

# ARE THERE CONTRADICTIONS IN THE BIBLE

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*The Bible can't be trusted. After all, it speaks of floating axe-heads, the sun apparently going backwards, a universe created in six days, an earth that has pillars and corners, people walking on water, light being present prior to the creation of the sun, a talking snake, a talking donkey, dragons, a young earth, and a senior citizen taking two of every animal on a big boat! In addition, the Bible is replete with contradictions, the presence of which disqualifies it from serious consideration.*

The above demonstrates why it is critically important to answer the charges of skeptics concerning Bible Contradictions. Typically, Christians back away from answering the charge of biblical contradictions, refusing to discuss the point, or they will say that one just has to have faith, or they will claim, with umbrage, that there are no such contradictions in Scripture.

These responses are incorrect and ineffective in evangelizing. These approaches actually drive people away from Christianity in that Christians won't seem to answer or admit to what lies before them. They deny clear evidence and won't provide an explanation. We appear to be ignorant or worse – deceitful. Christians should be clear and truthful:

*Yes, there are some contradictions in Scripture. Most can be explained and are not, in reality, contradictions, but some passages – only a few – seem to be genuine contradictions that at this time cannot be adequately explained. Most of those are Scribal errors having to do with numbers or places or misspellings. None of these contradictions, however, affect the truth of the Bible's message. Further, none affect Christian doctrine. Christians claim inerrancy in the original manuscripts (autographs) only, realizing that some Scribal errors and minor discrepancies have appeared in the copying process over the centuries. God, however, has preserved the Truth of His Word and it remains infallible in terms of doctrine and message. This is evidenced by the amazingly few differences there are in the **Dead Sea Scrolls** – the oldest known Bible manuscripts – compared to our modern translations. Just as one would not reject any other work of history or antiquity because of a few minor inconsistencies or misstated numbers, nor should the Bible be rejected for a similar issue. Furthermore, **Jesus was and is God the Son, in that His resurrection can be proven logically using legal and historical evidence. He trusted the Scriptures as the inspired word of God the Father, never once hinting that error existed.** (Jesus quoted from the LXX – the Greek Septuagint.)*

## TYPES OF CLAIMED CONTRADICTIONS

*(Using the work of Ken Ham in his book: How Do We Know the Bible is True)*

### 1. LOGICAL VS. PSYCHOLOGICAL PROBLEMS:

- a. The Bible can't be true because it contains accounts of miracles, and miracles are clearly impossible. This argument is not rationally sound because it "begs the question."
- b. Here are other non-logical, psychological problems that appear to be impossible, but are not, if one believes in an All-Powerful God:
  - i. The sun going backwards (2 Kings 20:11).

- ii. Walking on water.
- iii. A talking donkey.
- iv. Raising the dead.
- v. Calming a storm with a word.
- vi. Healing illnesses.
- c. To proclaim that something is impossible because it seems counter-intuitive is NOT rational. This is not a logical argument; it is nothing more than opinion.

## 2. THE MISLEADING CONTRADICTION:

- a. A contradiction, according to the **LAW OF NON-CONTRADICTION = A AND NOT A AT THE SAME TIME AND IN THE SAME RELATIONSHIP**. It cannot be both raining and not raining outside at the same time and in the same place. A contradiction cannot be true – ever. However, **A and not A** could be true at different times or different relationships:
  - i. **John is married. John is single**. John cannot be both married and single at the same time and in the same relationship (marriage to his wife). But John could have been married last year, but is no longer married. Further, John could be married to his job, but not to a woman.
  - ii. It is claimed that James contradicts Romans on the topic of WORKS. However:
    - 1. Romans 4:2-3 teaches that Abraham was justified by faith alone, not by works.
    - 2. James 2:21-24 teaches that Abraham was justified by works and not by faith alone.
    - 3. Is there a contradiction?
      - a. Romans 4 is teaching about justification before God: by faith alone. Abraham was considered righteous before God.
      - b. James 2 is teaching about justification before men: “By works (as a result of faith) Abraham was considered righteous before men.
      - c. In addition, James is making the point that true faith will always result in action; therefore, no action, no faith.
      - d. **There is NO contradiction here.**
- b. IF THE BIBLE CONTAINS GENUINELY CONTRADICTORY INFORMATION, THEN IT CANNOT REALLY BE COMPLETELY TRUE, SINCE ONE OF THE TWO CLAIMS WOULD HAVE TO BE FALSE, OR BOTH WOULD HAVE TO BE FALSE, BUT IN NO CASE COULD BOTH BE TRUE IF THEY CONTRADICT EACH OTHER.
- c. Many claimed contradictions are not “apparent” contradictions at all because there is no necessary conflict between the two propositions. For example:
  - i. Jesus is descended from Adam, and Jesus is descended from Noah. These propositions are not contradictory in that both are true.

## 3. FALSE DILEMMA:

- a. Was the Bible given by inspiration of God as indicated in 2 Timothy 3:16 or was it written by men as indicated in other passages (Luke 1:3; John 21:24)? The implication is that only one of these propositions can be true. But this is the fallacy of the False Dilemma because there is no reason both propositions cannot be true: God inspired men to write the Bible.

## 4. CONTEXTUAL CONSIDERATIONS:

- a. Some alleged contradictions commit the fallacy of **TAKING THE TEXT OUT OF CONTEXT**.

- i. Gen. 1:1 indicates that God exists and has made everything. But what about Psalms 14:1 in which we read “there is no God.” This is a favorite tactic of the unbeliever – to take a passage out of context. The full verse reads: “The fool has said in his heart, “There is no God.”
- b. Honor the author’s intentions – in any written work, the Bible included. The Bible is written in the follow genres:
  - i. **Historical:** Narrations should be taken in a literal way.
  - ii. **Poetic:** Such passages should not be pushed beyond their intention.
  - iii. **Prophetic:** Sections using a lot of imagery should be taken as such; those stated clearly should be taken literally.
  - iv. **Figures of Speech:** Should not be taken as anything other than figures of speech.
  - v. **Allegories:** Stories told to make a larger point. The story itself is not necessarily true; it’s the point of the story that is meant to teach.
  - vi. **Imagery:** Descriptions offered to make the point of the teaching more poignant and interesting. The imagery could be true, or it could be simply enhanced description – just as we do today when we tell a story.

## 5. THE FALLACY OF SWEEPING GENERALIZATIONS:

- a. There are a number of places where the Bible speaks in generalizations – things that are generally true, but not universally true. These are not contradictions – it is not a contradiction to have some instances where the general rule does not apply.
- b. Proverbs is an example of generalizations.
- c. The Bible teaches that it is wrong to kill, and yet makes exceptions for self-defense, punishment for certain extreme crimes, and during battle.

## 6. TRANSLATIONAL ISSUES:

- a. A major challenge is that we read the Bible in our own language, while the original language was Hebrew, with the major translation of the Biblical era being in Greek – the Septuagint.
  - b. There are copyist errors in our Bible, but not in the original manuscripts. Variations in ancient manuscripts that are clearly scribal errors should not be taken as the intention of the author, since the author is not responsible for transmission errors.
- THE INFORMED CHRISTIAN DOES NOT CLAIM THAT A COPY OF SCRIPTURE CONTAINS NO SCRIBAL ERRORS, ONLY THAT THE ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPTS CONTAINED NO ERRORS WHATSOEVER. WHY:**

- i. The original Scriptures were divinely inspired. Is a holy, omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent God capable of inspiring the writing of His word without error? Or, is He not?
- ii. Jesus frequently quoted the Scriptures without even a hint of concern over error. If there were scribal errors in the Septuagint, which was quoted by Christ, then they were of no consequence to Christ in terms of the truth of the teachings therein.
- iii. Jesus was and is God the Son, in that His resurrection can be proven logically using legal and historical evidence. He trusted the Scriptures as the inspired word of the God the Father.
- iv. The nature of God does not allow for error in the transmission of His word in the original manuscripts, nor does His nature allow for deception or confusion.
- v. God is capable of preserving the truth of His word throughout the millennia. It is said by Biblical scribal experts that there are only about 400 words in the Scripture that are in doubt.

- vi. The Dead Sea Scrolls, which are the oldest Biblical manuscripts in existence, clearly demonstrate that our text is essentially the same (99.9%) as the text of the Dead Sea Scrolls.
- vii. We must always remember that we are dealing with fundamentally different languages. That, in itself, will cause differences in the various translations.

**7. CONTRADICTIONS OF INFERENCE:**

- a. A Contradiction of Inference is where we merely infer a contradiction that the text does not actually state. This type of contradiction could be called the **X and only X fallacy**. This occurs when the reader erroneously assumes that a number stated in the Bible (X) indicates (X) and not more.
  - i. The demon-possessed man in Mark 5:2-16 and Luke 8:26-37. According to Matt. 8:28-34, there were two men who were demon-possessed. Does this conflict with Mark and Luke, which seem to infer that there was only one man, although the text does not so state. You see, if there were two men, it is also true that there was one man. The fact that Mark and Luke do not mention the other man is interesting, but not a contradiction.

**8. FACTUAL CONTRADICTION:**

- a. The earth is stationary; a young earth; an earth created by God alone.
- b. The big bang; evolution, an earth billions of years old; naturalism.
- c. The critic assumes that the Bible is wrong and man is correct.
- d. This is “**begging the question.**”

**9. THE BIBLE CONTAINS 31,173 VERSES. Exhibit A contains 143 claimed contradictions, or less than one half of one percent of the verses (0.4587%).** *(The number of contradictions is not absolute and may vary according to opinion.)*

**10. EXAMPLES OF BIBLICAL CONTRADICTIONS (10 out of a list of 143 will be presented):**

- a. **Lying – approved or forbidden?**
  - i. **Lying approved and sanctioned [Josh 2:4-6; James 2:25; Ex. 1:15-21; 1 Kings 22:19-23]**
    1. Josh 2:4-6: The lie of Rahab to save the Israelites.
    2. James 2:25: Rahab the prostitute was justified by her lie by saving the Israelites.
    3. Ex. 1:15-21: The Egyptian midwives allowed the Hebrew boys to live in contravention of Pharaoh’s orders. They then lied to Pharaoh saying that the Hebrew women bore the children before the midwives could get to them. God then awarded the midwives and approved of their actions.
    4. 1 Kings 22:19-23: The Lord allowed a lying spirit in the mouths of Ahab’s prophets to entice him to enter into a battle that would take his life.
  - ii. **Lying forbidden [Ex. 20:16; Prov. 12:22; Rev. 21:8]**
    1. Ex. 20:16: The Ten Commandments: “Do not give false testimony against your neighbor.” Strictly speaking, this refers to giving false testimony in court; however, God, who is Truth and speaks only the truth (Ps. 119:160; Jn 1:14; 17:17) expects people to speak the truth at all times.
    2. Prov. 12:22: “Lying lips are detestable to the Lord, but faithful people are His delight.”

3. Rev. 21:8: “But the cowards, unbelievers, vile, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars – their share will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.”
- iii. **Answer:** Perhaps the greater good in God’s eyes and/or the fulfilling of His will establishes the right or wrong of lying. Cannot definitively answer this contradiction. **Appears to be a contradiction.**
- b. **When was man created in relation to the animals?**
- Man was created after the other animals [Gen. 1:25-27].
  - Man was created before the other animals [Gen. 2:18-19].
  - Answer:** The verb “formed” can also be interpreted “had formed” (NIV), which would alleviate the alleged contradiction. **Not a contradiction.**
- c. **How many died of the plague?**
- There died of the plague 24,000 thousand [Num. 25:9].
  - There died of the plague but twenty-three thousand [1 Cor. 10:8].
  - Answer:** Paul states in 1 Cor. that 23,000 fell in one day. It is plausible that 23,000 fell in one day and an additional 1,000 the next day. **Not a contradiction.**
- d. **How did Judas commit suicide?**
- Judas committed suicide by hanging [Matt 27:5].
  - Judas committed suicide by splitting open on the rocks [Acts 1:18].
  - Answer:** Judas could have tied a rope to a tree branch that extended over a cliff. The branch could have then broken causing Judas’ body to fall on to the rocks below and split open. **Not a contradiction.**
- e. **Who tempted David to sin and take a census?**
- David was tempted by the Lord to sin and take a census [2 Sam. 24:1]. After which, God punished David by sending a plague that killed 70,000 people [2 Sam. 24:15].
  - David was tempted by Satan to sin and take a census [1 Chron. 21:1].
  - Answer:**
    - Hebrew writers tend to dismiss secondary causes and attribute all things to God, since He is in control of all things. Thus, God did not tempt David, but allowed him to be tempted by Satan (as He did with Job). In this sense, both God and Satan caused David to sin.
    - Even given the above, God allowed Satan to cause David to sin, or Himself was the cause of David sinning, which seems to be out of character for God. In addition to this conundrum, God then took the lives of 70,000 men – due to David’s sin.
    - The potential explanations seem lacking, with God having an active role – either directly or indirectly – in David’s sin and the death of 70,000 people. **Appears to be a contradiction.**
- f. **How many horsemen did David take?**
- David took 700 horsemen [2 Sam. 8:4].
  - David took 7,000 horsemen [1 Chron. 18:4].
  - Answer:** Appears to be a Scribal error. **Appears to be a contradiction.**
- g. **Is Christ equal with God the Father?**
- Christ is equal with God [Jn. 10:30; Phil. 2:5].
  - Christ is not equal with God [Jn. 14:28; Matt. 24:36].
  - Answer:** This is an example of a lack of understanding of the Trinity on the part of the skeptic. Christ in His essence is God the Son; part of the God-head and is one with the Father. For the accomplishment of His plan for the salvation of mankind, however, he took on the human condition, forsaking His equality with God temporarily in order to sacrifice His earthly life for mankind.

In Christ's earthly form, He was not equal to God the Father; in His true and natural form, He is God the Son. **Not a contradiction.**

**h. Is man justified by faith alone?**

- i. Man is justified by faith alone [Rom. 3:20; 4:21; Gal. 2:16; 3:11-12].
- ii. Man is not justified by faith alone [Jam. 2:21-24; Rom 2:13].
- iii. **Answer:** James is making the point that real faith produces works. To claim faith alone, without works, as the means to salvation is a misstatement in that works emanate naturally from faith. Faith that doesn't produce works is not faith. Therefore, works are not a second requirement to faith for salvation, but rather real faith always produces works. Faith and works are not two separate things but are one, as are fire and heat. A fire that does not produce heat is not a real fire. **Not a contradiction.**

**i. Should a fool be answered?**

- i. A fool should not be answered according to his folly [Prov. 26:4].
- ii. A fool should be answered according to his folly [Prov. 26:5].
- iii. **Answer:** This is a clear case of "either or" usage in Scripture. At times you should not answer a fool in that you will fall into his foolishness, arguing and getting nowhere. At other times, you should mirror the foolishness of a fool to point out his absurdity. Wisdom is required to know which approach to take. **Not a contradiction.**

**j. Was Elijah translated to heaven?**

- i. Elijah went up to heaven [2 Kings 2:11].
- ii. None but Christ ever ascended into heaven [Jn. 3:13].
- iii. **Answer:** Theological explanations fall short in my opinion. **Appears to be a contradiction.**

**11. A QUESTION FOR THOUGHT & DISCUSSION: Why are contradictions and scribal errors present in our bibles?**

- a. Given the following facts and understandings, why does God allow errors or contradictions in the iterations of His holy Word?
  - i. God is omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent and omnibenevolent. Could He not prevent such inconsistencies?
  - ii. God's nature is one of kindness, justice, clarity, without deception, not the author of confusion, and immutable. So why the confusion?
  - iii. Why do we have to demonstrate inerrancy in the original autographs by logical inference alone? Why are the original autographs not available today?
  - iv. The Scriptures are the ONLY source of objective knowledge about God, and thus the truths and teachings of Scripture are necessary for our salvation. We must be able to stand firm on Scripture as the "Word of God." We cannot depend on the teachings of man, for much deception has come from such teachings: (*Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses; Jim Jones; The Branch Dividians - David Koresh; the Worldwide Church of God- Herbert W. Armstrong; Unitarian Universalists; Rob Bell – Love Wins - [Mars Hill Church]; The Unification Church – Sun Myung Moon; Churches/Pastors promoting Chrislom; Churches/Pastors promoting the Health, Wealth & Prosperity Gospel; The Church of Oprah Winfrey; Pastors preaching that Christ is not the only way to heaven; Pastors preaching that man's intellect is the basis of all truth-the intellect of man trumps the Bible*).
- b. So, given the absolute power and necessity of the Scripture, for without it we have no solid foundation upon which to stand, why would God now allow errors and contractions in the Bible?

## CLOSING REMARKS

I believe fully in the Truth, Infallibility, and Inerrancy of the Bible. My belief in total inerrancy (no scribal errors or contractions) applies only to the Original Autographs. I further believe that the infallibility and Truth of all doctrine, teachings of God and His revealed plan, and the relevancy of the Scriptures applies to the Original Autographs as well as our modern-day translations (although some scribal errors and contradictions are present). I believe that the Bible should be understood literally where it clearly states a fact, command or concept that is obviously meant to be taken literally. This includes all matters of morality, the commands of God, and all matters of history. I believe that the Bible should be read and contemplated in terms of the genres in which it is written – history, poetry, prophecy, figures of speech, allegory, and imagery. The poetry, figures of speech, allegory, and imagery should not be stretched beyond their purpose. I believe that God fully inspired the Bible writers to accurately write His message to all mankind. The Bible is totally sufficient for all spiritual learning, moral teachings, knowledge of the Trinitarian God, and for matters of salvation. In every respect, I believe the Bible to be “TRUTH.” Without the Bible, my beliefs would be subjective and absolute Truth (objective Truth) would be unobtainable. I worship the God who inspired the Bible, not the Bible itself, and I fully depend upon the Bible for all I need to know about my God and His eternal purpose. ***Ron J. Lint, CAI***