

"Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. Therefore, since I myself have investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught." (Luke 1:1-4)

During a prime-time television special titled *The Search for Jesus*, Peter Jennings asserted that according to some scholars, "the New Testament has four different and sometimes contradictory versions of Jesus' life." The Jesus Seminar scholars Jennings referenced, however, are famous for an idiosyncratic brand of fundamentalism that supplants reason and evidential substance with rhetoric and emotional stereotypes. They have made a virtual art form out of exploiting "discrepancies" in the secondary details of the gospels.

One of the most frequently cited alleged contradictions involves the female discoverers of the empty

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*The Search for Jesus*  
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tomb. According to Matthew, the discoverers were Mary Magdalene and another Mary (28:1); Mark says they were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome (16:1); Luke claims Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and others (24:10); and John focuses solely on Mary Magdalene (20:18).

# The Gospels

## Complementary or Contradictory?

BY HANK HANEGRAAFF

In providing a defensible argument against such dogmatic assertions, it is first helpful to point out that the gospels are *complementary* rather than *contradictory*. If John, in the example cited above, had stipulated that Mary Magdalene was the only woman to discover the empty tomb while the other gospels claimed that more than one woman was involved, we would be faced with an obvious contradiction. Instead, the complementary details provided by the four gospel writers simply serve to flesh out the rest of the story.

Furthermore, credible scholars look for a reliable *core* set of facts in order to validate historical accounts. In this case, liberal and conservative scholars alike agree that the body of Jesus was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. As a member of the Jewish court that convicted Jesus, Joseph is unlikely to be Christian fiction.

Additionally, when we consider the role of women in first-century Jewish society, what is remarkable is that the empty tomb accounts would feature females as heroes of the story. This demonstrates that the gospel writers factually recorded

what happened, even if it was culturally embarrassing.

Finally, if each of the gospel writers presented secondary details in exactly the same manner, critics would dismiss their accounts on the basis of *collusion*. Instead, the Gospels provide unique, yet mutually consistent, perspectives on the events surrounding the empty tomb.

The principles above not only resolve the circumstances in the case at hand but all supposed contradictions highlighted by Peter Jennings in

*The Search for Jesus*. We can safely conclude that far from being contradictory, the gospel accounts are clearly *complementary*, a consensus of credible scholarship considers the *core* set of facts pre-

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sented by the gospel writers to be authentic and reliable; and the unique perspectives provided by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John preclude the possibility of *collusion*. □

*Adapted from Hank Hanegraaff, The Bible Answer Book (Nashville: J. Countryman, 2004).*

For further study concerning alleged contradictions in the Bible, see Gleason L. Archer, *New International Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982); concerning evidences for Christ's resurrection, see Hank Hanegraaff, *The Third Day* (Nashville: W. Publishing Group, 2003). Also see Hank Hanegraaff, "The Search for Jesus Hoax," available at [www.equip.org](http://www.equip.org).