

The “Twelve”?

Eric Lyons, M.Min.

Numerous alleged Bible discrepancies arise because skeptics frequently interpret figurative language in a literal fashion. They treat God’s Word as if it were a dissertation on the Pythagorean theorem rather than a book written using ordinary language. They fail to recognize the inspired writers’ use of sarcasm, hyperbole, prolepsis, irony, etc. Such is the case in their interpretation of 1 Corinthians 15:5. Since Paul stated that “the twelve” (apostles) saw Jesus after His resurrection, these critics claim that Paul clearly erred, because there were not “twelve” apostles after Jesus’ resurrection and before His ascension. There actually were only eleven apostles during that time. [Judas already had committed suicide (Matthew 27:5), and Matthias was not chosen as an apostle until after Jesus’ ascension into heaven (Acts 1:15-26).] Skeptics claim Paul’s use of the term “twelve” when speaking about “eleven” clearly shows that the Bible was not given “by inspiration of God.”

The simple solution to this numbering “problem” is that “the twelve” to which Paul referred was not a literal number, but the designation of an office. This term is used merely “to point out the society of the apostles, who, though at this time they were only eleven, were still called the twelve, because this was their original number, and a number which was afterward filled up” (Clarke, 1996). Gordon Fee stated that Paul’s use of the term “twelve” in 1 Corinthians 15:5 “is a clear indication that in the early going this was a **title** given to the special group of twelve whom Jesus called to ‘be with him’ (Mark 3:14). Thus this is their collective designation; it does not imply that all twelve were on hand, since the evidence indicates otherwise” (1987, p. 729, emp. added).

This figurative use of numbers is just as common in English vernacular as it was in the ancient languages. In certain collegiate sports, one can read about the Big Ten conference, which consists of eleven teams, or the Atlantic Ten conference, which is made up of twelve teams. At one time, these conferences only had ten teams, but when they exceeded that number, they kept their original conference “names.” Their names are a designation for a particular conference, not a literal number. In 1884, the term “two-by-four” was coined to refer to a piece of lumber two-by-four inches. Interestingly, a two-by-four still is called a two-by-four, even though today it is trimmed to slightly smaller dimensions (1 5/8 by 3 5/8). Again, the numbers are more of a designation than a literal number.

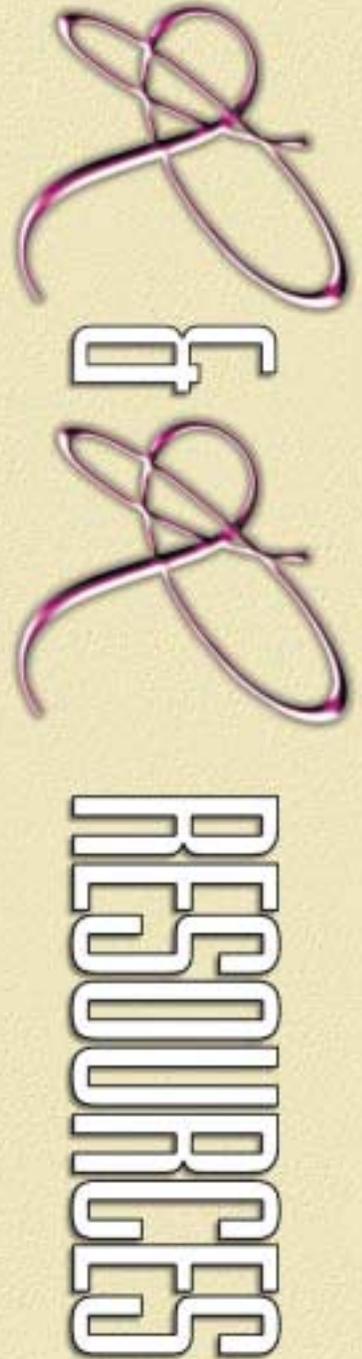
Critics like Steve Wells, author of the *Skeptic’s Annotated Bible*, misrepresent the text when they claim Paul taught: “Jesus was seen by **all** twelve apostles (**including Judas**) after Judas’ suicide and before Jesus’ ascension” (2001, emp. added). Paul did not teach that Jesus was seen by **all** twelve of the **original** apostles (including Judas). The text says simply that Jesus “was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve.” As already noted, skeptics reject the explanation that Paul used the term “twelve” in a figurative sense (yet they must admit that such numbers can be, and frequently are, used in such a way). These critics also disregard the possibility that the twelve may have included Matthias, the apostle who took Judas’ place (Acts 1:15-26). Although in my judgment Paul was using “the twelve” in a figurative sense, it is possible that he was including Matthias with “the twelve.”

Matthias had been chosen as one of the apostles long before Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, and we know he was a witness of the resurrection of Christ (Acts 1:21-22). In fact, it is very likely that he was part of the group that “gathered together” with the apostles when Christ appeared to them after His resurrection (Luke 24:33). When Paul wrote of “the twelve,” it may be that he was using a figure of speech commonly referred to as prolepsis (the assignment of something, such as an event or name, to a time that precedes it). Thus no one can say for sure that Matthias was not included in the twelve apostles mentioned by Paul.

Does Paul’s reference to “the twelve” in 1 Corinthians 15:5 contradict Jesus’ appearances to ten of the apostles on one occasion (John 20:19-23) and eleven on another (John 20:26-29)? Not at all. Either he simply used a figure of speech common to all languages—where a body of persons (or groups) who act as colleagues are called by a number rather than a name—or he was including Matthias.

REFERENCES

- Clarke, Adam (1996), *Adam Clarke’s Commentary* (Electronic Database: BibleSoft).
- Fee, Gordon D. (1987), *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans).
- Wells, Steve (2001), *Skeptic’s Annotated Bible* [On-line], URL: <http://www.skepticsannotatedbible.com/1cor/index.html>.



RESOURCES

Q Was Jesus transfigured six or eight days after prophesying that some would live to see the establishment of the kingdom (Matthew 16:28-17:2; Mark 9:1-2; Luke 9:27-29)?

A At first glance, it may appear to some that Luke’s time line contradicts Matthew and Mark’s account of the amount of time that elapsed between Christ’s prophecy and His transfiguration. However, a closer examination reveals that Luke never intended for his readers to understand that exactly 192 hours (eight 24-hour days) elapsed from the moment Jesus finished His prophecy to the time that He and the others began their ascent to the mount of transfiguration. Luke recorded that it was “**about** eight days,” not **exactly** eight days. Although Luke was a physician (Colossians 4:14), he did not use “scientific precision” in this case. He merely **approximated** the time between the two events.

Furthermore, it seems clear that whereas Matthew and Mark **excluded** the days of the two terminal events (the prophecy and the transfiguration), Luke **included** both days, as well as the six intermediate days, and thus mentioned that the two events were **eight days** apart. Even today,

when people rehearse something they witnessed a few days earlier, they may refer to the events as happening on “different” days. For example, if a store was robbed on a Monday afternoon, and the following Monday morning a witness told friends what he had seen, he could say truthfully that he recalled the events six days or eight days after they occurred. If one were counting only full days, then six would be correct (i.e., Tuesday through Sunday). However, it also would be correct to speak of the events as occurring eight days earlier—if one were including both full and partial days (Monday through Monday). Whether one uses “six” or “eight” does not discredit his story. Likewise, the time difference between Matthew, Mark, and Luke **in no way represents a legitimate Bible contradiction**. Luke simply used the inclusive method of reckoning time, whereas Matthew and Mark counted only complete days (Coffman, 1971, p. 261).

REFERENCES

Coffman, James Burton (1971), *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Abilene, TX: ACU Press).

—Eric Lyons

IN THE NEWS

In 1859, Darwin suggested that whales arose from bears, sketching a scenario in which selective pressures might cause bears to evolve into whales. But, stunned by criticism, he removed his hypothetical swimming bears from later editions of the *Origin of Species*. Unsure how to proceed, yet realizing that whales differed from fish, evolutionists sought a new ancestor. Whales are warm-blooded vertebrates that regulate their internal temperature and, like most mammals (the exception being the duck-billed platypus), female whales bear live young, which are nursed by mammary glands. These (and other) features make whales unequivocally mammalian—a fact that poses a significant hurdle for evolutionists.

According to the November 2001 issue of *National Geographic*, modern-day whales evolved from an animal known as *Pakicetus* (50 million years ago, allegedly). The artist’s reconstruction of *Pakicetus* looks very similar to a dog swimming underwater. However, the artist obviously did not take into account the fact that the fossil was discovered in an area containing fossilized remains of terrestrial creatures such as snails, or that it was found in a land stratum, not an aquatic one. This “ancient ancestor” was discovered in

1983 by Philip D. Gingerich, who immediately pronounced the find to be a primitive whale—**even though he found only a jaw and a few skull fragments!** So what makes *National Geographic* so sure this creature is a long-lost “walking” ancestor to whales? Chadwick stated:

What causes scientists to declare the creature a whale? Subtle clues in combination—the arrangement of cups on the molar teeth, a folding in a bone of the middle ear, and the positioning of the ear bones within the skull (2001, p. 68).

So from mere dimples in teeth and folded ear bones, this animal somehow qualifies as a walking whale? Closer examination of *Pakicetus* reveals that these creatures had little in common with whales and thus is not the ancient ancestors of whales. [See “Walking Whales” on our Web site under Docs’ Dissections for more information on the origins of whales.]

REFERENCES

Chadwick, Douglas H. (2001), “Evolution of Whales,” *National Geographic*, 200[5]:64-77, November.

—Brad Harrub

