

I am now at a point where I can explain how I read the Bible when I was a committed Christian who was not, however, a conservative evangelical convinced that the Bible was a completely inerrant revelation from God without any discrepancies or differences in it. As I have already indicated, my new way of reading of the Bible did not denigrate the Bible at all, as often happens when people realize there are mistakes in it and come away saying something like: "It's worthless, just a pile of contradictions!" That wasn't my view at all.

On the contrary, the differences revealed the true richness of the Christian tradition. The Gospels, rather than simply being completely accurate accounts of what really happened were theological reflections on the significance of Jesus. Different reflections, by different authors, all of whom had something to teach me as someone who was himself wrestling with the significance of Jesus. One way to see the true depth of these different reflections is to compare them carefully with one another. I explain how that can be done by taking a particular example: how did the Gospel writers remember Jesus' death. This is how I explain it in my book Jesus Interrupted (this will take two or maybe three posts).

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I can begin my comparison of texts by discussing an example that strikes me as particularly clear and gripping. As is the case with detailed discrepancies one can find between one account and another, this kind of difference can be seen only by doing a careful horizontal reading of passages; but rather than looking for minute disagreements here or there, we are looking for broader themes, major differences in the way a story is told. One story that is told very differently in the Gospels is the key story of them all, the crucifixion of Jesus. You might think that all the Gospels have exactly the same message about the crucifixion, and that their differences might simply reflect minor changes of perspective, with one author emphasizing one thing and another something else. But in fact the differences are much larger and more fundamental than that. Nowhere can this be seen more clearly than in the accounts of Jesus' death in Mark and Luke.

I should probably reiterate a point I made earlier, that...

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