peter is part of the same tradition by which Mark was related to Peter; thus the Evangelist's apostolic guarantor was Peter.

### (3) Observations

If we trust church tradition, then we can conclude that the author of the Gospel of Mark was Peter's disciple John Mark. If it was, then the Gospel of Mark was written by a close associate of Peter, from whom he received the tradition of the things said and done by the Lord. If, in addition to this, the author of the Gospel of Mark is the "young man" referenced in Mark 14:51-52, then the author would have also been an eyewitness.

Critical legal studies have not proffered any compelling reason to doubt John Mark's authorship of the Gospel of Mark.

## 3. Luke

### *a) Argument*

Dr. Philips argues that the author of the Gospel of Luke is "unknown" (p. 20). He cites the Encyclopedia Britannica, which states:

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<sup>2</sup> Available at <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/biblical-literature/The-Synoptic-Gospels>>.

The Muratorian Canon refers to Luke, the physician, Paul's companion; Irenaeus depicts Luke as a follower of Paul's gospel. Eusebius has Luke as an Antiochene physician who was with Paul in order to give the Gospel apostolic authority." *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol. 14, p. 827.

#### b) Response

It is ironic and contradictory that Dr. Philips would, on the one hand, write that the author of the Gospel of Luke is "unknown," while at the same time cite as his source an Encyclopedia Britannica entry that in turn cites various sources that identify Luke as:

- A physician, Paul's companion;
- A follower of Paul's gospel;
- An Antiochian physician who was with Paul in order to give the Gospel apostolic authority

All of these accounts are consistent with one another and reaffirm that Luke was both a doctor and disciple of Paul.

### 4. John

#### a) Argument

Dr. Philips writes (p. 22):

The Fourth Gospel (John) was opposed as heretical in the early church, and it knows none of the stories associated with John, son of Zebedee. In the judgement of many scholars, it was produced by a "school" of disciples, probably in Syria in the last decade of the first century.

#### b) Response

##### (1) Overview

Dr. Philips' main flaw here is that he simply cites another source, *The Five Gospels*, that argues that the Gospel of John was not written by John the Apostle. He offers no evidence to back up his view. If finding some author who has written that a particular fact is nor is not true is an indication that it is or is not true, then it would not be difficult to disprove the whole of Islam by simply citing some study whereby one scholar found the claims of the religion to be false. To engage in true

academic scholarship and debate, one must be ready to present evidence and make arguments, not merely state that someone else found something to be true. For every source that Dr. Philips can cite to argue that the Gospel of John was not written by the Apostle John, it is possible to find ten more than argue that it was written. To get past this, it is necessary to examine the actual evidence backing up each respective argument.

## (2) Arguments in Favor of the Apostle John's Authorship

The Gospel of John is held by tradition to be written by John, one of the Twelve Apostles. John the Apostle was the son of Zebedee and the younger brother of James, son of Zebedee. According to Church tradition, their mother was Salome.

Zebedee, James and John were fisherman in the Sea of Galilee. Matthew recounts that after Jesus called Simon and Peter, who were also fishermen, He "saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets. He called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him" (Mat 4:21-22). According to church tradition, John was therefore an eyewitness.

The Gospel of John has indications that suggest it was based on the recollections of an eyewitness. He recounts, for example, that the house at Bethany was filled with the fragrance of the broken perfume jar (John 12:30).

Moreover, early church fathers such as Irenaeus and Tertullian universally held that John wrote this Gospel.

## B. Jesus's Historicity Challenged

### 1. Claim

Dr. Philips writes (p. 7-8):

A biblical scholar, R.T. France, writes, "No 1st century inscription mentions him and no object or building has survived which has a specific link to him." This fact has even led some Western historians to mistakenly claim that Jesus Christ never actually existed. Therefore, research has to be primarily based on the scriptures which address the person and the mission of Jesus Christ. The scriptures in question are those officially recognized by both Christianity and Islam.



## 2. Response

Dr. Philips' claim is flawed for two reasons:

- It is wholly inaccurate to state that “No 1st century inscription mentions [Jesus] and no object or building has survived which has a specific link to him.” R. T. France's prestigious academic reputation aside, it is unclear whether R. T. France ever stated this, as we were unable to access the source (*Time*, December 18, 1995, p. 46.). Even if he did, however, state it, it would be patently wrong, as the Gospel manuscripts are first century “objects” that all present the life of Jesus and thus have a “specific link” to him:
  - o The Gospel of Matthew is dated 40 – 115 AD;
  - o The Gospel of Mark is dated 55 to 70 AD;
  - o The Gospel of Luke is dated around 60 AD;
  - o The Gospel of John is dated around 80 – 90 AD.
- Dr. Philips further writes that “research has to be primarily based on the scriptures which address the person and the mission of Jesus Christ. The scriptures in question are those officially recognized by both Christianity and Islam.” His statement is, however, misleading in that it implies the existence of a common corpus of Scriptures referencing Jesus that are recognized by both Christianity and Islam, but this is not the case; the Christian Scriptures recognizing Jesus are deemed by Islam to be corruptions of the true, original manuscripts, and Christians do not consider the *Qur'ān* to be the inspired word of God.

## C. The Books of the Bible Cannot be Accorded Verbal Divine Authority

### 1. Claim: Western Christianity Has Accepted that the Bible Cannot be Accorded Divine Authority

Dr. Philips quotes from the preface of *The Myth of God Incarnate*, where the editor writes (p. 8):

In the nineteenth century, Western Christianity ... accepted that the books of the Bible were written by a variety of human beings in a variety of circumstances, and cannot be accorded a verbal divine authority.

## 2. Response: The Groups Referenced Represent Fringe Rather Than Orthodox Christianity

This claim is problematic for several reasons. While certainly there may be individual Christians or groups that as early as the nineteenth century rejected the notion that the books of the Bible can be accorded with divine authority, by and large, these individuals or groups represent the fringe of Christianity, falling far out of Orthodox Christian circles. Today, orthodox Christianity, whether it takes the form of the Orthodox Church, the Catholic Church or the Evangelical Protestant churches, maintain the divine inspiration of the Bible. There are some scholars and members of certain denominations (predominantly many of the liturgical Protestant denominations) that reject the divine inspiration of the Bible, but this can be no more evidence of the unreliability of the Bible than can individual Muslims who question the divine inspiration of the *Qur'ān* serve as evidence of the lack of historical reliability of the *Qur'ān*. There are many diverse views in every religious group.

### D. Contradictions in the Bible

#### 1. Whether God or Satan Provoked David to Number Israel

##### a) *Claim*

Dr. Philips writes (p. 23):

The authors of Samuel and Chronicles relate the same story about Prophet David taking a census of the Jews. However, in 2nd Samuel, it states that Prophet David acted on God's instructions, while in 1st Chronicles, he acted on Satan's instructions.

Dr. Philips quotes the following passages:

- 2Sa 24:1 Again the anger of the Lord was aroused against Israel, and He moved David against them to say, "Go, number Israel and Judah."
- 1Ch 21:1 Now Satan stood up against Israel, and moved David to number Israel.

##### b) *Response*

The apparent contradiction can be reconciled by viewing it as a difference in emphasis between the author of 2 Samuel and the author of 1 Chronicles. Satan directly moved David to number Israel, but as with

all acts, he was only able to move with God's permission. Therefore, while Satan was the active agent and direct cause, God acted as a principal with indirect control over David's act.

Therefore, Satan provoked David directly (1 Chronicles 21:1), but God gave Satan permission to do so, as we see in the book of Job. In Job, Satan presents himself before the Lord and requests God's permission to afflict his faithful servant, Job. The devil insists that Job only serves God because of His blessings, and he would surely curse God if he were tested. God conditionally grants Satan's request.

We should also consider the emphases of the respective authors of 2 Samuel (probably Nathan or Gad), who viewed the affair in the sense of God's ultimate control over all things, and the author of 1 Chronicles (probably Ezra), who emphasized the satanic plot and how God used this as a tool for judgment. That 2 Samuel focuses on God as the mover finds support in the fact that Nathan and Gad were prophets who proclaimed God's control over the affairs of men. Ezra, in contrast, was a priest interested in pointing out the holiness of God and who hates sin.

## 2. The Plague Prophesied by Gad: Three Years or Seven Years

### a) *Claim*

Dr. Philips writes (p. 21):

In describing the length of a plague prophesied by Gad, the author of 2nd Samuel listed it as seven years, while the author of 1st Chronicles listed it as three years.

### II SAMUEL 24:13

So Gad came to David and told him, and said unto him, "Shall seven years of famine come unto thee in thy land? or wilt thou flee three months before thine enemies, while they pursue thee?"

### I CHRONICLES 21:11

11 So Gad came to David, and said unto him, "Thus saith the Lord, 'Choose thee 12 Either three years' famine; or three months to be destroyed before thy foes, while that the sword of thine enemies overtaketh thee;'"

*b) Response*

## (1) Explanation 1: 2 Samuel Adds Four Years of Initial Famine to the Three Additional Years Offered

## (a) Overview

Several web sites, including “7 years or 3 years of famine?”<sup>3</sup> give the following explanation:

In reality, Gad offered David 3 years of famine in addition to the 4 that had already transpired by that point. 2 Samuel gives an account of the 4 years that had already transpired and the 3 additional years for a total of 7 years, which are offered to David; 1 Chronicles gives the account of *only* the 3 additional years of famine.

In 2Sa 21:1, we read: “Now there was a famine in the days of David for three years, year after year.”

Thereafter, in 2Sa 24:8, we read, “So when they had gone through all the land, they came to Jerusalem at the end of nine months and twenty days.”

The only way to reconcile this apparent contradiction, as well as that recorded in the Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 accounts, is to recognize that the quotation marks we find in many modern translations do not exist in the original texts (both the Hebrew Old Testament and Greek New Testament do not include quotation marks).<sup>4</sup> This is because the biblical writers did not intend to give exact quotes of each word spoken. The insertion of quotation marks in modern translations give the false idea that authors quoted word-for-word, which is not the case. When reading the Scriptures, we should recognize the *ideas* that are poured forward. Although their exact word-for-word presentation may vary, the ideas put forward by different accounts of the same event are always consistent with one another.

## (b) Potential Issue with this Explanation

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[http://blessedquietness.com/journal/housechu/three\\_years\\_or\\_seven\\_years\\_of\\_famine.htm](http://blessedquietness.com/journal/housechu/three_years_or_seven_years_of_famine.htm).

<sup>4</sup> The King James Version of the Bible, recognizing this truth, does not insert quotes in its translation..

The only potential issue with this explanation is that it assumes, without any apparent evidence, that the famine continued in the period between:

- The first three years of famine; and
- God's offer to David of new famine of three years (for a total of seven).

In other words, a famine continued during the following periods:

- The three years of famine;
- During the killing of the Philistines (2Sa 23:12), which would have had to have taken two months and ten days;
- The nine months and twenty days for taking the census (2Sa 24:8).

This would have equaled a total of four years, which, when added to the additional three years referenced in 1 Chronicles, would come out to a total of seven years.

However, we do not know whether the famine continued during the killing of the Philistines in 2 Samuel 23:12 or in the nine months and twenty days for taking the census in 2 Samuel 24:8.

## (2) Explanation 2: Translators' Error

The Treasury of Scriptural Knowledge provides the following commentary on 1 Chronicles 21:12:

three years' famine: In 2Sa\_24:13, it is seven years; but the [Greek] Septuagint has there τρία ετη [Strong's G5140], three years, as here; which is, no doubt, the true reading; the letter ז, zayin, seven, being mistaken for ג, gimmel, three. Lev\_26:26-29; 2Sa\_21:1, 2Sa\_24:13; 1Ki\_17:1; 2Ki\_8:1; Lam\_4:9; Luk\_4:25

If we accept this explanation, we can conclude that the KJV and several other English translations of the Bible mistook the Hebrew ג, gimmel, three for the letter ז, zayin, seven when preparing their translations. In other words, the translators of the Bible into English were not infallible.

## (3) Conclusion

According to the explanations proposed above, we can conclude that one of the following is true:

- The authors of the KJV and other translations of the Bible that use seven years in 2 Samuel 24:13 mistook the Hebrew ג, gimmel, three for the letter ז, zayin, seven; or
- The author of the original Hebrew manuscript of 2 Samuel 24:13 did in fact use the Hebrew letter ז, zayin, seven, but in so doing, he was counting the three years of initial famine recounted in 2 Samuel 21:1 plus the 9 months and 20 days for taking the census in 2 Samuel 24:8.

Neither of these explanations poses a grave problem or threat to the integrity of the Bible. Mistaking a number is an innocent error with no grave consequences that does not cast into question the overall message of the Bible; if anything, it simply reinforces the biblical teaching that man is imperfect and that only God is infallible; the translators of the Bible, like all men, are fallible. That they might make a mistake in translating the text does not cast into doubt the validity of the original text.

The alternate explanation simply shows that different books of the Bible propose using different counting methodologies, with one book (2 Samuel) choosing to aggregate the total number of years of famine and the second book (1 Chronicles) choosing instead to highlight only the additional time (3 years) being aggregated to the past famine.

### 3. The Number of Syrians Who Died in Battle

#### a) Overview

Dr. Philips writes (p. 22):

The author of 2nd Samuel described the number of Syrians who died during a battle with Prophet David as being seven hundred, while the author of 1st Chronicles gave their number as seven thousand.

#### b) Comparison of Translations

	<b>2 Samuel 10:18</b>	<b>1 Chronicles 19:18</b>
NIV	David killed <u>seven hundred of their charioteers</u> and forty thousand of their foot soldiers.	David killed <u>seven thousand of their charioteers</u> and forty thousand of their foot soldiers.

NKJV	David killed <u>seven hundred charioteers</u> and forty thousand horsemen of the Syrians	David killed <u>seven thousand charioteers</u> and forty thousand foot soldiers of the Syrians
KJV	And the Syrians fled before Israel; and David slew <i>the men of seven hundred chariots</i> of the Syrians, and forty thousand horsemen	David slew of the Syrians <u>seven thousand men which fought in chariots</u> , and forty thousand footmen
KJV+	And the Syrians <sup>H758</sup> fled <sup>H5127</sup> before <sup>H4480 H6440</sup> Israel; <sup>H3478</sup> and David <sup>H1732</sup> slew <sup>H2026</sup> <i>the men of seven<sup>H7651</sup> hundred<sup>H3967</sup> chariots<sup>H7393</sup> of the Syrians,<sup>H4480 H758</sup> and forty<sup>H705</sup> thousand<sup>H505</sup> horsemen<sup>H6571</sup></i>	David <sup>H1732</sup> slew <sup>H2026</sup> of the Syrians <sup>H4480 H758</sup> <u>seven<sup>H7651</sup> thousand<sup>H505</sup> men which fought in chariots,<sup>H7393</sup> and forty<sup>H705</sup> thousand<sup>H505</sup> footmen,<sup>H376 H7273</sup></u>

*c) Possible Explanation 1: There is a Genuine Error*

Various commentaries conclude that there is a genuine error due to the way numerals were expressed with letters in the Hebrew. The NIV Study Bible note at 2 Samuel 10:18 states:

Evidently a copyist's mistake; in 1Ch 19:18 the figure is 7,000.

Albert Barnes' *Notes on the Bible* states:

Seven hundred chariots - More probable than the "seven thousand" of 1Ch\_19:18. The frequent errors in numbers arise from the practice of expressing numerals by letters, with one or more dots or dashes to indicate hundreds, thousands, etc.

Adam Clarke's *Commentary on the Bible* states:

In the parallel place, 1Ch\_19:18, it is said, David slew of the Syrians Seven Thousand men, which fought in chariots. It is difficult to ascertain the right number in this and similar places. It is very probable that, in former times, the Jews expressed, as they often do now, their numbers, not by words at full length, but by numeral letters; and, as many of the letters bear a great similarity to each

other, mistakes might easily creep in when the numeral letters came to be expressed by words at full length. This alone will account for the many mistakes which we find in the numbers in these books, and renders a mistake here very probable. The letter ז zain, with a dot above, stands for seven thousand, נ nun for seven hundred: the great similarity of these letters might easily cause the one to be mistaken for the other, and so produce an error in this place.

That there is a genuine error is one possible explanation of the evident contradiction, though other explanations are possible.

*d) Possible Explanation 2: 7,000 Men in 700 Chariots Were Slain*

(1) Overview

Some argue that David slew 7,000 men in 700 chariots.

This is the approach of the KJV, which translates 2 Samuel 10:18 as follows:

David slew *the men of seven hundred chariots* of the Syrians, and forty thousand *horsemen*, and smote Shobach the captain of their host, who died there.

(2) Problem with Explanation

The words “the men of,” which are found in the KJV in a gray italic font, are “supplied words” that the translators added for clarity in the English language, but that are lacking in the original Hebrew. The lack of Strong's numbers behind them is an indicator that there is not a specific Hebrew or Greek word behind them. The addition of “the men of” is thus potentially problematic as it is not found in the original Hebrew manuscripts. Rather, the original Hebrew states as follows:

- 2 Samuel 10:18

H1732 דוד H2026 ויהרג H3478 ישראל H6440 מפני H758 ארם H5127 וינס  
 H505 אלף H705 וארבעים H7393 רכב H3967 מאות H7651 שבע H758 מארם  
 H5221 הכה H6635 צבאו H8269 שר H7731 שובך H853 ואת H6571 פרשים  
 וימת H4191 שם: H8033

- 1 Chronicles 19:18



H758 ארם מלפני H6440 ישראל H3478 ויהרג H2026 דויד H1732 מארם H758  
 שבעת H7651 אלפים H505 רכב H7393 וארבעים H705 אלף H505 איש H376  
 רגלי H7273 ואת H853 שופך H7780 שר H8269 הצבא H6635 המית: H4191

The Hebrew uses identical phrasing for both 2 Samuel 10:18 and 1 Chronicles 19:18, changing only the number in each (700 in the former and 7,000 in the latter). The phrase in question is as follows:

שבע מאות רכב וארבעים אלף  
 שבעת אלפים רכב וארבעים אלף

The term for “chariot” used in both verses is identical—H7393 (רֶכֶב / rekeb). It can mean “team, chariot, chariotry, mill-stone, riders.” The fact that the same word was used in both instances likely indicates that the term had the same meaning in each, and the difference in the number was due to a scribal error.

### (3) Response to the Problem of the Explanation

H7393 (רֶכֶב / rekeb) can mean both “chariot” and “riders” (charioteers). It is therefore possible that the author of 2 Samuel intended to write that 700 chariots were slain and the writer of 1 Chronicles meant to write that 7,000 charioteers were slain. While 10 riders in a chariot would be a high number, it is not unreasonable, since a squad typically consists of 8 or 9 soldiers. The translation of the KJV is thus not unreasonable.

## 4. Whether Jesus or Simon Carried Jesus’s Cross

### a) Overview

Dr. Philips writes that the “Gospel accounts vary regarding who carried the cross on which Jesus was supposed to have been crucified. In Matthew, Mark and Luke, it was Simon of Cyrene, and in John, it was Jesus” (p. 25).

It is true that in Matthew, Mark and Luke, Simon of Cyrene carried the cross:

Mat 27:31 And when they had mocked Him, they took the robe off Him, put His own clothes on Him, and led Him away to be crucified. Mat 27:32 Now *as they came out*, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name. Him they compelled to bear His cross.

Mark 15:20 And when they had mocked Him, they took the purple off Him, put His own clothes on Him, and led Him out to crucify

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