

## Lesson 9

### THE BIBLE

#### ARE THERE CONTRADICTIONS IN THE BIBLE?

##### INTRODUCTION:

Ever since the Bible was written there have been infidels and atheists who have attempted to disprove its histories, impugn its motives, and misrepresent its morals. Skeptics and unbelievers often make the following argument against the Bible:

“The Bible is filled with error, obvious myths and self-contradictions. This proves that it is *not* a book written by divine guidance, but by fallible men. Therefore, the Bible must simply be viewed as an ancient book which, although containing wise sayings and valuable illustrations of certain moral principles, should not be exalted to the status of a divine production.”

Those who believe the Bible to be the inspired word of God formulate an argument such as: *“If the Bible contains characteristics that are totally beyond the capabilities of human beings, then the Bible was authored by a Being far superior to man (i.e., God).”*

“The characteristics within the Bible that are presented as that which are totally beyond the capabilities of human beings are: prophecies made and fulfilled, scientific foreknowledge, its amazing unity and others. Since the Bible *does* contain characteristics that are totally beyond the capabilities of human beings, then the Bible *was* authored by a Being who is far superior to man (i.e., God).”

**The Bible is either inspired of God or it is not.** One of those positions must be true. They cannot both be true. Neither can they both be false. One position must be true and the other false. This issue has profound ramifications as to how man should live. If the Bible is not inspired of God, it ought to be exposed as a fraud. On the other hand, if it is inspired of God, all men ought to live according to the Bible’s teaching.

Please understand the problem. We have two diametrically opposed positions. Either the Bible contains prophecies, scientific foreknowledge and unity, or it contains inaccuracies, inconsistencies and contradictions. If the Bible is *not* inspired, then the evidence (prophecies, etc.) that is used in an attempt to prove it inspired is incorrect. On the other hand, if the Bible *is* inspired, then the evidence (contradictions, etc.) that is used in an attempt to prove it uninspired is erroneous.

It is my contention that there is not a single error or contradiction in the Bible! For every supposed error that the unbeliever tries to produce, there is a sufficient logical explanation that can be offered. In fact, many of the ***alleged errors or contradictions*** of the Bible are simply manufactured in the mind of the critic!

I do not deny that some passages, when compared with corresponding passages, do appear at first to be contradictory. But the fact that two statements may be difficult to reconcile is no proof that they are contradictory. Any mention of difficult passages brings to mind the statement of the apostle Peter:

2 Pet 3:15-16 And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also, according to the wisdom given to him, wrote unto you; as also in all (his) epistles, speaking in them of these things; wherein are some things hard to be understood, which the ignorant and unstedfast wrest, as (they do) also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction. (ASV)

Notice that Peter did not say: That all of Paul's writings, or the scriptures in general, are hard to be understood. Peter said there are "*some*" things that are difficult. Peter did not say that the scriptures are "*impossible*" to understand. He said that only "*some things*" are "*hard to be understood.*" Some things may be "hard" to understand because of:

- a) Our level of maturity Heb 5:12-14
- b) Our reluctance to accept the teaching (Jno 6:60-66)
- c) Our lack of background understanding (Acts 1:6-7)
- d) Our reading more into a statement than it contains (Jno 21:2-23) or,
- e) Our failure to research the scriptures (Acts 17:11).

Peter said that some things written by Paul are wrested or twisted by the *unlearned* and *unstable* unto their own destruction. This shows that one can misuse the scriptures. We are admonished to handle aright the word of truth (II Tim 2:15). One should approach the study of the scriptures with integrity and reverence. Further, there is a principle that we ought to bear in mind: *Those things in the scriptures that must be understood and obeyed to be saved are among the simplest; things of a deeper nature are there to provide growth and advancement in the Christian life.*

## I. DEFINING TERMS

The term "**alleged**," when connected with the words contradiction or discrepancy, is not to be mistaken for a **proven** contradiction; but this means simply that something is **asserted** by someone to be true or to exist.

The word "**contradiction**" is defined as follows: "*A statement or proposition that contradicts or denies another or itself and is logically incongruous.*" The word contradictory means: "In logic: A proposition so related to a second that it is impossible for both to be true." The word "**discrepancy**" means: "The state or quality of being discrepant, differing, disagreeing, discordant, inconsistent."

John W. Haley in his monumental work, *An Examination of the Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible*, p. 53, says:

"In considering the solutions hereafter proposed, the legitimate force of a hypothesis should be kept in mind. If a certain hypothesis meets the demands of a given case, then, unless it can be proven false or absurd, its logical value is to set aside any and all objections, and to secure a strong presumption in its own favor. For instance, it is said: 'Here is a hypothesis which serves to explain and reconcile the disagreement.' Now, unless our hypothesis can be proven untrue, or irrational, it stands and the objection is effectually met. In such cases the burden of proof devolves upon the objector."

Roy H. Lanier, Sr. made the following observation. *“According to the definition given by reliable dictionaries as the meaning of the word contradictory, it must be absolutely impossible to harmonize two statements before we conclude that they are contradictory. And for one to prove that two statements are impossible of being brought into agreement, that one must know all about the time the statements were made, the purpose for which they were made, the persons by whom the statements were made, and the circumstances under which they were made. If it is at all possible that these things being known there would be no disagreement, the objector has not proved that he has found a contradiction. He may have found, what for him is, a difficulty; but he has not found a contradiction. And it is possible that many of us will be unable to solve many of the difficulties that have been pointed out by infidels and atheists as contradictions, while others who have delved more deeply into the meaning of the scriptures may have little trouble in solving the difficulty. So unless we know that we have more wisdom than anybody else in the world, we should be slow to conclude that it is absolutely impossible for two statements of scripture to be brought into agreement.”* (*Alleged Contradictions Of The Bible, The Holy Scriptures*, edited by Wendell Winkler in 1979).

## II.

### SOME GENERAL RULES TO FOLLOW REGARDING SOME DIFFICULTY

In our study of the Bible, there are certain rules of fairness that should exist. Please take note of the following:

1. Make sure that you have the best translation of the Bible you can obtain. Sometimes it is helpful to compare different translations.
2. Learn whom is speaking and the circumstances involved and the object of thought responsible for the statement.
3. Read the passage of dispute a number of times.
4. Read the setting of the passage. Read before and after the verse under consideration.
5. Notice the wording and the punctuation supplied (usually in italics) by the translators, along with the setting.
6. Of the several possible solutions and reasonable explanations that are usually present for any “difficulty” in the text of the Bible, common sense is always in order.
7. Make sure that each “explanation” be found in harmony with every other known Bible truth.
8. Be sure to start out with the right attitude in an honest search.

## III.

### SOURCE OF ALLEGED ERRORS

Our difficulties with the alleged errors of the Bible will be solved when we learn their origin. John W. Haley in his work, *An Examination of Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible* p. 31, lists the following sources:

1. Difference in dates
2. Difference of authorship
3. Difference of standpoint or of object
4. Different principles and methods of arrangement
5. Different modes of computing time
6. Peculiarities or oriental idiom

7. Use of several names for persons and places
8. Use of the same words for different meanings
9. Error in manuscripts
10. The imagination of critics

The origin of the alleged errors in the Bible might be summed up under the following six headings:

### **First, *A Change in Circumstances.***

People often take random statements from the Bible (failing to take into account their historical setting) and set them in opposition to each other in an effort to prove the Bible is self-contradictory. For example, “***And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold it was good...***” (Gen 1:31). “***And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart***” (Gen 6:6). And error is charged when these two statements are placed side by side, but these two statements were made many years apart (some would say over one thousand years apart). Genesis 1:31 was stated after God created the world and before sin entered, while Genesis 6:6 was made after man had reached such a level of spiritual degeneracy “***that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually***” (Gen 6:5). **Each statement was perfectly correct at the time it was made.**

### **Second, Ignorance on the Part of the Critic**

Many critics boldly proclaim that the “*Bible is full of mistakes and contradictions,*” but when asked to produce one they are, in most cases, totally ignorant, not only of the supposed error, but of the precious truth of the Bible. For example, some critics were confident that the Old Testament references to the Hittites (more than 40 in number) were in error. But in 1906 excavations were begun at Bogazkoy (90 miles east of Anhaso, Turkey), which proved to be the capitol of the Hittite empire. **Today, no scholar in his right mind would claim the Hittites were not a people.**

### **Third, No Single Author Claims to Tell the Whole Story**

Each Bible writer had a definite purpose to accomplish in his writing. The Holy Spirit helped each one select the facts needed to accomplish that purpose, but no writer ever claimed to give all the facts. Each of the gospel writers tells us something that the other writers do not tell us, but no writer contradicts the other in the detail. Therefore, in order to get the whole story, we must read all the accounts.

### **Fourth, Failure to be Fair With the Bible**

Failure to read exactly what the Bible says accounts for some of the alleged contradictions. For example, some people think they have found a contradiction in the Genesis account of the origin of the human family. They allege that the Bible says that all people descended from Adam and Eve. Then, they say that Cain, the son of Adam and Eve, is said to have gone to the land of Nod and found a woman who became his wife. “*If everyone descended from Adam and Eve,*” the unbelievers ask, “*where did this woman whom Cain married come from*”? Now if these critics had been fair with the Bible they would never have come up with such a ridiculous criticism of it. The Bible **does not say** that Cain went into the land of Nod alone and then found a woman already living there. The Bible says that Cain “***dwelt in the land***

*of Nod*” and that while living there *“he knew his wife; and she conceived and bore Enoch”* (Gen 4:16-17). **Therefore, the Bible actually says that Cain lived in Nod with his wife.** In other words, it is only logical to assume that he had a wife before he went to the land of Nod, that she was one of the daughters of Adam and Eve mentioned in Genesis 5:4, and that Cain chose Nod as the place where they lived.

### **Fifth, Misinterpretation of the Bible**

For years critics have argued that Paul and James contradicted each other in their teaching about faith and works. It is argued that Paul teaches salvation by faith apart from works (Rom 4) and that James contradicts Paul by saying that salvation is by works (James 2). This alleged contradiction arises from a lack of study into what they actually wrote. A close examination of the facts will show that **both men teach that a man is saved by faith when that faith leads him to perform the works of obedience which God has assigned.** There is not a single author of the Bible that teaches that salvation is by faith alone. James said, *“ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only”* (James 2:24). Paul wrote, *“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love”* (Gal 5:6) Now where is the contradiction between these two inspired men? **There is none!**

### **Sixth, Blind Prejudice of the Critic**

Many people simply do not want to be convinced that the Bible is the Word of God; therefore, regardless of how much proof one may present in support of the Bible they will not believe. John W. Haley points in his book on dealing with alleged contradictions on page 380:

*“Although in hundreds of cases criticisms of Scripture have been shown to be unfounded, those who refuse to believe in inerrancy never seem to be satisfied. Why is this so? Does it not constitute a frame of mind that wants to disbelieve? Does it reflect a viewpoint that says in effect, ‘I will not believe what the Scripture teaches about itself until every objection has been answered to my satisfaction.’”*

## **IV.**

### **WHAT PURPOSES ARE SERVED BY THE SUPPOSED CONTRADICTIONS?**

First, *they stimulate the human intellect.* Difficulties often arouse men to find the solutions. Roy Lanier, Sr. said, *“Bible difficulties have stimulated infidels to write more books about the Bible than have been written criticizing any other books; and believers have been stimulated to study more than they would have studied to answer infidel criticisms.”* Westcott wrote, *“The very existence of the difficulties in our Gospels – which are the groundwork of our faith – is a fresh incentive to vigorous and rational study.”* One of the greatest beauties of the Bible is that there is always more study demanded and more to learn, and that for a lifetime (2 Peter 3:18). Books of men are read, digested, and set aside after only a brief time, with no further reference after all that can be gained for our lives has been gained. But this is not so with God’s Book! His very thought processes are so far above our own that brilliant men have studied for a lifetime and still find that they have much to learn when studying God’s Book (Isaiah 55:8-9).

Second, *they test the moral character of individuals.* Jesus often spoke in parables to test the moral character and sincerity of his hearers (Matthew 13:1-15; Mark 4:11-13). He knew

that those with honest hearts would exert the necessary effort to learn the truth, but those superficial and insincere characters would reject it. So, today, those who “**love the truth**” will search diligently for the solution to all the difficulties, but those that “**love not the truth**” will be sent a “strong delusion” (II Thess. 2:10-12), and will feel justified, because of the difficulties and seeming contradictions, in rejecting God’s message.

Third, *they become “strong incidental proof that there was no collusion among the sacred writers.”* Indeed, we could say that the differences in the gospel accounts exclude all ideas of an intention to deceive. If they had been consciously inventing the story, then the simplest prudence would have made them avoid all traces of differences in their accounts. David Hartley, in 1749, said:

“No single forger, or combination of forgers, would have suffered the apparent inconsistencies which occur in a few places, such as the different genealogies and variations in the narration of the same fact of Christ.....and some little in different Gospels. These are too obvious at first sight, not to have been prevented, had there been any fraud.”

Fourth, *they give evidence that the Bible and nature came from the same source.* Augustus Neander in his book, *The Life of Jesus Christ*, said:

“God reveals Himself in his word as He does in His works. In both, we see a self-revealing, self-concealing God, who makes Himself known only to those who earnestly seek him; in both we find stimulants to faith and occasions to unbelief; in both we find contradictions whose highest harmony is hidden except from him who gives up his whole mind in reverence; in both, in a word, it is the law of revelation that the heart of men should be tested in reviving it; and that, in the spiritual life as well as in the body, must eat his bread in the sweat of his brow.”

If one has trouble with all the **seeming** contradictions in the Bible, then look at all the contradictions in nature. There is the beauty of mountain meadows for some and the ugliness of barren deserts for others; there is plenty for some, starvation for others; sorrow and sadness fill the lives of some, while others enjoy peace and contentment.

## V.

### IF CONTRADICTIONS REALLY EXIST

To charge that contradictions really exist in the Bible implies a number of other propositions one must accept:

First, **God is a liar**. The Bible declares that God “.....*cannot lie*” (Titus 1:2; and that “.....*it is impossible for God to lie*” (Heb 6:18). If it is true that God cannot lie, and if God is the author of the Bible, then it follows that no two statements in the Bible can contradict each other. As Edward J. Young has well stated:

“If the Bible is indeed God-breathed, it follows that it must be true and infallible. To assume that God could speak a word that was contrary to fact is to assume that God Himself cannot operate without error. The very nature of God therefore is at stake.”

Second, **God has not revealed Himself**. If the Bible was written by fallible men, unaided by any higher power, and contradicting each other often; it follows that God has not revealed Himself.

Third, **the Bible's claim of inspiration is false**. The Bible claims to be the Word of God. It claims that the Holy Spirit helped each writer select the very words to write the thoughts (I Cor 2:6-13). Therefore, should it be discovered that falsehoods or actual contradictions exist in the Bible; our conclusion must be that the Bible does not come from God and is not inspired.

Fourth, **truth is not as powerful as contradictions and lies**. No book has done more for mankind in all areas of life than the Bible. How many books would be left in most libraries if all those influenced by the Bible were removed? If all the works of art, songs and laws, influenced by the Bible, were destroyed how much poorer the world would be. If the testimony of the writers of the Bible is not creditable, and it is "*cunningly devised fable*" then it follows that a few unlettered peasants of Galilee devised a system of religious philosophy and morals that has overthrown all the boasted fabrics of human reason, putting to shame its profoundest speculations, and have become the leaders in human civilization and the acknowledged teachers and guides of the most enlightened nation. **This has never been true of falsehood.**

### THE BOOK DIVINE

Harold Lindsell wrote in "*The Battle For the Bible*, p. 181-182:

*"It is my judgment that many of the so-called discrepancies will be resolved as evangelical scholars give their attention to them. It would be foolish for me or anyone else to assert that all of the difficulties will be answered this side of eternity. They may, or they may not be. But the absence of a solution for even a single remaining problem is no reason to suppose that there is no solution. The fact that there have been dogmatic assertions made about the certainty of this mistake or that only to have the vapor of poison dispelled by a solution suggests the need for critics to be very tentative in charging error against Scripture."*

The inspired apostle Peter pointed out in 2 Peter 3:16-18:

*"as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction. You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard lest, being carried away by the error of unprincipled men, you fall from your own steadfastness, but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen." NAS*

The mind of Him who gave the Bible knows His creatures to whom it is given, and with mercy He leads them ever further in knowledge and understanding, toward Heaven (Ephesians 5:17).

### Questions

1. What argument do skeptics and unbelievers make against the Bible?

---

---

---

---

2. How do Christians reply?

---

---

---

---

3. Explain why the statement “The Bible is either inspired of God or it is not” cannot both be true or both be false.

---

---

---

---

4. What did Peter say about some things being hard to understand in 2 Peter 3:15-16?

---

---

---

---

5. Why may some things be hard to understand?

---

---

---

---

---

6. Give some general rules to follow regarding some difficulty:

---

---

---

---

---

7. Name the different sources of alleged errors:

---

---

---

---

---

---

8. The alleged errors may be summed up under what six headings?

---

---

---

---

---

---

9. What purposes are served by the supposed contradictions?

---

---

---

---

10. What is implied if contradictions really exist?

---

---

---

---