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Contradictions in the Bible - Why Are They There?

How can you believe a Bible that is full of contradictions?

Contradictions in the Bible - Why Are They There?

The Bible has many *seeming* contradictions within its pages. For example, the four Gospels give four differing accounts as to what was written on the sign that hung on the cross. Matthew said, “This is Jesus the King of the Jews” (27:37). However, Mark contradicts that with “The King of the Jews” (15:26). Luke says something different: “This is the King of the Jews” (23:38), and John maintains that the sign said “Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews” (19:19). Those who are looking for contradictions may therefore say, “See - the Bible is full of mistakes!” and choose to reject it entirely as being untrustworthy.

However, those who trust God have no problem harmonizing the Gospels. There is no contradiction if the sign simply said, “This is Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews.” The godly base their confidence on two truths: 1) “all Scripture is given by inspiration of God” (2 Timothy 3:16); and 2) an elementary rule of Scripture is that God has deliberately included *seeming* contradictions in His Word to “snare” the proud. He has “hidden” things from the “wise and prudent” and “revealed them to babes” (Luke 10:21), purposely choosing foolish things to confound the wise (1 Corinthians 1:27).

If an ungodly man refuses to humble himself and obey the gospel, and instead desires to build a case against the Bible, God gives him enough material to build his own gallows.

This incredible principle is clearly illustrated in the account of the capture of Zedekiah, king of Judah. Jeremiah the prophet told Zedekiah that God would judge him. He was informed that he would be “delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon” (Jeremiah

32:4). This is confirmed in Jeremiah 39:5-7 where we are told that he was captured and brought to King Nebuchadnezzar, then they “bound him with chains, to carry him to Babylon.” However, in Ezekiel 12:13, God Himself warned, “I will bring him to Babylon ... *yet ye shall not see it*, though he shall die there” (emphasis added). Here is material to build a case against the Bible! It is an *obvious* mistake. Three Bible verses say that the king would go to Babylon, and yet the Bible in another place says that he would not see Babylon. How can someone be taken somewhere and not see it? It makes no sense at all - unless Zedekiah was *blinded*. And that is precisely what happened. Zedekiah saw Nebuchadnezzar face to face, saw his sons killed before his eyes, then “the king of Babylon ... put out Zedekiah’s eyes” before taking him to Babylon (Jeremiah 39:6,7). This is the underlying principle behind the many “contradictions” of the Holy Scripture (such as how many horses David had, who was the first to arrive at the tomb after the resurrection of Jesus, etc.).

God has turned the tables on proud, arrogant, self-righteous man. When he proudly stands outside of the kingdom of God, and seeks to justify his sinfulness through evidence he thinks discredits the Bible, he doesn’t realize that God has simply lowered the door of life, so that only those who are prepared to exercise faith, and bow in humility may enter.

It is interesting to note that the *seeming* contradictions in the four Gospels attest to the fact that there was no corroboration between the writers.

How can you believe a Bible that is full of contradictions?

It is truly amazing how often this question is asked. This question contains the assumption that the Bible is filled with many obvious discrepancies which, if true, would make it impossible to believe that the Bible has a divine origin. It is a popular idea to maintain that the Bible disagrees with itself, which casts considerable doubt on its trustworthiness.

If, indeed, the Bible does contain demonstrable errors, it would show that at least those parts could not have come from a perfect, all-knowing God. We do not argue with this conclusion, but we do disagree with the initial premise that the Scriptures are full of mistakes. It is very easy to accuse the Bible of inaccuracies, but it is quite another matter to prove it.

Certain passages at first glance appear to be contradictory, but further investigation will show that this is not the case.

One of the things for which we appeal with regard to possible contradictions is fairness. We should not minimize or exaggerate the problem, and we must always begin by giving the author the benefit of the doubt. This is the rule in other literature, and we ask that it also be the rule here. We find so often that people want to employ a different set of rules when it comes to examining the Bible, and to this we immediately object.

What constitutes a contradiction? The law of non-contradiction, which is the basis of all logical thinking, states that a thing cannot be both a and non-a at the same time. In other words, it cannot be both raining and not raining at the same time.

If one can demonstrate a violation of this principle from Scripture, then and only then can he prove a contradiction. For example, if the Bible said - which it does not - that Jesus died by crucifixion both at Jerusalem and at Nazareth at the same time, this would be a

provable error.

When facing possible contradictions, it is of the highest importance to remember that two statements may differ from each other without being contradictory. Some fail to make a distinction between contradiction and difference.

For example, the case of the blind men at Jericho. Matthew relates how two blind men met Jesus, while both Mark and Luke mention only one. However, neither of these statements denies the other, but rather they are complementary.

Suppose you were talking to the mayor of your city and the chief of police at city hall. Later, you see your friend, Jim, and you tell him you talked to the mayor today. An hour later, you see your friend, John, and tell him you talked to both the mayor and the chief of police.

When your friends compare notes, there is a seeming contradiction. But there is no contradiction. If you had told Jim that you talked only to the mayor, you would have contradicted that statement by what you told John.

The statements you actually made to Jim and John are different, but not contradictory. Likewise, many biblical statements fall into this category. Many think they find errors in passages that they have not correctly read.

In the Book of Judges we have the account of the death of Sisera. Judges 5:25-27 is supposed to represent Jael as having slain him with her hammer and tent peg while he was drinking milk. Judges 4:21 says she did it while he was asleep. However, a closer reading of Judges 5:25-27 will reveal that it is not stated that he was drinking milk at the moment of impact. Thus, the discrepancy disappears.

Sometimes two passages appear to be contradictory because the translation is not as accurate as it could be. A knowledge of the

original languages of the Bible can immediately solve these difficulties, for both Greek and Hebrew - as all languages - have their peculiarities that make them difficult to render into English or any other language.

A classic example concerns the accounts of Paul's conversion as recorded in the Book of Acts. Acts 9:7 (KJV) states, "The men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man." Acts 22:9 (KJV) reads, "And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me."

These statements seem contradictory, with one saying that Paul's companions heard a voice, while the other account says that no voice was heard. However, a knowledge of Greek solves this difficulty. As the Greek scholar, W.F. Arndt, explains:

The construction of the verb "to hear" (akouo) is not the same in both accounts. In Acts 9:7 it is used with the genitive, in Acts 22:9 with the accusative. The construction with the genitive simply expresses that something is being heard or that certain sounds reach the ear; nothing is indicated as to whether a person understands what he hears or not.

The construction with the accusative, however, describes a hearing which includes mental apprehension of the message spoken. From this it becomes evident that the two passages are not contradictory.

Acts 22:9 does not deny that the associates of Paul heard certain sounds; it simply declares that they did not hear in such a way as to understand what was being said. Our English idiom in this case simply is not so expressive as the Greek (Does the Bible Contradict Itself?, pp. 13-14).

It must also be stressed that when a possible explanation is given to a Bible difficulty, it is unreasonable to state that the passage contains

a demonstrable error. Some difficulties in Scripture result from our inadequate knowledge about the circumstances, and do not necessarily involve an error. These only prove that we are ignorant of the background.

As historical and archaeological study proceed, new light is being shed on difficult portions of Scripture and many "errors" have disappeared with the new understanding. We need a wait-and-see attitude on some problems.

While the Bible difficulties and discrepancies have not yet been cleared up, it is our firm conviction that as more knowledge is gained of the Bible's past, these problems will fade away. The biblical conception of God is an all-knowing, all-powerful Being, who does not contradict Himself, and so we feel that His Word, when properly understood, will not contradict itself.

This article is from *Answers To Tough Questions skeptics ask about the Christian faith*, by Josh McDowell and Don Stewart.

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www.christiananswers.net - many Questions answered about Biblical reliability (truth, infallibility & accurateness of the Bible), how evolution & archaeology & astronomy relate to the Biblical reliability, etc.