

Panel Discussion on Mike Licona's New Book

Why Are There Differences in the Gospels? What We Can Learn From Ancient Biography
(New York: OUP, 2017)

Occasion: Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society
November 15, 2016; San Antonio, TX

Panelists: Mark Strauss, Darrell Bock, Craig Blomberg, Mike Licona
Moderator: Tyler McNabb

Each panelist read a paper pertaining to Mike's book. MP3s of each paper may be purchased at the following links:

Mark Strauss: <http://www.wordmp3.com/details.aspx?id=24069>

Darrell Bock: <http://www.wordmp3.com/details.aspx?id=23790>

Craig Blomberg: <http://www.wordmp3.com/details.aspx?id=23759>

Papers were followed by a panel discussion. What follows is a transcript of the panel discussion. An MP3 of the panel discussion may be heard at <https://www.risenjesus.com/panel>.

Moderator (Tyler): For the next forty minutes we'll have a panel discussion and then we'll open it up for about thirty minutes for Q&A.

Mike: Well, I want to first thank Darrell, Craig, and Mark for engaging my book and for providing valuable assessments. We all agree that there were compositional devices that historians and biographers employed when writing about the past and that the evangelists used a variety of these as well. Darrell, Mark, and I appear to be more open than Craig to the extent of flexibility in which the evangelists reported events. So I'd like to ask some questions of my interlocutors. I want to start with Mark.

I'm in agreement with I think everything he said. But I'd just like some clarifications. Just one question for you. Now in your paper, Mark, you said there are a few occasions [in the book] in which you state the options for explaining the differences and then you add that some of them may make some inerrantists uncomfortable. For example, on page 10 of your paper when discussing the difficulty in assessing whether John changed the day and time of Jesus's crucifixion, you mention the proposal of Keener, myself, and many others that John changed the day and time. You then name various proposals that do not appeal to temporal displacement and then you say and I quote,

To be sure, all of these solutions could be viewed as stretches and seem to run counter to a plain reading of the text. A Johannine change of chronology for theological reasons may be a simpler and more elegant solution. Yet this may mean that even explicit chronology is not necessarily historical. And for some evangelicals this may be a bridge too far.

So here's my question. I'm not asking on your particular view. The thing I'd be interested in knowing from you is "Do you think that a plain reading of the text, of John's text, would suggest that the Last Supper was not a Passover meal?"

Mark: No. I think that a plain reading of the text would suggest that it was.

Mike: That it was a Passover meal.

Mark: Oh no, John! So you're not talking about the Synoptics. No. A plain reading is that it's a common meal during Passover week.

Mike: That's how I take it. And I know Craig disagrees on this. But we'll get to you Craig.

Laughter

Mark: But a plain reading again may not be the best reading.

Mike: Right. Yeah. Okay. Darrell. There were two items in your paper I'd like to pursue further with you.

Darrell: mhmm.

Mike: I want to look at my claim about Peter's second accuser in the courtyard. This is the one you didn't touch on, but you said there were a number of items in there of great interest. Mark 14:69 appears to say it's the same female servant while Matthew is clear that it's a different servant (26:71), and Luke (22:58) says it was a man. On page 25 you say Mark may be ambiguous in reference to the second slave girl." You acknowledge the natural way to take it is that Mark is referring to the same girl. (So therefore Matthew would be a different girl, Luke, a man.) But you add that it's also 'possible' that Mark regards the second accuser as a different girl. I agree with you. But now I'm curious how you'd treat Luke's (22:58) statement that it was a man who was Peter's second accuser.

Darrell: Yeah, because I think in the second circumstance, I think you're dealing with a crowd. I think you have someone who initiates the discussion, someone who steps forward. You also have the cultural issue, perhaps, although I wouldn't put much weight on this, that to point out that a man joins in on this point might be culturally important because the way women are handled culturally. So a combination of things might be going on there.

Mike: Okay. Second, in addition to the possible conflicting accounts of Peter's second accuser, the identity of who it was, I point out what appears to be a conflict of Peter's location during the second accusation. On page 28 you say that I probably overstate this and that "Locations do not seem to be in opposition." I want to look at this with you. Mark (14:68) and Matthew (26:71) are clear that Peter was by the gate. Here's what Matthew writes, "When Peter had gone out to the gate, another female servant saw him and said to those there, 'This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.'" Now consider what John 18:18 reports. Slaves and assistants of the high priest were warming themselves around a charcoal fire they had made. And Peter was also with them, standing and warming himself. John then breaks to another scene in which the former high priest Annas questions Jesus then sends him off to Caiaphas. John then returns to Peter in the courtyard. 18:25 reports, "And Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. Therefore, they said to him, 'You are not also one of his disciples, are you?'" So, John says Peter was by the fire, whereas in Mark he was by the gate. So, how is this an overstatement?

Darrell: Well, it's an overstatement to the extent that it deals with, there's a precision and accuracy problem here in terms of the space that we're dealing with. And without architectural drawings about how this house that we're dealing with is configured, what you probably have is a fire in an alcove area with a gate that is associated with the space. And so then it becomes "How much fire do you have to have in order to be warm?," if you want to think of it that way. In Texas, I was thinking about this, in Texas, we sometimes have bonfires. They can be warming from a pretty good distance. Now I'm not suggesting that there's a bonfire in the middle of a house.

Laughter

Darrell: But I am suggesting that if you have a healthy fire you can warm yourself and still be at some distance from the actual location of the fire. And now you have a choice. This is back to the point of my paper. I can choose to describe it as he is warming himself by the fire. I can choose to describe it as he is warming himself by the gate. And those two choices are not inherently contradictory.

Mike: Inherently no. I'd say what you're saying is 'possible.' However, 'possible' does not mean 'probable.' And when I look at those texts, neither Matthew nor Mark mention any fire by the gate. And when you look at John, it says slaves and assistants of the high priest were warming themselves around the charcoal fire they'd made. Peter was with them standing and warming himself and just a few verses later it says, "And Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. Therefore, they said to him, 'You are also not one of His disciples are you?'" So it seems to me that, looking at that text like that, it appears that John is in conflict with Mark.

Darrell: The key word is 'appears.' That is actually part of the point that I'm trying to make, which is, this is in my mind a little different from the kind of difference you get through the

messengers and the centurion. That kind of a difference, when you get a choice between two different authors highlighting a different aspect of geography, if you want to think of it that way, then to combine your issues of spotlighting versus distinction and precision, you might get one writer who keeps the scene simple, and another writer who deals with shift of movement. That could be all you're dealing with here. I don't know how you rate 'possible' and 'probable' in a problem like this. When you figure that one out, I want to see the second edition.

Laughter

Mike: Well, I forgot exactly what I say in my book. But I'm guessing I say that it 'appears' to be a discrepancy. So as long as I say 'appears,' I don't think that's an overstatement.

Darrell: Well.....now again, I may be judging your intent. But I think the nature of our exchange tells me how you feel about 'appears.'

Laughter

Darrell: And so take my reply in the same spirit with which the 'appears' appears.

Laughter

Mike: Okay. What I think is probably going on there in terms of the second accuser and the location in which the accusation occurred, I think that they know of this story that Jesus, sorry, Peter was being accused three times. They know it was in the courtyard. They know there were various people there. And probably at some point they know the skeleton and some details of this story. But they don't know some of the others. So, they craft the details and they end up being somewhat in conflict. Look, I acknowledge that what you're saying there could be right. I don't know what's going on. I'm just open to different options. That's all.

Darrell: Fair enough.

Mike: And that's my heart on that. I'm not saying that there's necessarily a contradiction there. And even if you have a conflict in details, again, I would think that that's because they know the skeleton of the story. They remember that. They just don't remember a precise person or location and so, they just said this person.

Darrell: The only answer that I will make is that in our conversation there's a reconstruction going on by both of us which is assuming certain elements and in the midst of that assumption coming to certain conclusions. And I think on some of these things we just need to step back and recognize that's what's going on.

Mike: Yeah. I agree. Now to Craig. (in a jokingly sinister voice)

Darrell: I'm sitting back.

Laughter

Mike: So. Yeah. I'm gonna push back on a few things naturally. But I do want to say out front that I was a latecomer to this. I didn't even start my doctoral research until I was 41 years old and being 55 right now I have to admit, and like I said last year, Darrell and Mark and Craig, honestly, they know more about the Gospels right now than I ever will. So, any pushback that I give, I understand that I could definitely be wrong on that stuff. I'm honored and so thankful for your engagement with me on this stuff.

Craig: But we're all closer to forgetting what we learn than you.

Laughter

Darrell: An empty well's a frightening prospect.

Mike: Okay. So Craig, on page 8, you say, "The weakness of a study like Licona's has revealed a third set of examples. Sometimes it is not at all clear to me that appealing to one of Plutarch's compositional devices is the best way to explain the differences among the Gospels. But having done all the meticulous analysis of a writer like Plutarch like Licona did, the most natural thing in the world is to assume that his devices explain the vast majority, if not all, of the famous Gospel discrepancies. . . . To Licona's credit, he regularly acknowledges that there are other viable approaches to individual issues he is analyzing than his preferred compositional devices from Plutarch. But I feel that he falls back on them just a few times too often and dismisses the alternatives a bit too quickly." I guess my reply is, although I say several times in the book that I want to guard against that, we have to be careful not to see a compositional device lurking behind every difference. I think you could be right that there are some instances in here, I don't know where they're at, but I admit you could very well be correct that there are some instances where I have stated a conclusion more confidently than I was justified. And so I do think that very valuable that you point out and a good reminder to me and I appreciate it.

So, let's discuss Jesus's healing blind Bartimaeus near Jericho. The issue on what you focused is not whether they were going into Jericho or coming out. It was whether there was one or two blind people. As you noted, I discussed a number of possibilities. One, since Matthew doesn't include Mark's story of Jesus healing the blind man in Bethsaida, he just doubles up on the blind man here for purposes of economy. The second one is that Mark only has one [blind man] because he's shining his literary spotlight on Bartimaeus because his readers may have known Bartimaeus and Bartimaeus being the witness there. You say that spotlighting is a simple explanation, but doubling up on the number of blind men to compensate for a story Matthew knows just complicates the matter. Now in my book I say I don't have a preference. So, I guess what I'd like to know from you is why is providing various options, why does that seem to be a negative to you?

Craig: I don't think providing various options is a negative.

Mike: Okay. Well, you did say that. You seemed to chide me that I bring up the option of doubling them, because you said it just complicates the matter.

Craig: I don't know if I said either. But my question was it seemed to me you had exactly the right approach with the two demoniacs and now you have a parallel situation with two blind men and you don't opt for the same kind of solution, which seems to me to work equally well.

Mike: Okay. Alright. Let's move on to the feeding of the 5,000. So, on page 10 you say, "After the feeding of the 5,000 when Mark says Jesus told the disciples to go to Bethsaida in Mark 6:45, while John says they set out for Capernaum (John 6:17), the boat undoubtedly blew off course because Mark 6:53 says they landed at Genessaret, considerably south of both Bethsaida and Capernaum." So, I guess I'd say if you're correct, you still have another problem, because in John 6:17 it says they headed off for Capernaum but in John 6:21 it says they landed where they intended. So, if they landed in Gennesaret, it wasn't where they intended.

Craig: John 6 goes on to say that Jesus was preaching in the synagogue in Capernaum and, yes, if they were in Gennesaret they had to head a little bit further back north to get to where they intended and could have walked over land. But the point I'm trying to make is you were chiding, shall we say, a proposed harmonization that had both blown off course intending to go to Bethsaida and the landing at Capernaum. But that is not a harmonization I am aware that anybody has proposed. If you're gonna have....

Mike: I can give you two. And I did not include this in my book. So, I'm glad you said it in your paper, because I thought "Didn't I say that?" And then you said I provided a footnote for Achtemeier who didn't say it. And you're right. Achtemier does not say that and the endnote I put there was just to show that there was another view that I didn't cover in this. But actually, R.T. France in his commentary on Mark in the New International Greek Text Commentary has it. And I can't remember the guy's name right now, but it's for the IVP New Testament commentary, the commentary on Mark.

Craig: Kernaghan?

Mike: Yes. He takes that view. So, there are two that I know of who actually take that view. So, I don't think it was blown off course. Darrell and I have talked about this on the phone and it's a difficult thing, isn't it? I mean I don't think there's any real easy harmonization. It doesn't square well with inerrancy for me, but for me, I'm open to Mark being confused here. I'm also open to Jesus telling them to go to Capernaum. "On the way, guys, stop in Bethsaida and get resupplied." And Mark kind of talks about that, but the others don't. The others talk about the end thing. I don't know what's going on here exactly.

Craig: Yeah. My point wasn't nearly as much about where the boat got blown. If they managed to land where they intended, to land in that kind of storm that would have been remarkable, but maybe they didn't. It seems to me that you were rejecting the idea that it could be simultaneously true that Jesus commanded them to head to Bethsaida and that they set off for Capernaum as if somebody said to get on the Mississippi river and you're in St. Louis and headed for New Orleans and somebody else said they got on the boat in St. Louis and intended to get to Minneapolis. Both of those can't be true simultaneously under any way that you imagine geography and you seem to reject the idea that Luke thought they were in a remote place even though two verses after he says they were in Bethsaida. He uses that language which means it can't have happened very close to Bethsaida. If they were very close to Bethsaida, then you're right: There is no way to say Jesus commanded them to go to Bethsaida. He wouldn't even have to get in a boat to do that. They would just walk there, and simultaneously they set off in a boat to go to Capernaum. But if they're in a remote place, what you find typically due east of Tiberius, you go across the Sea of Galilee, go to a place like Kursi, the supposed site of the pigs going off the cliff, you've got some very remote areas. Now you set your sights, go to either Bethsaida or Capernaum and a slightly different angle. But they're pretty close to each other.

Mike: I guess I'd be wondering, if I was one of Jesus's disciples and let's say that I'm on the east side of the lake and he tells them to go to Capernaum via Bethsaida, that's what you're suggesting, right? If I'm Peter or John or James, sons of Zebedee, and I'm in that boat, which they were, I'd be thinking, "C'mon, Jesus. Look, you were a carpenter, I understand, but we're fishermen. This is what we do for a living. We know this lake really well. You don't have to tell us to go via Bethsaida. We know this lake. We have to pass by Bethsaida to get to Capernaum. Surely you don't think we're going to go all the way down to six o'clock and then come back up like a big V?" They were going to go straight across. You wouldn't have to say, "Go to Capernaum via Bethsaida."

Craig: And, of course, none of the Gospels say that He said that. So, now you're the one who's...

Mike: But you said that.

Craig: All the text says is that Jesus said to go to Bethsaida.

Mike: We'll, that's kind of like . . .

Craig: So, he is allowing Peter to make the inference as to what else is involved. He's saying, "Don't go straight across the open sea."

Mike: I live in the Atlanta area, up in a suburb named Cumming. It's about fifty miles north of the city. So, you go down Cumming. You gotta pass through Buckhead to get to Atlanta. So, what if I told my wife "Would you get in the car and drive down toward Buckhead?" I think

she'd say, "And where do you want me to go?" "Well, just go toward Buckhead?" That would be just a strange kind of thing. Why wouldn't I just say, "Would you get in the car and go to Atlanta?" I don't have to tell her, "Go through Buckhead. She would know it. She knows the road."

Craig: Unless there are also roads where you didn't have to go through it. That's the analogy that I'm making.

Mike: Is there a road to cross the Sea of Galilee to get to Capernaum?

Craig: No. It's the most direct sea route.

Mike: Yeah. They would naturally do that, of course. Why would Jesus have to tell them that?

Craig: Yeah. They would naturally do that and he may be telling them, "Hang close to the shore. It's going to be a rough night."

Mike: Okay. [to Darrell] Do you have something?

Darrell: Well, I just want to make the observation that when I go to Dallas Seminary, I fly into DFW, which is not Dallas Seminary, even though my intention when I go back from this will be to go to the seminary. And all that I'm trying to say is we're dealing with summarizing narratives that we know collapse more complicated things. We're dealing with an itinerant ministry that roams from place to place in a countryside on the edge of the Sea of Galilee. We've just got a lot of factors that we're dealing with and these summarizations get us into the accuracy and precision areas. These are all accuracy and precision problems if I can say it that way. And I think we just need to be careful not to assume more than the text may be giving us.

Mike: Alright. One more area I'd like to raise with Craig and it's about the day and time when Jesus was crucified. In the book I present several options. And I favor the view, with many, that John changed the day and time of Jesus's crucifixion. And you said that, in your opinion, this view is impossible for two reasons. Your first reason you say is and I quote, "John never says how long Jesus hung on the cross until He died. Without that reference to His death at the ninth hour, 3 PM, which is only in Mark, we would have no reason to suspect a synchronism with the time of the sacrifice of the lambs." Now John 19:14 has Jesus crucified sometime shortly after 12 Noon because he brings them up just after noon, Jesus is brought before Pilate for the very last time in John. That's where Keener and others and myself find synchronism with time that the burnt offerings were sacrificed. I know you don't hold that view. But can you see why Keener and others suspect a synchronism with the sacrificing of the lambs.

Craig: Oh, I understand the view. I understand where it comes from.

Mike: Okay. Okay. Alright. Then the second reason you say,

The second and even bigger problem involves John 19:31. It is true that the clause [in] verse 14, ἦν δὲ παρασκευὴ τοῦ πάσχα, could mean ‘it was the day of Preparation for the Passover,’ but it could just as easily mean ‘it was the day of Preparation (for the Sabbath) in Passover week’. Fridays were routinely called ‘the Day of Preparation’ in Jewish circles; to this day in Greece, παρασκευὴ is the word for Friday. *Without looking at Mark*, how do we decide which John means? Verse 31 settles the matter: ‘it was the day of Preparation, and the next day was to be a special Sabbath.’ Then when we consult Mark, we see John has changed nothing, because Mark 15:42 states explicitly, ‘It was Preparation Day, this is the day before the Sabbath.’

I guess my comment is, I think you read too much into John 19:31. John calls it a *megalē* (‘great’ or ‘special’) Sabbath, and that special Sabbath could mean, as you suggest, the Sabbath during Passover week. Or it could mean the Passover itself, as you acknowledge. In that case, verse 31 does not settle the matter, as you have claimed. That special Sabbath, again you acknowledge, could mean the Passover itself. So, to others and me, this latter [option] makes more sense that it’s referring to the Passover itself when four other considerations in John are taken into consideration. I’d like to get your thoughts on each of those.

Number one. There’s nothing in John’s description of the Last Supper itself that would suggest it’s a Passover meal. That would be my contention and Mark [Strauss] agrees. What do you think? Do you see anything in John’s description of the Last Supper that would suggest it’s a Passover meal?

Craig: The fact that chapter 13 begins that it was just before the Passover and Jesus loved them to the end, decided to carry through with His plans. And then without any reference to any other meal the next verse says it was the evening and they were eating. So, you just had a reference to the Passover as imminent. And now you’ve got a shift after a little one sentence paragraph, one verse paragraph, and you have a meal and it would make sense that it would be a Passover meal.

Mike: Well, let me read those two verses, because I don’t get that sense. This is John 13:1-2.

Now before the feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He would depart out of this world to the Father having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. During supper, the devil, having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot the son of Simon to betray Him...

And then it goes on about washing feet and then this Last Supper. But it says it was “before the feast of the Passover.” I see nothing in those two verses or the ones that come after it that would suggest it was a Passover meal or that it was a different day other than before the feast of the Passover.

Craig: Well, that depends on how you break the text in paragraphs, if you do at all. If you see 13:1, as the NIV have punctuated it, as an entire introductory paragraph to what is coming, before the feast of the Passover and Jesus knowing His hour was come, He loved them to the end, He's carrying through with His mission.

Mike: Then it goes right into . . .

Craig: Punctuation varies there in various possibilities and then it's a genitive absolute. Και δειπνου γενομενου, and the supper arriving. Which supper?

Mike: So, why would that be any different than "before the Feast of the Passover"?

Craig: Why would it be any other meal other than the Passover? Why even say it was just before the Feast of the Passover unless you're willing to . . . So, what you're pointing out, and I know you can go through and then look at 18:28 and other passages, which I have written on in several places and said in the article . . . I'm not going to repeat all those.

Mike: We'll get to those.

Craig: And you can make a plausible case, yes, for both points. But your point was if you just take John on his own then there's no way to come up with the plausibility for what I'm saying and . . .

Mike: That was my question. If we just took John, is there anything in it that would suggest it's a Passover meal, and you're saying no.

Craig: No, I'm saying yes at every point in chapter 13. Then you get a meal where Judas leaves precipitously and people think he was going to buy something for the feast. Okay, well then, obviously the feast hadn't come except the shops are open at night only on the night of the first meal. Why would any other day anybody leave and they would think they were going to buy something? There wouldn't be any shops open and the other alternative is that maybe he was going to give something to the poor. It was only on the night of the first meal when the beggars gathered around the gate because it was considered meritorious to give alms. So, there are all kinds of things, and then, if Richard Bauckham is right, the point that nobody's talking about yet here is, and that Plutarch doesn't make a good analogy with, we have Gospel writers who are consciously redacting other people's written sources, and if there's ever a place where John knows even Mark, it's in the Passion narrative. So, John does include, not details of the meal as in Mark, but a reference to the prediction of Peter's denial, a reference to the prediction of Jesus's betrayal. Those, if I'm reading John or readers of Mark to use Bauckham's language, are very clear signals that John is talking about the same meal on the same day as in Mark.

Mike: I think he is definitely talking about the same meal. I guess the question that I have hesitations about is saying that John is portraying it as a Passover meal. That's all I'd say. I do think the two points you raised though about Judas going out to give to the poor and . . .

Craig: Shops

Mike: Shops being open. Those are good points.

Darrell: There is one other detail, and that is only John and Luke mention Satan or the devil entering into Judas during this particular exchange, which may be an indication that John is aware of the tradition that's floating through the Synoptic Gospels. I think one of the things that we tend to do when we say "Well let's read someone on their own terms" is to forget the context in which they are writing and the context in which they are writing is regarding the events of this week. We're not just dealing with the Passover meal and the timing of the Passover meal. You're also dealing with the association of that and whatever it was with the Lord's Supper. So, this isn't just any tradition we're talking about here. This is a very significant deeply rooted tradition that we're dealing with. And then the second observation we want to make, I'm going to keep coming back to this again and again and again on these discussions: We're dealing with summarizing literature here. We're dealing with cultural customs. How many of you have Christmas parties at your offices that meet on Christmas Day? This is a season of the year in which Passover is covering several days. Even Unleavened Bread can be referred to as Passover and vice-versa. I had a long debate prior in an email with an orthodox rabbi about whether they can switch hit on those terms, but the point is this is a season we are talking about. There's a shadow of Passover that's over the events that we're talking about regardless of whether we're at the exact moment the Passover lambs are being sacrificed or not. And I think we just have to remember what our possibilities are and that is the point of why I wrote the paper that I did the way I did. There are tons of possibilities that we're dealing with, and each one of us when we pick a solution reaches into that potpourri of options and says, "That's the one." Maybe. Maybe not.

Mark: And do we then say "maybe, maybe not"? That's what we need to add to that; the level of uncertainty. I think that our view of Scripture is going to affect the way we read it. It should affect the way we read it. I think humility and uncertainty, neither of those things are bad things.

Mike: Yeah. I agree. One last thing I'd like to pursue with Craig is when we were talking about the day and time of Jesus's crucifixion. Last year, when we talked about the synthetic chronological placement, I mentioned a few other examples like one where Jesus healed the leper or when after Jesus began His ministry when they were in Capernaum after healing Peter's mother-in-law, what happened that night or the morning after. I think Matthew is different there. I think he presents explicit chronology. You disagreed with that. Or when did

the woman anoint Jesus? Was it two days before Passover as Mark and Matthew say or was it six like John says? You were very resistant to those things and here with some of the things I've proposed in the book you've said, "I have not found a place where two or more of the evangelists use undeniably temporal expressions to create a chronological contradiction." I agree with you that none of the examples that I've provided are so crystal clear and strong that they could be said to be undeniable. But I think where you and I differ is I don't require something to be undeniable before I accept it. I just look for what I would consider to be probable, the most probable, because someone can always come up with an explanation to squeeze out of something. And I get the impression from last year's paper that you read and a little from this one that synthetic chronological placement makes you uneasy. It worries you because it doesn't square with your view of what inerrant Gospels are supposed to look like. And so you're a little resistant to it and I just wanted to ask you, could there be some truth in that?

Craig: I'll use your point, "Could there be some truth?" Sure. There could always be some truth in some things. How probable is it? I think what I'm appealing to is a detailed inductive study of the text that I went through years ago, that I've gone back to over and over again. I actually think Vern Poythress's comments at that point are a bit truistic. If you're aware of both how *tote* and *nun*, then and now, regularly are logical and not just chronological connectors, if you realize that "in that day" can mean in that period of time and sometimes we translate it as "on" but there's no reason it always has to be that rather than "in", then it is very interesting how few explicit chronological connectives the Synoptics have and how many John has. And so, to go back to the anointing, I think Darrell made this point, it makes all the sense in the world to say John has the literal six days before the Passover inclusively to Saturday night before what we call Palm Sunday and Mark has a statement that says Judas and the high priest made their plot two days before. But the anointing is sandwiched in between the beginning and the end of that plot and Mark regularly interpolates material that he wants to show thematically ties in to what comes before and afterwards and no indication of chronology at all. As you try to diagnose what's going on here, I think what's going is, I began years ago in a little article called "The Limits and Legitimacy of Harmonization" to say I have to consider a whole range of options from everyone of the critical tools, not least the fact that Markan priority is a pretty bedrock of the discipline. And I remember a conversation with Don Carson when I was a student and Bob Gundry's commentary on Matthew was all the rage, which you've been, I think, unfairly compared with and Carson's comment was very perceptive. He got a hold of a good idea, Matthew's redactional emphases, and it made so much sense of several passages that he just kept putting it in and pushing it until it was the only method he used anywhere. That's how reading your book comes across to me. I found a key in Plutarch's compositional devices. I wanna milk it for all it's worth. Fine. Countless minor things you pointed out I think you're right on target and nobody would be concerned at all about it. But we have to remember also that

Matthew's using Mark. Maybe a common source that he shares with Luke, that there's a certain kind of oral tradition that has come to him that didn't come with Plutarch centuries later, that there's a whole complex solution to the relationship of John and the Synoptics, and I don't find all of that source and form and redaction criticism very regularly coming into play in your work. You may be right in every solution. But I'd be more convinced if sometimes you appealed to Plutarch and sometimes you appealed to source criticism and sometimes you appealed to form criticism and didn't make me feel like you're trying to push most everything into one hole.

Mike: Well, I reiterate I take [to heart] that caution and I think you're correct in that. Of course, the thing about the book was to look at the compositional devices and to see how much of the differences they could actually account for. But yeah, I mean I acknowledge the redaction and all that kind of stuff, oral tradition, all that. And in terms of John changing the day and time, I'll modify my question I was asking you: Is there anything in the account of John's portrayal of the Last Supper that would suggest he thought it was a Passover or he was portraying it as a Passover meal? Yeah. I think you're right that he at least thought it was a Passover meal. But I still don't know that he's portraying it that way. And I look at what Mark pointed out in his paper when he quoted the Chicago Statement when he says we're "not in the sense of being absolutely precise by modern standards, but in the sense of making good its claims and" - this is important here - "achieving that measure of focused truth at which its authors aimed." So, if that was the aim of ancient biography and it allowed synthetic chronological placement, that's totally in keeping with ICBI it would seem to me.

Craig: I never wanted to suggest or deny that.

Mike: Okay, and Darrell, I want him to comment because he mentioned his view on the two days before Passover. I think I recall you saying to me that you have changed your view and you now think Mark changed the day from six to two of the anointing.

Darrell: I'm not sure what Mark's doing. What I think is going on here in this conversation if I can just sit here as a neutral observer who is watching the conversation go back and forth. I think what Mike is doing is he's saying to others, "There are more categories in here for you to think about than you thought about." Okay? That is a perfectly legitimate space to be created. Now, the second level of that conversation is, "Am I persuaded in every case that this space that has been created is the actual space to land?" And the conversation that you're hearing, it's obvious that they're not landing in the same space. I just want to comment on what may not be transparent to everybody (*laughter*). And my point here is "That's precisely why we have this conversation." The reason we have this conversation is that what is coming out of it is, is that if anyone thinks they can be terrifically dogmatic on this question, okay, then put the dog back in the doghouse. Okay? It doesn't belong out and so, I think it has been a fabulous

conversation because I think it illustrates that beautifully for us all. And the other thing that's floating in the back of my head about all of this is, you are dealing with a tradition. I want to deal with one thing that you raised [looking at Mike]: John doesn't portray the meal as a Passover meal. He may not have to. The tradition may be so solid on what this meal is and the way in which it's been passed on that he would be commenting on what's the obvious. Now the question that raises is "Then why does John go on a Passover cloud over everything else that happens after this night?" Okay. THAT actually is the literary and theological and intentional question to ask because it's clear that whatever the tradition is - and I'm assuming that there's a Passover tradition in the background. Scot McKnight would disagree with me. Whatever the tradition is, he is doing something else with the imagery of the Passover or potentially doing something else that the other Gospel writers have chosen not to do. And that is worth pursuing.

Craig: And since Tyler doesn't have the mic . . . Tyler, tell them what we need to do.

Tyler: Yes, we are a bit over. So, lets go ahead and just jump into the audience Q & A.

Questioner 1: Why is it that the Gospel writers, when they quote Jesus, seem to be closer to one another than when they're talking in the story? Does that go against the kind of summarizing that you guys have been talking about with Plutarch and so forth?

Mike: You're saying the words, why are the words closer?

Questioner 1: Why are they so close together when they quote Jesus when you'd expect that if they're summarizing speeches they might be further apart from one another?

Craig: It might be helpful if questioners picked somebody to direct the question to.

Questioner 1: Mike.

Mike: Well, I would say it's not the case when you look at how John has Jesus's words compared to the Synoptics. And if we go with Markan priority, which I do, when you have Matthew, Mark, and Luke reporting similar things and it's almost word-for-word, they're just using Mark as their primary source, whereas John is going to paraphrase quite loosely at times in my view.

Craig: Why don't you give the mic to Tyler so he can call on people?

Questioner 2 (Kurt Jaros): This question is for Darrell. This discussion has been way too tame in my humble opinion.

Laughter

You guys all generally agree that Mike's new method here is a good method. The question is just which examples apply or fit with that method. The reason why it's been too tame is

because, as from someone who studies theology, there are people who hold to a very rigid interpretation of the Gospels. I'm wondering why aren't we having that discussion with them and Dr. Licona's method here?

Darrell: Well this is why it's valuable to come to ETS year after year after year. This was a discussion that took place between a theologian and a New Testament person, I think it was two or three years ago now. Vern Poythress and I exchanged at a session in which we interacted. I interacted with his book. He interacted with an article that I wrote in a book on the distinction between accuracy and precision and what you found was that actually we were in pretty substantial agreement with one another. There are other people out there for whom the theological requirements of the kind of variation that we're talking about in here does change blood pressure readings.

Laughter

And to that what I would say what Mark said earlier is very very important. Whenever I face this conversation with the systematic theologian who's nervous about what I do, after inviting them to a meal, it's going to take awhile, the question I always ask is, "You tell me how the Holy Spirit has inspired this phenomenon and you tell me what I'm supposed to tell students is going on. When you can answer that question in the parameters that you're setting without having them feel like...mmmm...I'm not sure...then I think you've helped us all out." And that's why the proof is in the pudding. Okay? I said there's variation. The angel's in the details. I don't think there's a devil there. I think there's an angel there, because I think that's showing us what God has actually done.

Questioner 3 (Rob Bowman): Mike. I do have a question. Looking at this from the other side of historical research on the Gospels, you compare the Gospel writers' methods with that of Plutarch. And Darrell, you mentioned a lot of other people leading up to that period and maybe spilling a little bit over. Now look at this from the other side. You've got people like Origen and Augustine who are Christians and they are reading the Gospels. And I don't know if you've addressed this in your book at all or if you have plans to address this, but unfortunately I haven't seen your book yet. But I would be interested as looking at it from that perspective. Do they see these kinds of methods being used in the Gospel writers? Do they understand the apparent discrepancies as reflecting this kind of thing or do they not even have those in mind when they read the Gospels? It seems to me from what I've read in Origen, and again especially Augustine, when he treats apparent discrepancies in the Gospels he is very often forced either to a very laborious explanation to harmonize them or say they didn't even really care about the details and we don't need to care about it because it really doesn't matter. But they don't seem to be, as far as I can recall, and I may be wrong about this, they don't seem to be aware of these kinds of conventions that you're talking about being reflected in the Gospels.

Mike: A-Rob. That's a really good question. I call him "A-Rob" for Apologetics-Rob, one of the brightest guys I've ever met. I think Augustine and Harold Lindsell would have gotten along really well.

Laughter

Origen certainly noticed the differences. But, yeah, he took loose interpretations like, for example, Matthew's raised saints for which, you know, I received a lot of flack over. Origen said, "Yeah. These saints were raised when Jesus died and after His resurrection they came out of their tombs and they went into the holy city." But he says that's not referring to Jerusalem here on Earth. This was an event that could not have been seen by the human eye. It was something that happened to the holy city Jerusalem in Heaven." And Origen described John's Gospel as a "spiritual Gospel." So, we weren't supposed to try to harmonize the differences. So, that's the kind of approach he took. He took a different approach than say Augustine did and I think it's a really legitimate question you ask: Did these guys recognize compositional devices? I haven't read through all the early Church fathers. So, I can't really answer that. But what I would say is there were things that, even knowing the language better than any of us, the Greek better than any of us does, and being very close to the culture, you still had people like Origen of whom it's said—I know there's some controversy over it or debate over it—but said that he understood some of Jesus's statements about making themselves eunuchs for the kingdom and he performed self-castration. So, we'd look at that and say hermeneutical blunders can have (high-pitched voice) drastic consequences!

Intense Laughter

But here you have guys very close to Jesus's time, same language, and they had struggles with the hermeneutics and explaining. They didn't even agree on how to explain the differences. So, I guess that's all I could point out.

Tyler: The green shirt and then we'll get blue.

Questioner 4: In your reading Plutarch, I think you found 30-something parallels and ... compositional devices, right? So I wonder, when I studied the Jewish war in the *Antiquities* and the parallel accounts there are lots of mistakes that Josephus ironed out. Now, in addition to your compositional devices that Plutarch added up mistakes that today ironed out wasn't anything supernatural?

Mike: "Yeah, I think Plutarch made mistakes at times."

Questioner 4: "Are they reflected in your compositional devices or was it an addition of?"

Mike: "No, there's some parts in the book where I said Plutarch may have made a mistake here. It's kind of one of those things like what Craig was pointing out. You can always come up with

an alternate explanation. And so we could come up with an alternate explanation that would suggest that Plutarch was not mistaken. But there are times when he appears to be mistaken. One I can think of right away is, after Pompey was killed by the Egyptians when Caesar was pursuing him because he was on the proscriptions, his property was sold. Well, there's a guy, I think his name is Corfinius. So, one of the accounts, I think it's Plutarch's *Life of Pompey*, says that Corfinius purchased the house [of Pompey]. But in the *Life of Antony*, Plutarch says Antony purchased the house. So, which one was it? And you can look at some different things there and there's some different explanations, but it does appear that we can't answer it. We just don't know what's going on there. But that appears to be a mistake, an outright error on Plutarch's part, one of them.

Questioner 5: Darrell brought up theology and used the word "dogmatic" at times. And so looking at it from that point of view, particularly starting in 16th century, most of the Protestant theologians were not as settled as we've been, as far as I can tell, in accepting these differing cultural and literary conventions. And so they were reading the New Testament and the Old Testament in the light of a lot of people who were opposed to what you men have been doing. And so my question is does that mean that we also should see the framework within which they were working and then they were going back to the Scriptures and saying especially with Paul to come up with certain understandings of Paul? And could what you've been referring to regarding the literary form of the Gospels, is there a parallel that someone could study on philosophical and theological writings that help us to understand some of the differences within the various interpretations of Paul looking at both from the way the 15th and 16th century reformers did and from the context in which Paul was writing. Or are they simply not the same range of historical biographical studies when it comes to the kind of literature that Paul was writing?

Craig: One of the things that was fascinating to me years ago when I first wrote *Historical Reliability of the Gospels* was to go through both Augustine's and Calvin's commentaries. They both wrote commentaries on a harmony of the Gospels. But in so doing, and yes, Mike joked that probably Poythress and Augustine have a lot in common in various places, but there were times when they were in many ways anticipating or foreshadowing or using approaches that we would only recover again in recent centuries. The example that comes to mind is composite speeches. Matthew has five major blocks of Jesus's teaching. Both Augustine and Calvin acknowledge the possibility that he simply grouped together sayings that he found from many different sources to create this particular literary form of the five major speeches, whether or not Jesus ever said all of that on one occasion or not. So, one of the nice things about some of these series now that are coming out like the *Ancient Christian Commentary Series*, the *Reformation Christian Commentary Series*, is you can go back and you can actually read a good slough representative smattering of what people in those days said, and a lot of the times it's

somewhat far-fetched harmonizing from our perspective. A lot of the time it's a remarkable allegorizing like with Origen. And then just when you're not expecting it, all of a sudden it sounds like you're reading Darrell Bock, *Jesus According to Scripture*, and just stating what modern Gospel scholars regularly say. Fascinating view.

Questioner 6 (Brent Sandy): Question for Darrell. Appreciate your time going through a number of what I call "rhetorics of reliability" that appears in the different ancient sources. Only one of those, however, can be checked. That is Arian. This is the only one we have other sources for. So, we have Diodorus Siculus, Curtius Rufus and so forth. The rhetoric of reliability doesn't pan out. The proof is in the pudding, because I've chronicled lots and lots of differences on the synoptic Alexander. We have multiple sources telling the same thing. So, I'm questioning then whether we can count very highly on the rhetoric of reliability in those sources when the proof is in the pudding. It doesn't have [a track record of] being very reliable.

Darrell: This is why I mentioned the difference between execution and goal. The point, although the moment you call it "rhetoric of reliability" that may oversell what's also going on the other way. My real point in going through this and I went into this, I was only familiar with a couple of these authors, when I originally did the article. The thing that is striking to me is, yes, there are errors. They are well aware of the problem of their sources and that kind of thing, which is probably producing some of the errors that they have. But they also are at least articulating that says, "I don't have the right to walk into and make up whatever I want." And so for me there's a spectrum here that we're dealing with. And on the far edge of the spectrum is what I call "creativity ex nihilo."

Laughter

And I'm not seeing any thrill of going there. So, if there are errors, there are errors in execution that are in part related to the problems of the sources for which these writers are in some cases begging indulgence, you know, as they're talking about. But their effort, their intent, is not to sit there and try and create something out of whole cloth that didn't exist. I actually think that's one of the most important observations we can make because a lot of the skeptical Jesus scholarship has that category as very readily available and often used.

Questioner 6 (Brent Sandy): Good point.

Tyler: Time for one or two more. Go ahead.

Questioner 7: Yes. I'm wondering, getting back to this matter of John 13:1, the Day of Preparation, and the whole ambiguity question. Darrell, maybe you can take the lead in responding to this. It is significant John is the only one of the Four Gospels that doesn't include the institution of the Lord's Supper; not directly in there anyway. And I wonder if he's being deliberately ambiguous about the date, about what meal this is, about which Day of

Preparation is it and deliberately vague about a number of things as far as time during the Passion week, vague time, what time the Crucifixion was and this and that happens, because of maybe something going on in Ephesus, and tension between Jewish believers and Gentile believers, some things that he wants to be deliberately vague about just to be nice where Matthew with his audience wants to be very explicit about. Can you comment?

Darrell: Yeah. I view John as the Paul Harvey of the Gospels. Here's the rest of the story. He's got, the number varies, but the number I hear frequently, somewhere between 80 and 88 percent of his Gospel is unique to John. There is no way on God's green or brown Earth that John is writing without an awareness of at least something of what's going on in the Synoptic Gospels. If it's not the Synoptic Gospels themselves, it's something very much like the Synoptic Gospels that's in play. That's why I said earlier that I find it hard to believe that he writes about this period and he may not have to say certain things because it's a given. What I do think is important about John however is what I said earlier, which is even with that, the moment you make that step that I just made, you still have the tantalizing fact that he is doing stuff with the Passover in connection with Jesus's death that the Synoptic writers didn't do. And that's the interesting part of the question, it seems to me.

Craig: Just very quickly. There's no baptism of Jesus in John either. So, what came to be the two ordinances or sacraments are both conspicuously absent from John leading some, not the majority of scholars, to wonder whether he was writing to a community that had overemphasized them. This has to be taken into account also.

Questioner 8 (David Beck): Mike, we've heard the words "uneasy" and "uncomfortable" several times. Maybe it would be helpful to your case if you gave us some good Plutarchian examples of things that are just flat over the line where we would have to say "no," given a commitment to truthfulness, inerrancy: "no."

Mike: I think you can have truthfulness without inerrancy. I like the way Christopher Pelling, he's the leading Plutarch scholar in the world, he retired from Oxford a year ago. And he talks about these compositional devices and he says in a sense what Darrell says, distinguishing between accuracy and precision, he says it's "true enough." Darrell gave the example of *Hacksaw Ridge*. Think of the movie *Apollo 13*. Gene Kranz, flight director played by Ed Harris. He has that famous tag line, "Failure is not an option!" Well, even though Ron Howard was praised for the accuracy of the movie, the fact is that Kranz never uttered that statement. It was the scriptwriters after interviewing Kranz and all the people there at mission control. Since they were taking events that occurred over a period of almost one year and condensing it down to two hours, they took some artistic license because they noticed that that was the attitude and approach that Kranz had. As a result they crafted that statement and put it on his lips because that epitomized the group. And so Pelling would say, "It's true enough." It's not

precise, but it is accurate still. So, when you say, “What’s over the line for truth,” if half of the Gospels said Jesus rose from the dead and half of the Gospels said He didn’t rise from the dead, that would be over the line right, for inerrancy, or something like that. But you know the “true enough,” I’m fine with that when it comes to inerrancy. I’m fine with that. I’m fine even if there were some discrepancies in the peripheral details and say that the Scripture’s inerrant in all that it teaches, all that it affirms. I think it was Darrell who said a moment ago that we have no idea how God inspired the Scriptures. We don’t know the method. We take kind of more of, as evangelicals, I think a lot of us think of it more, we won’t say it’s a dictation view but in essence we think it is. Whereas what about a model that says, I’m not saying this is the case, but what if God said, “I’m going to inspire them. I’m going to inspire them to get the essence. I’m going to make sure it is true enough.” How would that be any less compatible with the Scriptures that are typically used for [supporting the doctrine of] inerrancy than a more rigid view? I’ve asked that question of several and I don’t see any reason why that view is not just as compatible with the Scriptures typically given for inerrancy and divine inspiration as the more rigid view is.

Tyler: We’ve a minute and a half. Go ahead.

Questioner 9: I’ll make it as quick as I can. So, my question is on ancient historiography. So, it seems like most of the things contained in them come from those that summarize accounts or speeches and things like that. Well, what about those that hold those guys to the fire? I can think of numerous first century authors, like Strabo. He would go around and hear people reading the literary text and then he would go to the prepared manuscripts and say, “Wow. You’re relying on faulty information. You’ve added this. You’ve taken this from the story.” Even spelling issues. Or take a guy like Ovid who recounts something where a guy stands up and says, “Whoa, Whoa. You missed this detail in the story that you just read to us.” Or different historians consulting like a Roman news publication from the government in order to set up their trial scenes, in order to set up, where is that side of the picture?

Mike: Are you asking that of me?

Questioner 9: All of you go to it.

Mike: That would be the exception rather than the norm. Asconius in the first century was an exception. He was regarded as one of, if not the most, someone who would practice history as we would today. But Asconius didn’t make it in the top echelon of historians, because that’s not what they were looking for back then with this precise accuracy as we would want today. They wanted something for its literary beauty as well. And that’s why people like Sallust and Suetonius and Tacitus, their writings caught on and were spread more, far more than Asconius was.

Questioner 9: Ok, so, you're saying popularity of that is the view that that was more pervasive than the others.

Mike: Yeah. They weren't looking for that. They wanted stuff. They wanted some articism, how do you say, artistry, or something in there; not just good accurate history. But they could sacrifice some precise details as long as it was "true enough." It was more than "based on a true story." It was a true story. The [movie] *Hacksaw Ridge* . . . Darrell pointed out some differences to me [that are not exactly how things happened]. But it's based on a true story, although they did take a little bit of liberties with that.

Darrell: Yeah. I think the issue here is, you're getting writers who are saying about other historians, they're not doing this. That's part of the environment that the writer is writing into. You've seen several writers who say, "Yes, I'm going to be concerned about style. But I'm not going to be concerned about style to the point where at least my intention is to significantly alter the truth." You have other people for whom the complaint is "You're too concerned about style. You don't care about truth. You can't handle the truth." Alright?

Laughter

So, you get this variation that's going on. That's part of why you're getting this "rhetoric of reliability" is because you have these contended elements that are out there. But again, I do want to step back and say what you don't hear any of these people saying is "I have the right to make it up." Okay? There's got to be a reason for going in a certain direction as opposed to simply just making it up.

Tyler: Alright, guys. We're done.

Applause