

The Anvil Rings

VOLUME 2



ANSWERS TO ALLEGED BIBLE DISCREPANCIES

Eric Lyons

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NOTE: All bold text in Scripture quotations has been added by the author for emphasis.

THE ANVIL

Last eve I passed beside a blacksmith's door,
And heard the anvil ring the vesper chime;
Then looking, I saw upon the floor,
Old hammers, worn with beating years of time.
"How many anvils have you had," said I,
"To wear and batter all these hammers so?"
"Just one," said he, and then with twinkling eye;
"The anvil wears the hammers out, ye know."
And so, thought I, the anvil of God's Word,
For ages skeptic blows have beat upon;
Yet though the noise of falling blows was heard
The anvil is unharmed...the hammers gone.

John Clifford (1836-1923)

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PREFACE

It seems that scarcely a day passes that those of us at Apologetics Press are not questioned about the trustworthiness of the Bible. We receive phone calls from parents and grandparents regarding difficult Bible passages that they are attempting to explain to their children or grandchildren. We receive letters from prisoners who, while being incarcerated, spend days on end critically pondering whether or not the Bible really is a special, inspired revelation from Almighty God. We receive e-mail from college students whose faith is being tested seriously for the first time in their young lives. As they begin to see the need to develop their own faith, being out from under their parents' watchful eye for perhaps the first time in their lives (for an extended amount of time), they struggle with the most basic tenets of Christianity: Does God really exist, or is He just a figment of our imagination? Is the Bible the product of God, or is it merely the result of man's intellect? Was

Jesus really the Son of God? How do we know that Christ is “the way” (John 14:6), rather than Confucius, Buddha, or Muhammad?

One of the more disturbing messages we have received at our offices since the inception of our work was the result of a phone call from an elder of a church in the heart of the “Bible belt.” The gentlemen informed us that a fellow leader in the church, a man more than sixty years old (whose father and grandfather also had served as spiritual shepherds years earlier), and a man who had worn the name of Christ for nearly half a century, suddenly had given up his long-held belief in the trustworthiness of the Bible. In a letter that this defunct elder and his wife wrote to the church, explaining their recent departure from the faith, they indicated that many things in the Bible troubled them. In earlier years, their beliefs basically went unchallenged. What few things that had given them minor trouble were tossed aside without much investigation. Now, all of that had changed. Although they professed a desire to believe in the reliability of the Bible, they no longer could overlook what they felt were inconsistencies in Scripture.

Aside from the fact that such a recantation of faith by a leader in the Lord’s church has the potential to spark immense turmoil within a congregation, another disturbing thought is why this elder and his wife waited so long to investigate the Bible’s claims of inspiration. Why did they fail to inquire about the Bible’s reliability when they were in their late teens or early twenties?

The fact is, questioning one’s faith earlier in life, and taking the time and effort to find answers to those

questions, is a good (and necessary) thing if a person wants to have a fortified faith. Too often, young people grow up in Christian homes without ever developing their **own** faith in God, the Bible, and Jesus. Too often, young people leave for college without the tools to combat the infidels, atheists, and skeptics who inundate their classrooms. What will happen when they come face to face with statements they never previously have pondered? What will happen when they are asked to defend their belief in a book written more than 1,900 years ago?

Admittedly, every question that we face later in life cannot be foreseen and answered by parents. But we can commit ourselves to equipping saints (especially the young, but also the older ones) with the tools that they will need to fight the “good fight of faith” (1 Timothy 6:12). *The Anvil Rings* trilogy has been written in order to assist Christians in their fight against skepticism, and to help non-Christians see how logical it is to believe in an inspired, inerrant Bible. Whether you are a plumber or a preacher, a biochemist or a bricklayer, a student or a secretary, when questions are raised regarding an alleged contradiction between two or more passages of Scripture, it is my earnest hope that the books, articles, and videos published by Apologetics Press can assist you in your search for, and defense of, the Truth.

Chapter 1



SEVEN ESSENTIAL INTERPRETATION PRINCIPLES

Everyone wants to be understood. We want others to be able to comprehend what we attempt to communicate to them. Though different ages, languages, cultures, personalities, education levels, etc. can make communication among human beings difficult at times, everyone wants to “be heard,” and they want their messages to be heard in the way in which they intend for them to be understood.

When a cashier at the grocery store says, “That will be \$34.32,” he reasonably expects the customer to understand the exact cost of the groceries and to take appropriate action. When a teacher instructs her students to complete the pop quiz to the best of their abilities, she rightly expects her students to comprehend

her instructions and at least attempt to answer the questions before them. When a journalist writes a review of a book for a newspaper, he has realistic expectations that people will attempt to be as fair with his article as his readers should expect him to be with the book that he reviewed.

The Bible, likewise, deserves to be handled fairly. It deserves to be interpreted in a **reasonable** manner. In order to be as fair with the Bible writers as we would want others to be with us, the following basic rules of interpretation must be implemented. Without such principles in place, a fair and just understanding of the Scriptures (or anything else) is hopeless.

#1—BIBLE WRITERS ARE INNOCENT UNTIL PROVEN GUILTY

Imagine how chaotic life would be if we presumed that everything anyone ever said or did was dishonest. If we assumed that everything our parents told us was a lie, we might have drunk Drano® or overdosed on prescription medicine, which they said would kill us. If we supposed that everything we learned about history was a lie, we would never be able to build upon the advancements of past generations. If we lived every day under the assumption that everyone with whom we communicate is lying to us about everything, life would be virtually unlivable.

Generally speaking, people understand the importance of the principle of being “innocent until proven guilty.” A teacher cannot justifiably assume that a student who makes a perfect score on a test without

studying for it cheated. It might be that he had received all of the information elsewhere at another time. It could be that he learned everything well enough in class that he did not have to study at home. Or, it may be that he simply “got lucky” and guessed correctly on the questions he did not know. A teacher could not justifiably punish such a student without evidence that the student cheated. A policeman is not justified in assuming that because a murder was committed by a man wearing green tennis shoes, then the first person the policeman finds wearing green tennis shoes is the murderer.

In our daily lives, we generally consider a person to be **truthful** until we have actual **evidence** that he or she has lied. If a secretary informs a caller that her boss is on vacation, yet the caller receives a detailed e-mail from that boss only an hour later about a work-related matter, is the caller justified in concluding that the secretary is a liar? Not at all. (How many people work while on vacation?) The boss could actually even be in the building for some reason, but still actually be taking “vacation days.” (How many of us have stopped by the work place for an extended amount of time while “on vacation”?) Suppose someone asks you where you are going, and you respond by saying, “I’m going home.” However, on the way home you stop to get milk and eggs at the grocery store. If the same person who asked you that question sees you at the grocery store, would he be right to conclude that you lied because on your way home you stopped by the store? Certainly not! The fact is, most conscientious, reasonable people understand that we are “innocent until proven guilty,” and that false allegations are reprehensible.

In addition to giving people the benefit of the doubt and generally considering them to be truthful about a matter unless we have evidence to the contrary, when we read a historical document or book, the same rule should apply. The writing is considered to be truthful until it can be proven otherwise. Do we have proof that an author of antiquity was lying or mistaken about a matter? If not, we should be careful about falsely accusing the writer. William Arndt properly argued:

The *apriori* assumption must always be that the author has not contradicted himself. This rule is observed in dealing with secular authors. At what pains, for instance, have not editors been to bring about agreement between seemingly conflicting statements in the writings of Plato! The principle by which they were guided was that **no contradiction must be assumed unless all attempts at harmonizing fail**. That is in accordance with the dictates of fairness. Let but the same amount of good will be manifested in the treatment of the difficult passages in the Bible.¹

A book is to be presumed internally consistent until it can be shown conclusively that it is contradictory. This approach has been accepted throughout literary history and is still accepted today in most venues. (You cannot expect to have a coherent ancient history class using Herodotus, Thucydides, Josephus, etc. if you presume that they were all liars.) Respected 19th-century Harvard law professor, Simon Greenleaf, dealt with this principle in his book, *The Testimony of the Evangelists: The Gospels Examined by the Rules of Evidence*:

The rule of municipal law on this subject is familiar, and applies with equal force to all ancient

writings, whether documentary or otherwise; and as it comes first in order, in the prosecution of these inquiries, it may, for the sake of mere convenience, be designated as our first rule: “Every document, apparently ancient, coming from the proper repository or custody, and bearing on its face no evident marks of forgery, **the law presumes to be genuine, and devolves on the opposing party the burden of proving it to be otherwise.**”²

Indeed, the logically accepted way to approach ancient writings is to assume innocence, not guilt. The Bible surely deserves this same treatment.

#2—LEGITIMATE POSSIBILITIES SHOULD SUFFICE

If a cantankerous co-worker saw you getting \$20 out of the petty cash box at work one Thursday afternoon, would he be justified in immediately notifying everyone in the office that you are a thief? The **only** thing this accuser knows is that you took some cash from the money box at work. He has no idea if the boss gave you permission to get the money. He does not know if you were reimbursing yourself for a purchase you made for the company. He is unaware of any pre-arrangement you may have made with the general manager to use the money on the way into work the next morning to purchase doughnuts for everyone in the office. All that this irritable colleague knows is that (1) he doesn't like you, and (2) here is a “reason” you should be fired.

Most anyone who considers such a scenario quickly sees how immoral it would be to jump to such a

conclusion. Why? Because there are many possibilities why you might honestly and legitimately be taking \$20 from the company's petty cash drawer. Without further information and adequate evidence, the legitimate possibility of your innocence must be presumed until actually proven guilty. If a person or a historical document (e.g., the Bible) must be considered "innocent until proven guilty," then, without further evidence, any **possible** answer should suffice.

Suppose that video footage of you taking the \$20 was made available 50 years after your death and no one was alive who could verify one way or another about your innocence or guilt. Yet, since the owner of the video has an axe to grind with your grandchildren, he posts the video on the Internet and labels your grandchildren as descendants of a thief. Again, no fair and just person would think that such an act was right. Why? Because even though no one on Earth knew about the circumstances surrounding the \$20, they knew that there were many legitimate **possible** reasons why you may have taken the money honestly.

Since the apostles and prophets and those to whom they originally wrote have been dead now for at least 1,900 years, when questions arise about what they wrote, it obviously is impossible to ask them what they meant. Although we might like to know why Matthew worded something one way and Luke another way, we may never know for sure. The pertinent question is: "Is it genuinely possible for both accounts to be true?"

For example, Matthew and Mark wrote that "the robbers" (plural) reviled Jesus on the cross (Matthew 27:44;

Mark 15:32). Luke, on the other hand, mentioned that “**one** of the criminals” blasphemed Jesus (Luke 23:39). Luke’s account is obviously different than Matthew’s and Mark’s, but is it necessarily contradictory? In other words, is it possible for all of these accounts to be true?

Consider two real possibilities for the differences concerning the thieves who were hanged alongside Jesus. First, it is quite possible that, initially, both thieves reviled Christ, but then one of them repented. After hearing Jesus’ words on the cross, and seeing His forgiving attitude, the one thief may have been driven to acknowledge that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. How many times have we made a statement about someone or something, but then retracted the statement only a short while later after receiving more information?

A second possible explanation for the differences involves the understanding of a figure of speech known as synecdoche. Merriam-Webster defines this term as “a figure of speech by which a part is put for the whole (*as fifty sail for fifty ships*), the whole for a part (as society for high society)...or the name of the material for the thing made (as *boards* for *stage*).”³ Just as Bible writers frequently used figures of speech such as simile, metaphor, sarcasm, and metonymy, they also used synecdoche. As seen in the definition of synecdoche, this figure of speech can be used in a variety of ways:⁴

- A whole can be put for the part.
- A part may be put for the whole.
- Time might be put for part of a time.
- The singular can be put for the plural.
- The plural can be put for the singular.

It is feasible that Matthew and Mark were using the plural in place of the singular in their accounts of the thieves reviling Christ on the cross. Lest you think that such might be an isolated case, notice two other places in Scripture where the same form of synecdoche is used.

- Genesis 8:4 indicates that Noah's ark rested "on the **mountains** of Ararat." Question: Did the ark rest on one of the mountains of Ararat, or did it rest on all of them at the same time? Although the ark was a huge vessel, it obviously did not rest on the many mountains of Ararat; rather, it rested on one.
- In Genesis 21:7 Sarah asked, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse **children**? For I have borne him a son in his old age." Anyone who knows much about the Bible recalls that Sarah had but **one** child. In certain contexts, however, one might use a synecdoche and speak of one child (as did Sarah) by using the word children. Often, when I call for the attention of my children, I refer to them as "boys and **girls**." I have two sons, but I actually only have one daughter. However, summoning my children with the expression "boys and **girl**" simply does not flow as well as "boys and **girls**." Thus, I frequently use the plural ("girls") for the singular ("girl"). But in the way that I use the expression, **the emphasis is not on the singularity or plurality of the nouns, but on the particular categories** ("boys" and "girls").

It could very well be that Matthew and Mark focused on the **categories** of people from whom the taunts came rather than the actual number of the people in those categories. Matthew mentions how "those who passed by" (27:39), the soldiers (27:27), the scribes, elders, and chief priests (27:41), and "even the robbers" (27:44) all taunted

Jesus. Thus Christ's mockers came from various **classes of people**—including thieves (even though only one may have taunted Jesus).

Again, the conscientious Bible student does not have to pin down the exact answer to an alleged contradiction; he only needs to show one or more legitimate **possibilities** of harmonization in order to remove the initial sting of any “contradiction.” Regarding the thieves who died with Jesus, the skeptic cannot deny that both of the previous explanations are plausible answers to the question of why Matthew and Mark wrote of “thieves” reviling Christ, instead of “thief.”

Which of these possible explanations is correct? In the absence of more information, a definite answer is likely impossible. However, both answers possess merit. Either one is sufficient to answer the charge of error. Over a century ago, the reputable Bible scholar and gospel preacher J.W. McGarvey commented on this point as follows:

We are not bound to show the truth of the given hypothesis; but only that it may be true. If it is at all possible, then it is possible that no contradiction exists; if it is probable, then it is probable that no contradiction exists.... It follows, also, that when there is an appearance of contradiction between two writers, **common justice requires that before we pronounce one or both of them false we should exhaust our ingenuity in searching for some probable supposition on the ground of which they may both be true.** The better the general reputation of the writers, the more imperative is this obligation, lest we condemn as false those who are entitled to respectful consideration.⁵

One Bible antagonist cited a rather easy-to-explain alleged discrepancy and then proceeded to compare the Bible to a “cheating husband” who “has been caught in a contradiction, exposed as a liar, and therefore can’t be trusted to tell the truth.”⁶ In truth, however, the burden of proof was on the Bible critic to verify his allegations and he did not. One must remember how equally deplorable it is to draw up charges of marital unfaithfulness when there is no proof of such. In reality, the Bible should be likened to a faithful husband who has been wrongfully accused of infidelity by prejudiced, overbearing skeptics whose case is based upon unproven assumptions. The Bible is innocent until **proven** guilty. And no guilt has ever been proven. On the contrary, legitimate **possible** explanations exist for the difficult passages of Scripture.

#3—CONSIDER THE KIND OF COMPOSITION

On any given day, we may read a definition in a dictionary, a romantic love letter written by our spouse, a law passed by Congress, an article from a favorite satiric website, and the lyrics of an eccentric song we are contemplating downloading for our children. Obviously, if we really care to understand the meaning of these compositions, we are going to take note of the fact that they are categorically quite different. Love letters do not read like laws (at least we hope not); laws do not read like lyrics; and lyrics do not read like dictionaries. One particular preliminary principle of biblical interpretation to keep in mind is the need to pay special attention to the **kind** of composition. Are you reading laws, letters, prayers,

and prologues penned in prose, or are you analyzing prophecies, lyrics, and speeches written in poetry?

The everyday language that people customarily use in writing (like that which you are reading at this very moment) is prose. This ordinary literary medium is distinguished from poetry, which may be characterized by its rhythm or rhyme (or some other regular, creative pattern), as well as varying kinds of figurative language. The Holy Spirit chose to communicate His message through man using varieties of both prose and poetry. If we want to succeed at effectively interpreting Scripture and arriving at the Truth that God communicated (and that He wants us to learn—1 Timothy 2:4), we need to identify the kind of composition Bible writers used in various sections of Scripture. Consider a few of these.

History

Much of the Bible should be recognized as a historical composition, full of real people, places, dialogue, and events, written primarily in ordinary language (prose). Genesis is principally a book of history that details the beginning of numerous things, including matter, energy, life, mankind, sin, and the nation of Israel.⁷ The book of Numbers is a historical book that describes many events that occurred during Israel's 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. The 12 Old Testament books of Joshua through Esther are oftentimes referred to as "the books of history." They chronicle Israel's history from the time they entered the Promised Land, through the period of the judges, the united kingdom, the divided kingdom, and their return to Jerusalem following 70 years of captivity in Babylon.

More than half of the content of the New Testament could be categorized as history. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John detail many events in the life of Christ, while the book of Acts (written by Luke) serves as a brief history of the first 30 years of the Lord's Church. Although these books only make up five of the 27 in the New Testament, their total content is more voluminous than the rest of the 22 books combined.

Law

Though generally the Bible may be broken down into three law systems (Patriarchal Law, Law of Moses, and Law of Christ), a few books are largely made up of numerous laws and need to be recognized as such. The Bible writers frequently referred to the first five books of the Bible as "the Law" (or more precisely, the Law of Moses) due doubtlessly to the number of laws that Moses communicated to the Israelites. Exodus records the giving of the Ten Commandments, laws about the Passover (which was instituted in Exodus), tort laws, slavery laws, and more. Leviticus contains over 200 individual laws, which, as the name "Leviticus" would suggest, largely focus on matters pertaining to the levitical priesthood, the Temple, sacrifices, religious festivals, etc. Deuteronomy, the English name given to the fifth book of Moses,⁸ means "The Second Law," and refers to the retelling of the laws of God to a new Israelite generation (since the former generation passed away during the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness). Unlike Leviticus, which contains many laws unique to the levitical priesthood, the laws in Deuteronomy focus more on all of Israel. This "retelling of the Law" includes

the Ten Commandments, as well as laws concerning families, the community, war, idolatry, and much more.

Reading and interpreting books made up primarily of law is quite different than digesting other kinds of composition, whether written in prose or a poetic style. Poetry obviously includes a great amount of figurative language, but so do many speeches, letters, and descriptions written in prose. Law is almost always written in clear, concrete language. As D. R. Dungan explained:

If law is being interpreted, we do not expect to find a single figurative expression. The author has evidently tried to be severely plain and definite. The very purpose of law precludes the thought of anything in the composition but the plainest and most direct form of speech. It has been the intent of him who gave the law to have his will carried out by the people. Hence we expect him to use every precaution to prevent any misunderstanding.⁹

Keep in mind, though all biblical books may generally be categorized as a particular kind of writing (e.g., history or law written in prose), they often still contain sections of other unique forms of writing. The Law of Moses, for example, contains speeches, descriptions, genealogies, songs, and much more. But primarily, they are books of law and history.

Epistle

Although we refer to the 66 major sections of the English Bible as “books,” several of them are actually “epistles” (another term for “letter”).¹⁰ In fact, **most** of the New Testament “books” are epistles. One normally has to read only the first few lines of these documents to

detect their epistle-type form (discovering the identity of the sender and the recipient, as well as a greeting and a prayer or statement of thanksgiving). Paul, Peter, James, John, and Jude all wrote one or more New Testament epistles to many different people in a number of different locations for a variety of different reasons.

In their book *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart acknowledged various differences in the New Testament epistles, but went on to highlight what “all of the epistles have in common” that readers need to especially note—“the crucial thing to note in reading and interpreting them”:

They are all what are technically called *occasional documents* (i.e., arising out of and intended for a specific occasion), and they are *all* from the *first century*. Although inspired by the Holy Spirit and thus belonging to all time, they were first written out of the context of the author to the context of the original recipients. It is precisely these factors—that they are occasional and that they belong to the first century—that make their interpretation difficult at times.

Above all else, their occasional nature must be taken seriously. This means that they were occasioned, or called forth, by some special circumstance, either from the reader’s side or the author’s.... Usually the occasion was some kind of behavior that needed correcting, or a doctrinal error that needed setting right, or a misunderstanding that needed further light.¹¹

If we ever want to arrive at a proper understanding of the biblical epistles, it is paramount that we first identify their unique format (which is not a difficult task).

Then, once we learn of their letter-like style, we should move on and actually read it like a letter (though an inspired letter). That is, read it in its entirety, paragraph by paragraph, asking questions all along the way, such as, “What is the occasion of this epistle? What is the writer getting at? What is this letter all about? What is its purpose?” In short, if we expect to understand the New Testament epistles, we must do more than thoughtlessly picking and choosing a few verses here and there to prove some point that we think they teach (when upon a fuller, thoughtful, and serious study, they may not).

Prophecy

The last 17 books of the English Old Testament make up what is frequently called “the books of prophecy.” Isaiah through Daniel are known as the “Major Prophets,” while Hosea through Malachi are referred to as the “Minor Prophets.”¹² Revelation is the only book in the New Testament that fits into the category of prophecy (though it is also a letter—1:4-7; 22:21), as it contains inspired visions given to the apostle John in the first century about “things which must shortly take place” (1:1).

Most people seem to have the impression that the prophets were primarily future-tellers. Though they certainly foretold (by the revelation of God) many things that would soon, or eventually, come to pass, primarily the prophets were **forth**tellers. That is, they were first and foremost public proclaimers of the will of God, including, and especially, reminding their audiences of (1) the blessings of submitting to God’s laws, and (2) the consequences of rejecting them.

The prophetic books present interpretation challenges for at least three notable reasons.¹³ First, similar to some of the difficulties in properly understanding the New Testament epistles (as well as the Psalms), the Prophets generally offer few hints regarding their historical settings.¹⁴ Thus, Bible dictionaries, encyclopedias, and various handbooks can be quite helpful in ascertaining relevant historical background information. Second, many of the proclamations and prophecies in the last 17 books of the Old Testament are in the form of Hebrew poetry, which is significantly different than the customary poetic features (e.g., rhyme) of modern-day America. Third, the Old Testament prophets and the apostle John (in Revelation) used a great deal of figurative phrases and symbols, including apocalyptic language, which communicate important truths to the intended audience while veiling the message to outside forces (who could misuse the prophetic utterances against them). The book of Revelation, as well as various parts of Daniel, Ezekiel, and Isaiah, etc., contain extensive amounts of apocalyptic language and symbols, which conscientious 21st-century Bible students must handle with the greatest amount of care and concern. (To interpret such language literally, rather than figuratively, leads to a complete misunderstanding of the inspired message.)

Poetry

Those unfamiliar with the Bible are likely surprised to learn how much poetry it contains. As mentioned earlier, the prophets (whose writings make up 17 of the 39 books of the Old Testament) often spoke and wrote their stirring messages in the form of poetry. Pieces of

poetic history, prophecy, and lyric (including the songs of Moses and Miriam in Exodus 15, the beautiful, brief, priestly blessing of Numbers 6:24-26, and the song of Mary in Luke 1:46-55) are sprinkled throughout many books of the Bible. Poetry dominates the composition style of Job through Song of Solomon—so much so that when grouping books of the Bible together, many refer to these five as “The Books of Poetry.” Psalms and Song of Solomon, as their titles suggest, are obviously poetic, while about 90% of the book of Job is poetry.

Although “the division between prose and poetry in ancient Heb. is not precise,” thankfully “certain literary devices in poetry allow us to identify poems with a high level of confidence.”¹⁵ In his helpful discussion of poetry in the *New Bible Dictionary*, T. Longman III highlighted three primary poetic devices frequently found in Scripture: terseness, imagery, and most notably, parallelism.¹⁶ Hebrew parallelism is a “peculiar repetition of form, and usually of thought also, in successive, or alternate lines.”¹⁷ Oftentimes the parallel thought is “synonymous,”¹⁸ while at other times there is an advancing thought (known as “synthetic parallelism”),¹⁹ or a contrasting thought (called “antithetical parallelism”).²⁰

Except for the lyrics we hear from modern-day musicians, most Americans (including myself) generally seem to have little interest in poetry.²¹ No doubt, many today wonder why God chose to compose a significant amount of His written revelation to man in a poetic style. Surely He wasn’t simply trying to make life more difficult than it already is. In truth, there are at least two logical possibilities why God chose this style of composition. First, many ancient cultures highly

prized poetic modes of expression. Thus, it made perfect sense for God's messengers, at least occasionally, if not regularly, to compose **poetic** messages. Second, people tend to remember truths more easily when they are communicated in poetry. Even those of us who do not appreciate poetry as much as we probably should, must admit that truths conveyed with rhyme, rhythm, or some other poetic device are often much easier to remember.²² Furthermore, we must keep in mind that "God made use of this helpful phenomenon in an age where reading and writing were rare skills and where private ownership of written documents was virtually unknown. Thus the larger parts of the prophetic oracles were usually expressed in poetic form. People were used to poetry and could remember those prophecies; they would ring in their ears."²³

One of the most important characteristics of poetry to keep in mind, especially as it relates to interpreting the Word of God fairly and accurately, is the amount of hyperbole it employs. Hyperbole is exaggeration. It is "language that describes something that is better or worse than it really is."²⁴ It serves the purpose of heightening the sense of what is being described. If a person hasn't eaten all day, he could say that he is "really hungry." Or, he might say it in a hyperbolic way: "I'm so hungry I could eat a horse." Could he really eat an entire horse? No, and to interpret his words thusly would be to misunderstand his intended exaggeration. Similarly, when, for example, David proclaimed in the poetic language of Psalm 58:3, "The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies," he employed strong, figurative

language. Obviously, no babies literally speak lies from the moment that they are born. However, the wicked judges of David's day had been unrighteous for many years—since rather early on in their lives (but not when they were innocent babies).²⁵ As long as we are aware of the hyperbolic element of poetry, statements such as that found in Psalm 58:3 (and many other places in Scripture, especially in the poetic parts) will be rather easy to properly understand.

#4—CONTEXT IS CRITICAL

Effective communication is impossible without the participants taking into consideration the context in which statements are made. What does a mother mean when, while witnessing her son score his 30th point in a basketball game, she yells to her fireman husband, “Our son is on fire!”? She obviously doesn’t want her courageous husband to run onto the court with a fire extinguisher to “put out” their son. Later that evening, however, when the son is grilling steaks in the backyard, the mother screams those same words to her husband after seeing the propane tank explode in her son’s face. What does she mean now? Likely the husband will have no problem quickly understanding the message, given the context in which it was made.

In our daily lives, both Christians and skeptics generally understand the importance of interpreting one another’s statements within the explicitly stated or implied contexts. When it comes to properly and fairly interpreting the Scriptures, however, Bible critics (and sadly even some believers) often either ignore or dismiss the actual context(s) in which the verses in question are

found. What exactly do we mean by “context”? Clinton Lockhart briefly defined the meaning of the word in his excellent book, *Principles of Interpretation*:

The *Context* of a word or expression is that part of a discourse which is immediately connected with it, or that precedes or follows it. The parts which are closely connected are the *immediate context*; while those of another paragraph or chapter form the *remote context*. In most writings and utterances there is such a connection of thought in clauses, sentences, and paragraphs, that one part will to some extent indicate the meaning of another part.²⁶

Perhaps no Bible verse has been misused more in modern times than Matthew 7:1—“Judge not, that you be not judged.” From church pews to barstools, from the “Bible belt” to popular skeptical websites,²⁷ Matthew 7:1 is ripped from its context and confidently quoted as proof that “Jesus said, ‘Don’t judge.’ Don’t judge anyone at any time.”²⁸ But is that really what Jesus meant?²⁹ Actually, the **context proves otherwise**. Consider how a close look at the surrounding verses and chapters help to correct abuses of Matthew 7:1 and to give its true meaning.

Throughout Matthew chapters 5-7 (often referred to as the Sermon on the Mount), Jesus publicly criticized the Jewish scribes and Pharisees for their self-righteousness and abuse of the Old Testament. Near the beginning of this sermon, Jesus stated: “For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:20).

The unrighteousness of the scribes and Pharisees was at the heart of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus wanted His audience to understand that self-righteousness would not be permitted in the kingdom of heaven; rather, it would lead to “condemnation” in hell (5:20; cf. 23:14,33). A follower of God must be “poor in spirit” (5:3), not filled with pride. He must love his enemies, not hate them (5:44). He is to do good deeds, but only to please God, not men (6:1-4). The scribes and Pharisees were guilty of wearing “righteousness” on their sleeves, rather than in their hearts (6:1-8; cf. 23:1-36). It was in the midst of such strong public rebuke that Christ proclaimed:

Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, “Let me remove the speck from your eye”; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye (Matthew 7:1-5).

In Matthew 6:1-4, Jesus instructed us **not** to do charitable deeds...“as the hypocrites do” (to be seen of men). In 6:5-8, Jesus told us **not** to pray...“like the hypocrites” (to be heard of men). In 6:16-18, Jesus taught us **not** to fast...“like the hypocrites” (to be seen of men). Likewise, in Matthew 7:1-5, Jesus was teaching us that judging another is wrong...**when that judgment is hypocritical.**

But, what if we are doing charitable deeds **to be seen of God**? Then by all means, “do good to all” (Galatians

6:10)! What if our prayers are led from a pure heart and with righteous intentions? Should we pray? Most certainly (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:17). Can we fast today, if the purpose of our fasting is **to be seen of God** and not men? Yes. But what about passing judgment? In Matthew 7:1-5, did Jesus condemn **all** judging, or, similar to the above examples, did He condemn only **a certain kind** of judging? Matthew 7:5 provides the answer. After condemning unrighteous judgments (7:1-4), Jesus instructed a person to “[f]irst remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.” He was saying, in essence, “Get your life right first. Then, in love, address your brother’s problem.” This is consistent with what Paul wrote to the church at Philippi: “Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others” (Philippians 2:4). God never intended for Christians to be recluses who never interacted with those around them (Luke 19:10; Galatians 6:1). Rather, He gave us the responsibility of helping others by lovingly correcting them when they sin. In Matthew 7, Jesus was not suggesting that a person can **never** judge. He was saying, **when** you judge, **judge righteously** (as when we pray, fast, and do good deeds—do it without hypocrisy—John 7:24). Incidentally, Jesus already had judged the Pharisees. Thus, He obviously was not teaching that we should never judge anyone.

Further proof that Jesus did not condemn all judging can be found throughout the rest of Matthew chapter 7. In fact, **in the very next verse** after His statements about judging, Jesus implicitly commanded that His followers make a judgment. He said: “Do not give what

is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces” (Matthew 7:6). Disciples of Christ must judge as to who are “dogs” and who are “hogs.” Otherwise, how can we know when not to give that which is holy to “dogs”? Or how can we know when not to cast our pearls before “swine”? Jesus said we must judge between those who are “worthy” and those who are like dogs and pigs (cf. Matthew 10:12-15; Acts 13:42-46).³⁰ A few verses later, Jesus again implied that His disciples must make a judgment.

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them (Matthew 7:15-20).

Question: How can we “watch out” for false prophets if we cannot make judgments as to who the false prophets are? According to Jesus, determining the identity of false teachers involves inspecting “their fruits” and making judgments—righteous judgments. The simple fact is, those who teach that Jesus was condemning all judging in Matthew 7:1 are guilty of ignoring the context of the passage (as well as the numerous verses throughout the rest of Scripture which teach that sincerely judging the sinful lifestyles of others is necessary).³¹ In short, observing the context of any Bible statement is critical to understanding it properly.

#5—LOOK AT WHO’S TALKING

Another principle that must be remembered when dealing with various biblical passages is that the Bible reports numerous uninspired statements. Even though “[a]ll Scripture is given by inspiration of God” (2 Timothy 3:16), not everything that the inspired writers recorded was a true statement. For example, after God created Adam, He told him not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil lest he die (Genesis 2:17). Yet, when the serpent approached Eve, he “informed” her that she would **not** die if she ate of this forbidden fruit (3:4). Obviously, Satan was not inspired by God to say, “You will not surely die.” In fact, as we learn later, he actually lied (John 8:44). However, when Moses recorded the events that took place in Eden hundreds of years later, he wrote by inspiration of God (cf. Luke 24:44; John 5:46). When Jesus healed a demoniac, some of the Pharisees accused Him of casting out demons, not by the power of God, but by the power of “Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons” (Matthew 12:24). Like Moses, Matthew did not lie, but merely reported a lie. The writers of the Bible are in no way responsible for the inaccurate statements that are recorded therein. Whether the statements were true or false, they reported them accurately.

The above examples are quite basic: Satan’s statement and the Pharisees’ allegations clearly were false. But what about instances where statements are made by individuals who do not seem “as bad” as these? I once read an article by a gentleman who was defending a doctrine by citing various verses in the book of Job. The problem was that these verses blatantly contradicted other passages in the Bible. This man was mistaken in

his understanding of the biblical text because he never took into consideration one of the fundamental rules of interpretation—knowing who is speaking; he simply cited all statements as being true. One who studies the book of Job must realize that it is an inspired book that contains many **un**inspired statements. For instance, we know that Job’s wife was incorrect when she told him to “[c]urse God and die” (Job 2:9). We also know that many statements made by Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar were incorrect. Nine of the forty-two chapters in the book were speeches by these “miserable comforters” (16:2) whom God said had “not spoken of Me what is right, as My servant Job has” (42:7). Clearly, then, one never should quote these men and claim the statement as an inspired truth (unless, of course, an inspired man verified it as being true—cf. 1 Corinthians 3:19).

#6—ADDITIONAL MATERIAL IS NOT NECESSARILY CONTRADICTORY

One of the most commonly neglected rules of interpretation that Bible critics overlook when attacking Scripture is that extra information is not necessarily contradictory information. When one Bible writer offers more details than another on a particular subject, it is inappropriate to assume that one of the writers is mistaken. When a journalist in the 21st century writes about a man on the side of the road who has just escaped death following a particular catastrophe, while another journalist writes how this same man **and** his wife (standing next to him) are suffering survivors of the devastating disaster, it does not mean that the first journalist was denying the wife’s existence. For his own reasons,

unknown to his readers, he chose to focus on only one of the survivors.

Suppose you heard a collegiate athlete say that he tore the anterior cruciate ligament in his **left knee** while playing basketball in high school in 2012. But then, later, you hear him say that he tore the anterior cruciate ligament in his **right knee** while playing basketball in high school in 2012. Are these statements contradictory? Should you assume the man is lying? Not at all. Why? Because it may very well be that the gentleman injured his left knee **and** his right knee in the same year. (Many people have.) The addition or exclusion of information does not mean two different testimonies are contradictory; they may very well be **supplementary**. Countless times throughout Scripture, and especially within the gospel accounts, extra information is given that critics cannot justifiably prove to be contradictory.

John 19:38-40

Consider how Matthew, Mark, and Luke all wrote about how a man named **Joseph** took the body of Jesus following His crucifixion, “wrapped it in linen, and laid it in a tomb that was hewn out of the rock” (Luke 23:53; cf. Matthew 27:59-60; Mark 15:46). The apostle John, however, noted that Joseph actually had help in burying Jesus. He wrote: “Joseph of Arimathea...took the body of Jesus. And **Nicodemus**, who at first came to Jesus by night, **also came**, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds. Then **they** took the body of Jesus, and bound it in strips of linen with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury” (19:38-40). Are the accounts of Jesus’ burial contradictory? Skeptics

could never prove that such is the case. This incident simply is an example of extra information being given by one of the Bible writers. Had Matthew, Mark, and Luke stated that Joseph was the **only** person involved in Jesus' burial, then skeptics may have a valid point to argue. But as it stands, John simply supplemented the others' accounts, adding **additional facts** to the story.

John 18:40

When Mark and Luke recorded how the Jews petitioned Pilate for the release of Barabbas, they both called him a murderer (Mark 15:7; Luke 23:18-19; Acts 3:14). Yet, when John wrote about Barabbas, he omitted all discussion about his homicidal past and simply indicated that "Barabbas was a robber" (John 18:40). Is it possible that Barabbas was both a murderer **and** a thief? Of course. How many prisons around the world today house individuals who have committed both murder and burglary?

The Bible writers may not have worded things exactly the way some may think they should have, but such personal (or cultural) preferences do not invalidate their writings. Throughout the gospel accounts, statements are supplemented. Extra evidence frequently is given. And, the truth is, such supplementation should be expected from inspired, **independent** writers who did not have to participate in collusion in order to convey accurately the Good News of Jesus Christ. When one recognizes that supplementation cannot inherently be equated with a contradiction, many of the so-called "Bible contradictions" are easily (and logically) explained away.

#7—BE CAREFUL WITH QUOTATION MARKS AND RED LETTERS

Quotation marks in modern written texts are often very beneficial to the reader. They help the reader know exactly when a person is speaking. They also help the reader understand exactly what the person has said. Did the husband merely say that he appreciated his wife, or did he tell his wife: “I love you more than life itself”? Did Patrick Henry merely ask for freedom, or did he cry, “Give me liberty or give me death”? Did Abraham Lincoln state, “About 90 years ago, our grandparents started a country,” or did he actually say, “Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation”? Quotation marks help the reader to know the difference between an actual quote and a paraphrase of what was said.

Whereas writers in modern times are accustomed to using quotation marks for direct quotes, students of the Bible must understand that “ancient writers did not use the same literary devices employed today. **Quotation marks**, colons, ellipsis marks, brackets, etc., **were unknown to them.**”³² It is very important for Bible students to keep in mind that the inspired writers of Scripture and the amanuenses who copied their works did not use quotation marks to identify what various individuals said. As with all writers of antiquity, quotation marks were foreign to the Bible writers. The **thousands** of quotation marks (as well as the other aforementioned punctuation marks) in most modern translations were added by translators in hopes of helping the Bible student have an easier time understanding the text. Unfortunately, quotation marks can

be a hindrance if the Bible student does not first understand that the inspired writers often did not intend for their statements to be precise quotations, but rather summaries of inspired truths.

Sometimes it is quite obvious that quotation marks are out of place. For example, the inspired writer of 1 Kings 14 recorded how God informed the prophet Ahijah that King Jeroboam's wife was coming to pay him a visit. The penmen then wrote: "Thus and thus you shall say to her" (14:5). In several versions that utilize quotation marks (e.g., NKJV, NASB, RSV, etc.) you may be left with the impression that what God told Ahijah was literally, "thus and thus...." In actuality, "thus and thus" was merely the inspired writer's way of saying that God spoke some things to Ahijah—the things that Ahijah then specifically relayed to Jeroboam's wife in verses 6-16. God did not literally reveal "thus and thus" to Ahijah. He revealed to him some very specific words that the phrase "thus and thus" summarizes.

The same terminology was used in 2 Kings when, after an Israelite servant informed Naaman's wife that Elisha could heal Naaman of his leprosy, Naaman told the King of Syria, "**Thus and thus** said the girl who is from the land of Israel" (2 Kings 5:4). Naaman obviously did not approach the King of Syria and literally say, "thus and thus." Rather than repeat what the girl said to Naaman's wife, the inspired penman of 2 Kings summarized Naaman's statement to the king with the words "thus and thus." Yet, because these words appear within quotations marks in certain modern translations, some might misinterpret the encounter. These two examples from 1 and 2 Kings are elementary, but they clearly

demonstrate how Bible students in the 21st century must be careful when interpreting “quotations” from 2,000+ years ago.

Quotations of Jesus

Numerous times in the gospel accounts, the Bible writers recorded statements made by Jesus while He was on Earth. Although Bible writers frequently recorded the same statements, they are not exactly (word-for-word) alike. For example, whereas Matthew recorded that Jesus told Satan, “**It is written again** (*palin gegrafti*), ‘You shall not tempt the Lord your God’” (4:7), Luke wrote: “**It has been said** (*eiratai*), ‘You shall not tempt the Lord your God’” (4:12). Although this difference is considered minor, and is referring to the same thing (the Old Testament), Matthew and Luke still recorded Jesus’ statement using different words. Why? Why did Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John not always record the words of Jesus exactly alike?

First, it is possible that some differences throughout the gospel accounts are due to Jesus having made **both** statements. It is unwise to think that every similar statement recorded by the gospel writers must refer to the exact same moment. In the example of Jesus responding to Satan’s temptation, it may be that Jesus repeated the same thought on the same occasion using different words. After telling Satan, “**It has been said**, ‘You shall not tempt the Lord your God,’” Jesus could have re-emphasized the point (especially if Satan repeated the temptation) by saying, “**It is written**, ‘You shall not tempt the Lord your God.’” Thus, Jesus could have made both statements.

A second reason why differences exist among the gospel writers' quotations of Jesus is because the writers' purpose was to record precisely what the **Holy Spirit** deemed necessary (cf. John 16:13), but not necessarily exactly what Jesus said. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21), one writer may paraphrase a person's (e.g., Jesus') words, while another writer may quote the exact words. Similar to how two different but honest, intelligent newspaper reporters can give accurate accounts of the same event, all the while using different terminology, styles, etc., God's inspired penmen could give **accurate** accounts of what Jesus communicated to mankind, especially considering "**they were moved by the Holy Spirit**" (2 Peter 1:21).

Red-Letter Bibles

At times in the gospel accounts there is no clear way to know for sure if the Bible writers were quoting Jesus or simply narrating the inspired story. As commentator Leon Morris correctly concluded:

[F]rom time to time in the Gospel [of John—EL] we have the meditations of the [e]vangelist, but **it is difficult to know where they begin and end**. In the first century there were no devices like quotation marks to show the precise limits of quoted speech. The result is that we are always left to the probabilities and **we must work out for ourselves where a speech or quotation ends**.³³

For example, we cannot say for sure if John 3:16—arguably the most frequently quoted Bible verse in the world—is a direct quotation of Jesus or a comment by John. The great thing is, we do not have to know this

in order to know the teachings of God. Whether John 3:16 is a direct quote from Jesus or not, **it is from God**, and thus divinely authoritative. We must be careful not to assume that red-letter Bibles have all of (and only) Jesus' direct quotations printed in red. Judgment calls must be made by publishers as to which words they put in red and which words they do not. The fact is, whatever color publishers make the words of Jesus and the Bible writers, **all of them** deserve our utmost respect because **all of them** come from God. As the psalmist proclaimed: "The **entirety** of Your word is truth, and **every one** of your righteous judgments endures forever" (Psalm 119:160).

Throughout the Bible, one can find accurate statements that Jesus and others made, but not necessarily the exact quotations (despite the fact that modern translators and publishers often offset the sayings of Jesus with red letters and within quotation marks). Keep in mind, however, that inspired **summaries** of what someone said do not take away from the accuracy of the God-given Scriptures, nor a person's ability to apply those Scriptures to one's life.

CONCLUSION

Twentieth-century American author and children's book illustrator John McCloskey once stated, "I know you believe you understand what you think I said, but I'm not sure you realize that what you heard is not what I meant."³⁴ Sadly, many people make the mistake of initially (and often hastily) thinking they know what the Bible says and means, when actually what "they heard" is not what the writers meant.

The fact is, whether it be in personal conversations with friends or in studies of works of antiquity, it takes some time and effort to properly understand others. We believe that the seven foundational interpretation principles expounded upon in this chapter are critical to a fair and proper understanding of the Bible. These principles are especially important to remember when attempting to arrive at correct conclusions while comparing two or more different Bible passages.

Now that we've set forth some fundamental rules of interpretation, let's turn our attention throughout the rest of this volume to answering many of the alleged discrepancies that skeptics have proposed as insurmountable.

Chapter 2



ALLEGED CONTRADICTIONS REGARDING GOD'S ATTRIBUTES

The infinite attributes and actions of God are no small matter to consider. In truth, man could **never** meditate on anything greater. We marvel, as did the apostle Paul, at “the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!” (Romans 11:33). We are awestruck by His eternity. We tremble at the thought of His omnipotence. We humbly bow before Him Who knows our every thought. As David recognized, “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me” (Psalm 139:6). Experientially speaking, as finite beings, we will never be able to fully grasp the wonders of God. As Jehovah Himself said, “My thoughts are not

your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways.... For as the heavens are higher than the Earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8-9). Yet, how thankful we are that God chose to reveal certain things to us about Himself (cf. Deuteronomy 29:29; 1 Corinthians 2:10-16), which, as much as is humanly possible, we can come to know. He is love (1 John 4:8). He is logical (1 Corinthians 14:33). He is just (Acts 10:34-35). He is worthy of all praise, honor, and obedience (Psalm 18:3; Matthew 10:34-39). He is everything that His inspired Word reveals that He is.

Oftentimes, however, passages of Scripture are cited by Bible critics as “proof” of the Book’s errancy and of the contradictory portrait that the inspired writers allegedly painted of God. In his 2009 debate with Kyle Butt on the existence of God, atheist Dan Barker spent nearly two-thirds of his opening 15-minute speech listing 14 alleged “inconsistencies” among Bible verses that allude to various characteristics and actions of God.¹ Dennis McKinsey, in his book titled *Biblical Errancy*, spent 44 pages listing numerous charges against God and the Bible’s statements about Him.² On his website attempting to expose the Bible and the God of the Bible as frauds, R. Paul Buchman listed 83 “contradictions” involving “God’s Nature” and 142 about “God’s Laws.”³

Legion are those who claim that the Bible paints an inexplicable, paradoxical portrait of God. When the Scriptures are honestly and carefully examined, however, all such criticisms of the Creator and His Word are shown to be either mere misunderstandings or artificially contrived contradictions.

DOES GOD REALLY KNOW EVERYTHING?

Genesis 18:21; Psalm 44:21; 139:1-8; 1 John 3:20

Numerous passages of Scripture clearly teach that God is omniscient. The Bible declares that the Lord “knows the secrets of the heart” (Psalm 44:21), that His eyes “are in every place” (Proverbs 15:3), and that “His understanding is infinite” (Psalm 147:5). Of Jehovah, the psalmist also wrote:

O Lord, You have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off. You comprehend my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word on my tongue, but behold, O Lord, You know it altogether.... Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain it. Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there (139:1-4,6-8).

The New Testament reemphasizes this truth, saying, “God is greater than our heart, and **knows all things**” (1 John 3:20). “[T]here is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account” (Hebrews 4:13). He knows not only the past and the present, but the future as well (Acts 15:18; cf. Isaiah 46:10). According to the Bible, there is nothing outside of the awareness of God.

If God knows (and sees) everything, some have questioned why certain statements exist in Scripture that

seem to indicate otherwise. Why was it that God questioned Cain regarding the whereabouts of his brother Abel if He already knew where he was (Genesis 4:9)? Why did the Lord and two of His angels ask Abraham about the location of his wife if He is omniscient (Genesis 18:9)? And, if God knows all and sees all, why did He say to Abraham concerning Sodom and Gomorrah: “I will go down now and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry against it that has come to Me; and **if not, I will know**” (Genesis 18:21; cf. Genesis 22:12⁴)? If God is omniscient, why would He need to “go” somewhere to “see whether” people were wicked or not? Does God really know everything?

First, when critics claim that the questions God asked Cain or Abraham (or Satan—cf. Job 1:7; 2:2) suggest that God’s knowledge is limited, they are assuming that all questions are asked solely for the purpose of obtaining information. Common sense should tell us, however, that questions often are asked for other reasons. Are we to assume that God was ignorant of Adam’s whereabouts when He asked him, “Where are you?” (Genesis 3:9). At the beginning of God’s first speech to Job, God asked the patriarch, “Where were you when I laid the foundations of the Earth?” (38:4). Are we to believe that God did not know where Job was when He created the world? Certainly not! What father, having seen his son dent a car door, has not asked him, “Who did that?” Obviously, the father did not ask the question to obtain information, but rather to see if the son would admit to something the father knew all along. When a dog owner, who comes home from work and sees the arm of his couch chewed to

pieces, points to the couch and asks his puppy, "Did you do that?" are we to think that the owner really is asking the question for his own benefit?

On occasion, Jesus used questions for the same purpose. When He questioned the Pharisees' disciples and the Herodians regarding whose inscription was on a particular coin, it clearly was not because He did not know (Matthew 22:15-22). Likewise, when Jesus asked the multitude that thronged Him, "Who touched Me?" (Luke 8:45), it was not because the woman who touched Him was hidden from Him (Luke 8:47). Jesus knew the woman was made well by touching His garment before she ever confessed to touching Him (Mark 5:32). Thus, His question was intended to bring attention to her great faith and His great power (Mark 5:34). Truly, in no way are the questions God asks mankind an indication of His being less than divine.

What about Jehovah's statement to Abraham recorded in Genesis 18:21? Did He not know the state of Sodom and Gomorrah prior to His messengers' visit (Genesis 18:22; 19:1-29)? Did He have to "learn" whether the inhabitants of these two cities were as evil as some had said? Certainly not. Moses and the other Bible writers' usage of phrases such as "I will know" (Genesis 18:21) or "now I know" (Genesis 22:12) in reference to God, actually are for the benefit of man. Throughout the Bible, human actions (such as learning) frequently are attributed to God for the purpose of helping finite beings better understand Him. This kind of accommodative language is called anthropomorphic (meaning "man form"). When Jehovah "came down to see the city and the tower" built at Babel (Genesis

11:5), it was not for the purpose of gaining knowledge. Anthropomorphic expressions such as these are not meant to suggest that God is not fully aware of everything. Rather, as in the case of Babel, such wording was used to show that He was “officially and judicially taking the situation under direct observation and consideration, it having become so flagrant that there was danger (as in the days of Noah) that the truth of God’s revelation might be completely obliterated if it were allowed to continue.”⁵ Almighty God visited Sodom and Gomorrah likely “for appearance’ sake, that men might know directly that God had actually seen the full situation before He acted in judgment.”⁶ As Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown noted in their commentary on Genesis: “These cities were to be made ensamples to all future ages of God’s severity, and therefore ample proof given that the judgment was neither rash nor excessive (Ezek 18:23; Jer 18:7).”⁷

Similar to how God instructs us to pray and make “known” to Him our petitions for our benefit (Philippians 4:6), even though He actually already knows our prayers and needs before we voice them (Matthew 6:8), **for our profit** the Bible sometimes speaks of the all-knowing God in accommodative language as acquiring knowledge.

DID GOD TEMPT ABRAHAM?

Genesis 22:1; James 1:13

One of the most criticized passages throughout the centuries in the book of Genesis has been chapter 22. In recent years, relentless Bible critic Dan Barker has alleged that he “knows” the God of the Bible cannot

exist because “there are mutually incompatible properties/characteristics of the God that’s in this book [the Bible–EL] that rule out the possibility of His existence.” One of the scriptures that Barker frequently cites as proof of the Bible’s alleged inconsistent portrait of God is verse one of Genesis 22.⁸ According to the King James translation of this passage, Genesis 22:1 affirms that “God did tempt Abraham” (KJV) to sacrifice his son Isaac. However, since James 1:13 says, “Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, **neither tempteth he any man**” (KJV), Barker has insisted that God is like a married bachelor or a square circle—He cannot logically exist, if He both tempts and does not tempt.

If Genesis 22:1 actually taught that God tempted Abraham to commit evil and sin, then the God of the Bible might be a “square circle,” i.e., a logical contradiction. But, the fact of the matter is, God did not tempt Abraham to commit evil. Barker and others have formulated this argument based upon the King James Version and only **one** meaning of the Hebrew word (*nâsâh*) found in Genesis 22:1. Although the word **can** mean “to tempt,” the first two meanings that Brown, Driver, and Briggs give for *nâsâh* in their Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament is “to test, to try.”⁹ Likewise, the *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament* defines the word simply “to test.”¹⁰ The *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* agrees that *nâsâh* is best translated, whether in secular or theological contexts, as “testing.”¹¹ For this reason, virtually all major translations in recent times, including the NKJV, NASB, ESV, NIV, and RSV, translate Genesis 22:1 using the term “tested,” not tempted.

When David put on the armor of King Saul prior to battling Goliath, the shepherd realized: “I cannot walk with these, for I have not **tested** (*nâsâh*) them” (1 Samuel 17:39). Obviously, this testing had nothing to do with David “tempting” his armor; he simply had not tested or tried on Saul’s armor previously. God led Israel during 40 years of desert wanderings “to humble...and **test**” them (Deuteronomy 8:2), not to tempt them to sin. Notice also the contrast in Exodus 20:20 between (1) God testing man and (2) trying to cause man to sin. After giving Israel the Ten Commandments, Moses said: “Do not fear; for God has come to **test** (*nâsâh*) **you**, and that His fear may be before you, **so that you may not sin**” (Exodus 20:20). If one were to use Barker’s reasoning that *nâsâh* must mean “to tempt,” regardless of the context, then he would have to interpret Exodus 20:20 to mean that God tempted Israel to sin, so that they would not sin—which would be an absurd interpretation.

When a person interprets the Bible, or any other book, without recognizing that words have a variety of meanings and can be used in various senses, a rational interpretation is impossible. Many alleged Bible contradictions are easily explained simply by acknowledging that words are used in a variety of ways (as they are today). Is a word to be taken literally or figuratively? Must the term in one place mean the exact same thing when in another context, or may it have a different meaning? If English-speaking Americans can intelligibly converse about **running** to the store in the 21st century by **driving** a car, or if we can easily communicate about **parking** on **driveways**, and **driving** on **parkways**, why do some people have such a difficult time understanding the various ways in

which words were used in Bible times? Could it be that some Bible critics like Barker are simply predisposed to interpret Scripture unfairly? The evidence reveals that is exactly what is happening.

Rather than contradicting James 1:13, Genesis 22:1 actually corresponds perfectly with what James wrote near the beginning of his epistle: “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various **trials**, knowing that the **testing of your faith produces patience**. But let patience have its perfect work, **that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing**” (1:2-4). By instructing Abraham to sacrifice his promised son (cf. Hebrews 11:17), God gave Abraham another opportunity to prove his loyalty to Him, while Abraham simultaneously used this trial to continue developing a more complete, mature faith.

DID GOD INCITE DAVID TO NUMBER ISRAEL?

2 Samuel 24:1; 1 Chronicles 21:1

Census-taking under the Law of Moses was not inherently evil. In fact, God actually commanded Moses to number the Israelite soldiers on two different occasions—once in the second year after deliverance from Egyptian bondage, and again about forty years later near the end of Israel’s wanderings in the desert (Numbers 1:1-3,19; 26:2-4). Even though the book of Numbers describes many of their experiences while wandering through a barren land, the book takes its name (first assigned by the translators of the Septuagint) from these two numberings of the Israelites. Indeed, the taking of a census

was a legitimate practice under the old law (cf. Exodus 30:11-16). Sometimes, however, one's motives can turn lawful actions into sinful deeds (cf. Matthew 6:1-18). Such was the case with King David when he decided to number the Israelites in the latter part of his reign. God had not commanded a census to be taken, nor did David instigate it for some noble cause. Instead, the Bible implies that David's intentions (and thus his actions) were dishonorable, foolish, and sinful (cf. 2 Samuel 24:3,10ff.).

For many Bible readers, the parallel accounts that describe David's numbering of Israel (found in 2 Samuel 24 and 1 Chronicles 21) pose a serious problem. "Why does 2 Samuel 24:1 state that **God** 'moved' David against Israel, while 1 Chronicles 21:1 says that it was **Satan** who 'stood up against Israel, and moved David to number Israel'?" Can both passages be right, or is this a contradiction?

The Hebrew verb *sûth*, translated "moved" (NKJV) or "incited" (NASB), is identical in both passages. God's and Satan's actions are described using the same word. The difference lies with the sense in which the word is used: Satan incited (or tempted—cf. 1 Thessalonians 3:5) David more directly, while God is spoken of as having incited David because He **allowed** such temptation to take place. The Hebrews often used active verbs to express "not the doing of the thing, but the **permission** of the thing which the agent is said to do."¹² Throughout the Bible, God's allowance of something to take place often is described by the sacred writers as having been done **by the Lord**.

The book of Exodus records how God hardened Pharaoh's heart (Exodus 7:3,13; 9:12; 10:1; et al.), but it was not the case that God directly forced Pharaoh to reject His will. Rather, God hardened his heart in the sense that God provided the circumstances and the occasion for Pharaoh to reject His will. God sent Moses to place His demands before Pharaoh, even accompanying His Word with miracles to confirm the divine origin of the message (cf. Mark 16:20). Pharaoh made up his own mind to resist God's demands. God merely provided the occasion for Pharaoh to demonstrate his unyielding attitude. If God had not sent Moses, Pharaoh would not have been faced with the dilemma of whether or not to release the Israelites. So God was certainly the initiator of the circumstances that led to Pharaoh's sin, but He was not the author (or direct cause) of Pharaoh's defiance.¹³

Another instance where this idiomatic language can be found is in the book of Job. In fact, the situation regarding God and Satan inciting David to number Israel probably more closely parallels the first two chapters of Job than any other passage of Scripture. Satan went into the presence of God on two different occasions in Job 1-2. The first time, he charged that righteous Job only served God because of the blessings God showered upon him (1:9-11). God thus permitted Satan to afflict Job with suffering, telling Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your power; only do not lay a hand on his person" (1:12). After Satan used both humans and natural agency to destroy Job's wealth and all of his children (1:13-19), Satan returned to the Lord's presence. Notice the exchange of words between God

and Satan (in view of the Hebrew idiomatic thought: what God **permits**, He is said to **do**).

Then the Lord said to Satan, “Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil? And still he holds fast to his integrity, although **you incited Me against him**, to destroy him without cause.” So Satan answered the Lord and said, “Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life. But stretch out **Your hand** now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will surely curse You to Your face!” And the Lord said to Satan, “Behold, he is in **your hand**, but spare his life.” So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord, and struck Job with painful boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head (Job 2:3-7).

Even though God knew that Satan was the direct cause for Job’s suffering (recorded in chapter one), He told Satan: “[Y]ou **incited Me** against him, to destroy him without cause” (2:3). As a result of Job’s abstaining from sin during this time of suffering, Satan then proposed a new challenge to God, saying, “But stretch out Your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will surely curse You to Your face” (vs. 5). In essence, God said, “Okay. I will,” but He did **not** do it **directly**. He merely allowed **Satan** to do it: “Behold, he [Job] is in your hand, but spare his life” (vs. 6). So **Satan** “struck Job with painful boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head” (vs. 7). The dialog between God and Satan in Job chapter 2 leaves no doubt that **what God permits** to take place often is described by sacred writers as having been **done by God**. The inspired author of Job even

reiterated this point forty chapters later, when he wrote: “Then all his [Job’s] brothers, all his sisters, and all those who had been his acquaintances before, came to him and ate food with him in his house; and they consoled him and comforted him **for all the adversity that the Lord had brought upon him**” (42:11).

In his commentary on 2 Samuel, Burton Coffman made mention that the same principle still is operative in the Christian dispensation.

Paul pointed out that people who do not love the truth but have pleasure in unrighteousness are actually incited by God to believe a falsehood that they might be condemned (2 Thessalonians 2:9-12). “Therefore God sends upon them a strong delusion to make them believe what is false, so that all may be condemned, etc.”¹⁴

Those discussed in 2 Thessalonians 2 made a decision to reject the truth of God’s Word (cf. vs. 10) and believe a lie. God sends a delusion in the sense that He controls the world’s drama.

The problem of how a loving God (1 John 4:8) can send a “strong delusion” (2 Thessalonians 2:11), harden someone’s heart (Exodus 9:12), or incite someone to sin (as in the case of David numbering Israel—2 Samuel 24:1), can be compared to God’s work in nature. In one sense, a person could speak of God killing someone who jumps from a 100-story building to his death, because it was God Who set in motion the law of gravity (but He did not force the person over the edge). Some inspired writers wrote from this viewpoint, which was customary in their culture.

Similar to how Pharaoh hardened his heart because God gave him occasion to do such, and similar to how Job suffered because God allowed Satan to strike Job with calamity, God allowed Satan to incite David to sin (1 Chronicles 21:1). Israel suffered as a direct result of Satan's workings in the life of King David—workings that God allowed. Thus, both God and Satan legitimately could be said to have incited the king—but in different ways (and for different reasons).

LOVE IS NOT JEALOUS, SO WHY IS GOD?

1 John 4:8; 1 Corinthians 13:4; Exodus 20:5

The argument goes something like this: (1) 1 John 4:8 indicates that “God is love;” (2) 1 Corinthians 13:4 says that “love...is not jealous” (NASB); and yet (3) Exodus 20:5, along with several other passages, reveals that God is “a jealous God.” “How,” the skeptic asks, “can God be jealous when several verses say God is love and 1 Cor. says love is not jealous?”¹⁵ Other critics such as Richard Dawkins alleged that “[t]he God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant actor in all fiction: **jealous** and proud of it.”¹⁶ Penn Jillette listed God being “jealous and insecure” seventh in his list of reasons for becoming an atheist.¹⁷ Dan Barker went so far as to say:

If we were forced to reduce the entire Old Testament to a single word, what would it be? It would not be “love.” There is not enough love there to fill a communion cup.... The one word that sums up the scenario between Genesis and Malachi is “jealousy.” Almost every page, every story, every act, every psalm, every prophecy,

every command, every threat in those 39 ancient books points back to the possessiveness of one particular god who wanted to own and control his chosen lover by demanding total devotion. “Love me! I am better than the others! Don’t look at them—look at me!”¹⁸

The term “jealousy” most often carries a negative connotation in 21st-century America. We pity the man who is jealous of his coworker’s success. We frown upon families who react to a neighbor’s newly found fortune by being overcome with jealousy. And we are perturbed to hear of a jealous husband who distrusts his wife, and questions every possible wrong action that she might make, even going so far as demanding that she never leave the house without him. Add to these feelings about jealousy what various New Testament passages have to say on the subject, and one can understand why some might sincerely question why God is described at times as “jealous.” The apostle Paul admonished the Christians in Rome to “behave properly,” and put off “strife and **jealousy**” (Romans 13:13, NASB). To the church at Corinth, Paul expressed concern that when he came to their city he might find them involved in such sinful things as gossip, strife, and **jealousy** (2 Corinthians 12:20). And, as noted above, he explicitly told them that “**love...is not jealous**” (1 Corinthians 13:4, NASB). James also wrote about the sinfulness of jealousy, saying that where it exists “there is disorder and every evil thing” (3:16, NASB; cf. Acts 7:9). One religious writer described such jealousy as “an infantile resentment springing from unmortified covetousness, which expresses itself in envy, malice, and meanness of

action.”¹⁹ It seems, more often than not, that both the New Testament and the “moral code” of modern society speak of “jealousy” in a negative light. So how can the loving God of heaven be, as the Bible reveals in no uncertain terms, a “jealous God” (Exodus 20:5; Deuteronomy 4:24)?

The truth is, sometimes jealousy can be spoken of in a good sense. The word “jealous” is translated in the Old Testament from the Hebrew word *qin’ah*, and in the New Testament from the Greek word *zelos*. The root idea behind both words is that of “warmth” or “heat.”²⁰ The Hebrew word for jealousy carries with it the idea of “redness of the face that accompanies strong emotion”²¹—whether right or wrong. Depending upon the usage of the word, it can be used to represent both a good and an evil passion. Three times in 1 Corinthians, Paul used this word in a good sense to encourage his brethren to “earnestly desire (*zeelouíte*)” spiritual gifts (12:31; 14:1,39). He obviously was not commanding the Corinthians to sin, but to do something that was good and worthwhile. Later, when writing to the church at Corinth, the apostle Paul was even more direct in showing how there was such a thing as “godly jealousy.” He stated:

I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it (2 Corinthians 11:2-4)!

Paul's burning desire was for the church at Corinth to abide in the love of God. As a friend of the bridegroom (Christ), Paul used some of the strongest language possible to encourage the "bride" of Christ at Corinth to be pure and faithful.

In a similar way, Jehovah expressed His love for Israel in the Old Testament by proclaiming to be "a jealous God" (Exodus 20:5). He was not **envious** of the Israelites' accomplishments or possessions, but was communicating His strong **love** for them with anthropomorphic language. The Scriptures depict a spiritual marriage between Jehovah and His people. Sadly, during the period of the divided kingdom, both Israel and Judah were guilty of "play[ing] the harlot" (Jeremiah 3:6-10). God called Israel's idolatrous practice "adultery," and for this reason He had "put her away and given her a certificate of divorce" (3:8). This is not the "lunatic fury of a rejected or supplanted suitor," but a "zeal to protect a love-relationship."²² Jehovah felt and did for Israel "as **the most affectionate husband** could do for his spouse, and **was jealous** for their fidelity, because he willed their invariable happiness."²³ Song of Solomon 8:6 is further proof that love and jealousy are not always opposed to each other. To her beloved, the Shulamite said: "Put me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm. **For love is as strong as death, jealousy is as severe as Sheol**; its flashes are flashes of fire, the very flame of the Lord" (NASB). In this passage, love and jealousy actually are paralleled to convey the same basic meaning²⁴—that (aside from one's love for God) marital love is "the strongest, most unyielding and invincible force in human experience."²⁵ In this sense, being a jealous husband or

wife is a **good** thing. As one commentator noted, married persons “who felt no jealousy at the intrusion of a lover or an adulterer into their home would surely be lacking in moral perception; for the exclusiveness of marriage is the essence of marriage.”²⁶

Truly, love has a jealous side. There is a sense in which one legitimately can be jealous for what rightfully belongs to him (see Numbers 25). Such is especially true in the marriage relationship. Israel was God’s chosen people (Deuteronomy 7:6). He had begun to set them apart as a special nation by blessing their “father” Abraham (Genesis 12:1ff.; 17:1-27). He blessed the Israelites with much numerical growth while living in Egypt (Exodus 1:7,12,19; Deuteronomy 26:5; cf. Genesis 15:5; 46:3). He delivered them from Egyptian bondage (Exodus 3-12). And, among other things, He gave them written revelation, which, if obeyed, would bring them spiritually closer to Him, and even would make them physically superior to other nations, in that they would be spared from various diseases (see Exodus 15:26). Like a bird that watches over her eggs and young with jealousy, preventing other birds from entering her nest, God watched over the Israelites with “righteous” jealousy, unwilling to tolerate the presence of false gods among his people (see Exodus 20:3-6; Joshua 24:14-16,19-20). Such “godly jealousy” (cf. 2 Corinthians 11:2) was not what Paul had in mind in 1 Corinthians 13:4.

In addition, the Bible reveals that God is **every person’s** Maker (or Father by creation), Sustainer, Savior, and Judge. He was (and is) jealous, not only for Israel’s love, but for **everyone’s**—and for everyone’s **own benefit**. It is in everyone’s best interest to have a loving, submissive

relationship with our heavenly Father (Ecclesiastes 12:1-7; Hebrews 12:9), even as it is in every child's best interest to humbly submit to wise, loving, earthly fathers—who have the best interest of their own children in mind. What loving, protective father is not “angry” and “jealous” of his wayward son's drug dealer, who keeps his son's deadly addiction continuously supplied? Does a father not have a right to be jealous for his son's best interest and overall life? If so, why does God not have a right to be jealous for the souls of His children?

God “desires **all men** to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4). He has a perfectly truthful and loving plan intended to save the world from punishment and to give us eternal happiness. For these reasons, He is “jealous” for our love, “not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

SUFFERING AND AN ALL-LOVING GOD

1 John 4:8

Walk through the halls of the nearest hospital or mental institution and you will see people of all ages suffering from various illnesses and diseases. From cancer to a tragic car accident, from a destructive tornado to the abuse of an innocent child, evil, pain, and suffering of all sorts exist. Suffering is everywhere, and thus such questions as the following inevitably arise. “If there is a God, why am I afflicted with this illness?” “If there is a God, why was my son not allowed to see his sixteenth birthday?” “If there is a God, why are my parents

afflicted with Alzheimer's?" These and hundreds of similar questions have echoed from the human heart for millennia. They are as old as the first tear, and as recent as the latest newscast.

For many people, the existence of pain and suffering serves as a great obstacle to belief in God. Skeptics and infidels, both past and present, have held that the existence of evil is an embarrassment for those who believe in God. How do theists reconcile the presence of suffering with the existence of an omnipotent and all-loving God? Allegedly, "If God is all-good and all-loving, surely he would not want evil and suffering to exist. And if God is all-powerful, He would have the ability to do away with such heartache." Thus, supposedly, God is either not all-powerful or not all good and loving, and thus, the atheist argues that the God of the Bible is a logical contradiction, and cannot exist. So how do Christians reconcile the presence of suffering with the existence of an all-powerful and all-loving God?

First, "the problem of evil" is actually a problem for the atheist, not the theist. As the renowned atheist William Provine stated in 1994, atheistic evolution implies that "no ultimate foundation for ethics exists."²⁷ If such is the case, then how could an atheist logically conclude that suffering is actually "wrong" or "evil"? Former atheist-turned-theist, C.S. Lewis, skillfully highlighted this dilemma in his book *Mere Christianity*. He stated:

My argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of *just* and *unjust*? A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line.

What was I comparing this universe with when I called it unjust...? Of course, I could have given up my idea of justice by saying it was nothing but a private idea of my own. But if I did that, then my argument against God collapsed too—for the argument depended on saying that the world was really unjust, not simply that it did not happen to please my private fancies. Thus in the very act of trying to prove that God did not exist—in other words, that the whole of reality was senseless—I found I was forced to assume that one part of reality—namely my idea of justice—was full of sense. Consequently, atheism turns out to be too simple.²⁸

In other words, if real, objective evil exists (outside of my own and your own private, subjective feelings about the matter), there must be some objective standard outside of the natural world to give real meaning to the ideas of “good” and “evil.” Thus, the so-called “problem” of evil, pain, and suffering, actually becomes a much bigger issue for the atheist.

But still, if God exists, why do people suffer? Why does an all-good, all-powerful God allow such?

Even though man cannot explain in specific detail every instance of human suffering, contrary to what many believe, there are several logical reasons why people experience mental and physical pain. One of the foremost reasons is rooted in the fact that God is love (1 John 4:8), and His love allows freedom of choice. God did not create men and women as robots to serve Him slavishly without any kind of free moral agency on their part (cf. Genesis 2:16-17; Joshua 24:15; Matthew 7:13-14). God does not control His creation as a puppeteer

controls a doll. God has, as an expression of His love, granted mankind free will, and that free will enables human beings to make their own choices.

Man frequently brings suffering upon himself because of the wrong decisions he makes. The apostle Peter wrote: “But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people’s matters...” (1 Peter 4:15). When people suffer the consequences of their own wrong choices, they have no one to blame but themselves. If a person makes the decision to kill someone, he will suffer the consequences of making a wrong choice. He may be put in prison, or perhaps even be killed himself. If a fornicator is found to have a sexually transmitted disease, again, it is because he made the wrong decision to have sexual intercourse with someone who was infected. Thus, oftentimes man’s suffering results from a misuse of his own freedom.

Humanity also suffers because of the personal wrong choices of others. If God allows one person freedom of choice, He must allow **everyone** that freedom to be consistent in His love for the world. God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34; Romans 2:11). In the Bible, we read where Uriah the Hittite suffered because of David’s sins (2 Samuel 11). Uriah ultimately was killed because of David’s attempt to cover up the wrong decisions he had made. Today, families may suffer because a father is thrown in jail for drunk driving. In that case, **he** is the cause of the family’s suffering. If a man smokes all of his life, and then eventually dies at an early age because of lung cancer, he and his family suffer because of **his** decision to smoke. God cannot be blamed for man’s

personal wrong choices; nor can He be blamed for the wrong decisions that others have made.

Closely related to the first two reasons man suffers today is a third reason—the personal wrong choices of former generations. Who is to blame for millions starving in India? A **partial** answer would be—some of their ancestors. Years ago, people began teaching that it was wrong to eat cows because they might be eating an ancestor. The false doctrine of reincarnation has deprived millions of people throughout the world of adequate sustenance. Is God to be blamed when people will not eat the beef that could give them nourishment? Many of the decisions of former generations have caused much pain and suffering for those in the world today.

Incidentally, much is said about reaping from the wrong choices of others, but people often forget that when one man does well, oftentimes profit is felt by many. People living in the 21st century have a multitude of advantages because of the work of former generations. Human beings are living longer because of various medical discoveries. Advances in technology allow man to have conveniences that previously were only imagined. Thus, just as man suffers because of the sins of former generations, he also reaps the benefits of their good labors. If man truly is free, it must be possible for him to both suffer the consequences and reap the benefits, of his own decisions, as well as those of others.

Another reason man suffers today is because there are those who ignore law and order. God created a world ruled by natural laws established at the Creation.

These laws were implemented for man's own good, but if these laws are challenged, then man will suffer the consequences. If a man steps off the roof of a 20-story building, gravity will pull him to the pavement beneath. If a boy steps in front of a moving freight train, since two objects cannot occupy the same space at the same time, the train will strike the child and likely kill him. Why? Because he has (knowingly or unknowingly) gone against the natural order of this world. The natural laws that God created allow man to produce fire. But the same laws that enable him to cook his food also allow him to destroy entire forests. Laws that make it possible to have things **constructive** to human life also introduce the possibility that things **destructive** to human life may occur. How can it be otherwise? A car is matter in motion, and takes us where we wish to go. But if someone steps in front of that car, the same natural laws that operated to our benefit will similarly operate to our detriment. The same laws that govern gravity, matter in motion, or similar phenomena, also govern weather patterns, water movement, and other geological/meteorological conditions. **All** of nature is regulated by these laws—not just the parts that we find convenient. If God suspended natural laws every time His creatures were in a dangerous situation, chaos would corrupt the cosmos, arguing more for a world of **atheism** than a world of **theism**.

Everyone (believer and unbeliever alike) must recognize the natural laws God established or else suffer the consequences. In Luke 13:2-5, Jesus told the story of 18 men who perished when the tower of Siloam collapsed. Had these men perished because of their sin?

No, they were no worse sinners than their peers. They died because a natural law was in force. Fortunately, natural laws work continually so that we can understand and benefit from them. We are not left to sort out some kind of haphazard system that works one day but not the next.

Furthermore, as much as the unbeliever hates to admit it, there **are** times when suffering actually is **beneficial**. Think of the man whose chest begins to throb as he enters the throes of a heart attack. Think of the woman whose side begins to ache at the onset of acute appendicitis. Is it not true that pain often sends us to the doctor for prevention or cure? Is it not true also that, at times, suffering helps humankind develop the traits that people treasure the most? Bravery, heroism, altruistic love, self-sacrifice—all flourish in less-than-perfect environments, do they not? Yet people who exhibit such traits are cherished and honored as having gone “above and beyond the call of duty.” Was this not the very point Christ was making when He said: “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends” (John 15:13)?

Finally (and perhaps most important), the same Bible that says, “God is all good and all loving,” and that “God is all-powerful,” and that “evil, pain, and suffering,” certainly do exist—that same Bible tells us that (1) this physical realm (including any suffering we experience) is **temporary**, and (2) **our purpose in this physical realm is to prepare ourselves for the eternal realm**. God’s purpose in creating the physical Universe was not to create a realm where evil, pain, and suffering were impossible, but to create free moral agents

who would use the time we have on earth to decide where we want to live eternally (by the grace of God and through the suffering and sacrifice of Jesus Christ).²⁹ In truth, although no one enjoys suffering, if experiencing pain and suffering at various times in our physical lives helps us spiritually to prepare ourselves for eternity—for Judgment Day—then such an ability to suffer can actually be very loving. Although the apostle Paul suffered beatings, shipwrecks, imprisonments, a stoning, and many other difficulties in his life, he concluded what every human being who chooses to become a Christian and live the Christian life can conclude: “Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Corinthians 4:17).

Chapter 3



ANSWERING ATTACKS UPON THE DISPOSITION AND DEITY OF CHRIST

WAS JESUS A REAL PERSON?

Before answering direct attacks upon the disposition and deity of Christ, it first must be stressed that Jesus was indeed a real person. It seems that a growing number of people in the world today actually think that Jesus is nothing more than a fantasy figure that various secret societies created 2,000 years ago. Allegedly, His name belongs in the same fictional writings that contain such fairy-tale characters as Peter Pan, Hercules, and Snow White and the seven dwarfs. Gerald Massey, in his book, *Gnostic and Historic Christianity*, has “informed” us that “[w]hether considered as the God

made human, or as man made divine, this character [Jesus–EL] never existed as a person.”¹ Skeptics like Massey, D.M. Murdock,² Brian Flemming,³ and many others believe that Christians have been deceived into thinking that there really was a man named Jesus, when, in fact, He never lived.

How do those who believe in the historicity of Jesus Christ respond to such allegations? Can we really **know** that there was a sinless, miracle-working, death-defying man named Jesus who lived upon the Earth approximately 2,000 years ago, or have we accepted His existence blindly?

Even though the New Testament, which enjoys far more historical documentation than any other volume ever known, proves beyond the shadow of a doubt that Jesus actually lived, it is by no means the only historical evidence available. Around the year A.D. 94, a Jewish historian by the name of Josephus mentioned Jesus’ name twice in his book, *Antiquities of the Jews*. In book 18, chapter 3 of that work, Josephus wrote: “And there arose about this time **Jesus**, a wise man, if indeed we should call him a man; for he was a doer of marvelous deeds, a teacher of men who receive the truth with pleasure.”⁴ Then, in book 20, chapter 9, Josephus documented how a man named Ananus brought before the Sanhedrin “a man named James, **the brother of Jesus who was called the Christ**, and certain others.”⁵ [NOTE: Certain historians regard Josephus’ comments about Jesus as being a “Christian interpolation.” There is, however, no evidence from textual criticism that would warrant such an opinion.⁶ In fact, every extant Greek manuscript contains

the disputed portions. The passage also exists in both Hebrew and Arabic versions. And although the Arabic version is slightly different, it still exhibits knowledge of the disputed sections.^{7]}

About 20 years later, Tacitus, a Roman historian, wrote a book surveying the history of Rome. In it he described how Nero (the Roman emperor) “punished with every refinement the notoriously depraved Christians (as they were popularly called).” He went on to write that “their originator, **Christ**, had been executed in Tiberius’ reign by the governor of Judea, Pontius Pilatus.”⁸ Even though Tacitus, Josephus, and other historians from the first and second centuries A.D. were not followers of Christ, they did have **something** to say about Him. They verified that Jesus was a **real** person—Who was so famous that He even attracted the attention of the Roman emperor himself!

Another obvious reason to believe that Jesus was a real person is because our entire dating method is based upon His existence. The letters “B.C.” stand for “before Christ,” and the letters “A.D.” (standing for *Anno Domini*) mean “in the year of the Lord.” So when history teachers speak of Alexander the Great ruling much of the world in 330 B.C., they are admitting that Alexander lived about 330 years before Jesus was born.

Even though this is only a sampling of the evidence relating to the man known as Jesus, it is enough to prove that He was a real person, and not just some imaginary character. We do not accept His existence blindly—it is a historical fact!

IN WHAT WAY WAS GOD GREATER THAN JESUS?

John 10:30; 14:28; Mark 13:32

According to the apostle John, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and **the Word was God**.... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:1,14). Unquestionably, this Word (God), Whom John claims became flesh, was Jesus Christ (1:17). This same apostle recorded other statements in his account of the Gospel that convey the same basic truth. He wrote how, on one occasion, Jesus told a group of hostile Jews, “I and My Father are one” (10:30). Later, he recorded how Jesus responded to Philip’s request to see God by saying, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (14:9). He even told about how Jesus accepted worship from a blind man whom He had healed (9:38; cf. Matthew 8:2). And, since only God is to be worshipped (Matthew 4:10), the implication is that Jesus believed He was God (cf. John 1:29,41,49; 20:28; Mark 14:62).

Some, however, see an inconsistency with these statements when they are placed alongside John 14:28, in which Jesus declared: “My Father is greater than I.” Allegedly, this verse (among others—cf. 1 Corinthians 11:3; Mark 13:32; Colossians 3:1) proves that Jesus and the Bible writers were contradictory in their portrayal of Jesus’ divine nature. Jesus could not be **one with God** and **lesser than God** at the same time, could He? What is the proper way to understand John 14:28?

Statements found in passages like John 14:28 (indicating that Jesus was “lesser” than the Father), or in Mark 13:32 (where Jesus made the comment that even He did not know on what day the Second Coming would be), must be understood in light of what the apostle Paul wrote to the church at Philippi concerning Jesus’ self-limitation during His time on Earth. Christ,

being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but **made Himself of no reputation** [He “**emptied Himself**”—NASB], taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, **He humbled Himself** and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross (Philippians 2:6-8).

While on Earth, and in the flesh, Jesus was **voluntarily** in a subordinate position to the Father. Christ “emptied Himself” (Philippians 2:7, NASB; He “made **Himself** nothing”—NIV). Unlike Adam and Eve, who made an attempt to seize equality with God (Genesis 3:5), Jesus, the last Adam (1 Corinthians 15:47), humbled Himself, and obediently accepted the role of a servant. Jesus’ earthly limitations (cf. Mark 13:32), however, were not the consequence of a less-than-God **nature**; rather, they were the result of a **self-imposed submission** reflecting the exercise of His sovereign will. While on Earth, Jesus assumed a position of complete subjection to the Father and exercised His divine attributes only at the Father’s bidding (cf. John 8:26,28-29).⁹ As A.H. Strong similarly commented many years ago, Jesus “resigned not the possession, nor yet entirely the use, but rather the independent exercise, of the divine attributes.”¹⁰

Admittedly, understanding Jesus as being 100% God and 100% human is not an easy concept to grasp. When Jesus came to Earth, He added humanity to His divinity (He was “made in the likeness of men”—KJV). For the first time ever, He was subject to such things as hunger, thirst, growth (both physical and mental), pain, disease, and temptation (cf. Hebrews 4:15; Luke 2:52). At the same time Jesus added humanity to His divinity, however, He put Himself in a subordinate position to the Father in terms of role function (1 Corinthians 11:3). In short, when Jesus affirmed, “My Father is greater than I” (John 14:28), He was not denying His divine nature; rather, He was asserting that He had subjected Himself voluntarily to the Father’s will.

HOW CAN BOTH STATEMENTS BE TRUE?

John 5:31; 8:14

They sound exactly the opposite. On the surface, they appear to be completely contradictory statements. “We won the game.” “We lost the game.” How could both of these declarations be true? If a person is indeed talking about the same game, how could a team have both won the game and lost the game at the same time?

Admittedly, there are times when such statements are uttered by someone who is simply lying. However, there are occasions when two contrasting statements may both genuinely be true—such as when the claims are made in **different senses**.

Consider, for example, hearing someone talk about the 1990 Missouri-Colorado college football game.

With only about 30 seconds left to go in the game and Missouri winning 31-27, Colorado had the ball, first and goal at the Missouri three yard line. Colorado elected to spike the ball on first down in order to stop the clock. On second down they ran the ball, but failed to score. They ran the ball again on third down. And, to stop the clock, they spiked the ball on fourth down with only two seconds left. They then ran the ball on “fifth down” and scored. The game was over at that point. According to the referees, Colorado had won the game 33-31. But did they really “win”?

As any football fan knows, a team only gets **four** downs to make a first down (or to score a touchdown if they are inside of the 10 yard line). “Fifth down” does not exist in football. The referees had forgotten to count one of the downs. Subsequently, the only reason Colorado “won” the game was because they were given an extra down in the final three seconds.

Imagine listening to a University of Missouri football player from that 1990 team talk about their game with Colorado. He may talk about their defeat at the hands of Colorado that year. However, he may also tell people that “Missouri actually won the game.” How could he make both statements and still be telling the truth? Though, technically, the referees awarded Colorado the victory, everyone knew that, in reality, Missouri had won the game. Thus, in one sense Missouri “lost,” and in another sense they “won.”

So what does all of this have to do with the Bible and Jesus? There are times in Scripture where different statements are made by the same person (including Jesus),

which **on the surface** sound contradictory, yet when the reader looks more deeply into the text, he realizes that such different statements were made for different reasons and in different senses.

One statement that has confused some Bible readers concerning Jesus' defense of His deity is found in John 5:31. Jesus began this part of His discourse by saying, "If I bear witness of Myself, **My witness is not true.**" According to many Bible critics, this declaration blatantly contradicts the statement He made on another occasion when speaking to the Pharisees. He said: "Even if I bear witness of Myself, **My witness is true**" (John 8:14). How could He say that His witness was both true, and not true, without being contradictory? Was He a liar, as some skeptics insist? Or could it be that He was using these words in different senses? The fact is, Jesus had different purposes for why He said what He did. In John 5, Jesus was speaking to a group of hostile Jews regarding God the Father and His own equality with Him (John 5:17-30; cf. 10:30). In this setting, He defended His deity by pointing to several witnesses, including John the baptizer, the Father in heaven, and the Scriptures (5:33-47).

When Jesus conceded to the Jews the fact that His witness was "not true," He was not confessing to being a liar. Rather, Jesus was reacting to a well-known law of His day. In Greek, Roman, and Jewish law, the testimony of a witness could not be received in his own case.¹¹ "Witness to anyone must always be borne by someone else."¹² The Law of Moses stated: "One witness shall not rise against a man concerning any iniquity or any sin that he commits; by the mouth of

two or three witnesses the matter shall be established” (Deuteronomy 19:15; cf. Matthew 18:15-17). The Pharisees understood this law well, as is evident by their statement to Jesus: “You bear witness of Yourself; Your witness is not true” (John 8:13). In John 5:31, “Jesus points to the impossibility of anyone’s being accepted on the basis of his own word.... He is asserting that if of himself he were to bear witness to himself, that would make it untrue” in a court of law.¹³ If Jesus had no evidence in a trial regarding His deity other than His own testimony about Himself, His testimony would be inconclusive. Jesus understood that His audience had a legal right to expect more evidence than just His word. In accordance with the law, His own testimony apart from other witnesses would be considered invalid (or insufficient to establish truth).

But why is it that Jesus said to the Pharisees at a later time that His “witness **is** true” (John 8:14)? The difference is that, in this instance, Jesus was stressing the fact that **His words** were true. Even if in a court of law two witnesses are required for a fact to be established (a law Jesus enunciated a few verses later in John 8:17), that law does not take away the fact that Jesus was telling the truth. Jesus declared His testimony to be true for the simple reason that His testimony revealed the true facts regarding Himself.¹⁴ He then followed this pronouncement of truth with the fact that there was another witness—the Father in heaven Who sent Him to Earth (8:16-18). Thus, in actuality, His testimony was true in two senses: (1) it was true because it was indeed factual; and (2) it was valid because it was corroborated by a second, unimpeachable witness—the Father.

Why is it that in the 21st century we can use words and expressions in so many different ways and have little trouble understanding each other, but when Jesus or the Bible writers used words in different senses, so many people want to cry “foul”? Could it be because modern-day skeptics refuse to allow Jesus and the inspired writers the same freedoms to use words and phrases in different ways? Could it be due to unfair bias on the part of Bible critics?

God the Father (John 8:18; 5:37-38), along with John the baptizer (John 5:33), the miracles of Jesus (5:36), the Scriptures (5:39), and specifically the writings of Moses (5:46), all authenticated the true statements Jesus made regarding His deity. Sadly, many of His listeners rejected the evidence then, just as people reject it today.

HOW RUDE!?

John 2:4; Ephesians 6:2

Imagine your mother asking you to do something for a neighbor, and you responding to her by saying, “**Woman**, what does that have to do with me?” If your mother is anything like mine, she probably would have given you “the look” (among other things) as she pondered how her son could be so rude. Responding to a mother’s (or any woman’s) request in 21st-century America with the refrain, “Woman...,” sounds impolite and offensive. Furthermore, a Christian, who is commanded to “honor” his “father and mother” (Ephesians 6:2), would be out of line in most situations when using such an expression while talking directly to his mother.

In light of the ill-mannered use of the word “woman” in certain contexts today, some question how Jesus could have spoken to His mother 2,000 years ago using this term without breaking the commandment to “[h]onor your father and your mother” (Exodus 20:12; cf. Matthew 15:4; 5:17-20). When Jesus, His disciples, and His mother were at the wedding in Cana of Galilee where there was a depletion of wine, Mary said to Jesus, “They have no wine” (John 2:3). Jesus then responded to his mother, saying, “**Woman**, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come” (John 2:4). Notice what one leading skeptic repeatedly alleged regarding Jesus’ question in this verse.

In Matt. 15:4 he [Jesus—EL] told people to “Honor thy father and thy mother”; yet, he was one of the first to ignore his own maxim by saying to his mother in John 2:4, “Woman, what have I to do with thee?”¹⁵

Imagine someone talking to his own mother in such a disrespectful manner and addressing her by such an impersonal noun as ‘woman.’ Talk about an insolent offspring!¹⁶

Jesus needs to practice some parental respect....¹⁷

Apparently Jesus’ love escaped him.¹⁸

Why was Jesus disrespectful of his mother? In John 2:4, Jesus uses the same words with his mother that demons use when they meet Jesus. Surely the son of God knew that Mary had the blessing of the Father, didn’t he, (and she was the mother of God—Ed.) not to mention the fact that the son of God would never be rude?¹⁹

As one can see, Mr. McKinsey is adamant that Jesus erred. He used such words to describe Jesus as disrespectful, insolent, unloving, and rude. Is he correct?

As with many Bible critics, Mr. McKinsey is guilty of judging Jesus' words by what is common in 21st-century English vernacular rather than putting Jesus' comment in its proper first-century setting. It was not rude or inappropriate for a man in the first century to speak to a lady by saying, "Woman (*gunai*)...." This "was a highly respectful and affectionate mode of address,"²⁰ "with no idea of censure."²¹ The New International Version correctly captures the meaning of this word in John 2:4: "**Dear woman**, why do you involve me?" (NIV). Jesus used this word when complimenting the Syrophoenician woman's great faith (Matthew 15:28), when affectionately addressing Mary Magdalene after His resurrection (John 20:15), and when speaking to His disconsolate mother one last time from the cross (John 19:26). Paul used this same word when addressing Christian women (1 Corinthians 7:16). As Adam Clarke noted: "[C]ertainly no kind of disrespect is intended, but, on the contrary, complaisance, affability, tenderness, and concern, and in this sense it is used in the best Greek writers."²²

As to why Jesus used the term "woman" (*gunai*) instead of "mother" (*meetros*) when speaking to Mary (which even in first-century Hebrew and Greek cultures was an unusual way to address one's mother), Leon Morris noted that Jesus most likely was indicating

that there is a new relationship between them as he enters his public ministry.... Evidently Mary thought of the intimate relations of the home at

Nazareth as persisting. But Jesus in his public ministry was not only or primarily the son of Mary, but “the Son of Man” who was to bring the realities of heaven to people on earth (1:51). A new relationship was established.²³

R.C.H. Lenski added: “[W]hile Mary will forever remain his [Jesus’—EL] mother, in his calling Jesus knows no mother or earthly relative, he is their Lord and Savior as well as of all men. The common earthly relation is swallowed up in the divine.”²⁴ It seems best to conclude that Jesus was simply “informing” His mother in a loving manner that as He began performing miracles for the purpose of proving His deity and the divine origin of His message, His relationship to His mother was about to change.

Finally, the point also must be stressed that honoring fathers and mothers does not mean that a son or daughter never can correct his or her parents. Correction and honor are no more opposites than correction and love. One of the greatest ways parents disclose their love to their children is by correcting them when they make mistakes (Hebrews 12:6-9; Revelation 3:19). Similarly, one of the ways in which a mature son might honor his parents is by taking them aside when they have erred, and lovingly pointing out their mistake or oversight in a certain matter. Think how much more honorable this action would be than to take no action and allow them to continue in a path of error without informing them of such. We must keep in mind that even though Mary was a great woman who “found favor with God” (Luke 1:30), she was not perfect (cf. Romans 3:10,23). She was not God, nor the “mother of God” (i.e., she did

not originate Jesus or bring Him into existence). But, she was the one chosen to carry the Son of God in her womb. Who better to correct any misunderstanding she may have had than this Son?

DID JESUS CONDONE LAW-BREAKING?

Matthew 12:1-8

The Pharisees certainly did not think that the Son of God was beyond reproach. Following Jesus' feeding of the four thousand, they came "testing" Him, asking Him to show them a sign from heaven (Matthew 16:1). Later in the book of Matthew (19:3ff.), the writer recorded how "[t]he Pharisees also came to Him, **testing Him**, and saying to Him, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?'" It was their aim on this occasion, as on numerous other occasions, to entangle Jesus in His teachings by asking Him a potentially entrapping question—one that, if answered in a way that the Pharisees had anticipated, might bring upon Jesus the wrath of Herod Antipas (cf. Matthew 14:1-12; Mark 6:14-29) and/or some of His fellow Jews (e.g., the school of Hillel, or the school of Shammai). A third time the Pharisees sought to "entangle Him in His talk" (Matthew 22:15) as they asked, "Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" (22:17). The jealous and hypocritical Pharisees were so relentless in their efforts to destroy the Lord's influence, that on one occasion they even accused Jesus' disciples of breaking the law as they "went through the grainfields on the Sabbath...were hungry, and began to pluck heads of grain and to eat" (Matthew 12:1ff.). [NOTE: "Their knowledge of so trifling an incident shows how minutely

they observed all his deeds.”²⁵ The microscopic scrutiny under which Jesus lived, likely was even more relentless than what some “stars” experience today. In one sense, the Pharisees could be considered the “paparazzi” of Jesus’ day.] Allegedly, what the disciples were doing on this particular Sabbath was considered “work,” which the Law of Moses forbade (Matthew 12:2; cf. Exodus 20:9-10; 34:21).

Jesus responded to the criticism of the Pharisees by giving the truth of the matter, and at the same time revealing the Pharisees’ hypocrisy. As was somewhat customary for Jesus when being tested by His enemies (cf. Matthew 12:11-12; 15:3; 21:24-25; etc.), He responded to the Pharisees’ accusation with two questions. First, He asked: “Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God and ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests?” (12:3-4). Jesus reminded the Pharisees of an event in the life of David (recorded in 1 Samuel 21:1ff.), where he and others, while fleeing from King Saul, ate of the showbread, which divine law restricted to the priests (Leviticus 24:5-9). Some commentators have unjustifiably concluded that Jesus was implying innocence on the part of David (and that God’s laws are subservient to human needs),²⁶ and thus He was defending His disciples’ “lawless” actions with the same reasoning. Actually, however, just the opposite is true. Jesus explicitly stated that what David did was wrong (“not lawful”—12:4), and that what His disciples did was right—they were “guiltless” (12:7). Furthermore, as J.W. McGarvey observed: “If Christians may violate law when

its observance would involve hardship or suffering, then there is an end to suffering for the name of Christ, and an end even of self-denial.”²⁷ The disciples were not permitted by Jesus to break the law on this occasion (or any other) just because it was inconvenient (cf. Matthew 5:17-19). The Pharisees simply were wrong in their accusations. The only “law” Jesus’ disciples broke was the pharisaical interpretation of the law (which seems to have been more sacred to the Pharisees than the law itself). In response to such hyper-legalism, Burton Coffman forcefully stated:

In the Pharisees’ view, the disciples were guilty of threshing wheat! **Such pedantry, nit-picking, and magnification of trifles would also have made them guilty of irrigating land, if they had chanced to knock off a few drops of dew while passing through the fields!** The Pharisees were out to “get” Jesus; and any charge was better than none.²⁸

Jesus used the instruction of 1 Samuel 21 to cause the Pharisees to recognize their insincerity, and to justify His disciples. David, a man about whom the Jews ever boasted, blatantly violated God’s law by eating the showbread, and yet the Pharisees justified him. On the other hand, Jesus’ disciples merely plucked some grain on the Sabbath while walking through a field—an act that the law did not forbid—yet the Pharisees condemned them. Had the Pharisees not approved of David’s conduct, they could have responded by saying, “You judge yourself. You’re all sinners.” Their reaction to Jesus’ question—silence—was that of hypocrites who had been exposed.

Jesus then asked a second question, saying, “[H]ave you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless?” (Matthew 12:5). Here, Jesus wanted the Pharisees to acknowledge that even the law itself condoned **some** work on the Sabbath day. Although the Pharisees acted as if **all** work was banned on this day, it was actually the busiest day of the week for priests. As McGarvey explained:

They baked and changed the showbread; they performed sabbatical sacrifices (Num. xxviii. 9), and two lambs were killed on the sabbath in addition to the daily sacrifice. This involved the killing, skinning, and cleaning of the animals, and the building of the fire to consume the sacrifice. They also trimmed the gold lamps, burned incense, and performed various other duties.²⁹

One of those “other duties” would have been to circumcise young baby boys when the child’s eighth day fell on a Sabbath (Leviticus 12:3; John 7:22-23). The purpose of Jesus citing these “profane” priestly works was to prove that the Sabbath prohibition was not unconditional. [NOTE: Jesus used the term “profane,” not because there was a real desecration of the temple by the priests as they worked, but “to express what was true according to the mistaken notions of the Pharisees as to manual works performed on the Sabbath.”³⁰] The truth is, the Sabbath law “did not forbid work absolutely, but labor for worldly gain. Activity in the work of God was both allowed and commanded.”³¹ Coffman thus concluded: “Just as the priests served the temple on the Sabbath day and were guiltless, his [Jesus’–EL] disciples

might also serve Christ, the Greater Temple, without incurring guilt.”³² Just as the priests who served God in the temple on the Sabbath were totally within the law, so likewise were Jesus’ disciples as they served the “Lord...of the Sabbath” (Matthew 12:8), Whose holiness was greater than that of the temple (12:6).

A TEST THAT SOME FIND OFFENSIVE

Matthew 15:21-28

Testing, proving, or trying someone can be a very effective teaching technique. A teacher might effectively test the honesty of her students by giving them a difficult closed-book exam over a chapter they had not yet studied. Those who took their “F” without cheating would pass the test. Those who opened up their books when the teacher left the room and copied all of the answers word for word, would fail the test, and learn the valuable lesson that honesty is always the best (and right) policy, even when it might appear that it means failure.

Teachers test their students in a variety of ways. Good parents prove their children early on in life in hopes that they learn the virtues of honesty, compassion, and obedience. Coaches may try their players in attempts to instill in them the value of being disciplined in all phases of their game. Bosses test and challenge their employees in hopes of assembling the best team of workers who put out the best products possible. Indeed, mankind has understood the value of tests for millennia.

It should come as no surprise that God has used this same teaching technique various times throughout

history. He tested Abraham on Mount Moriah (Genesis 22:1-2; Hebrews 11:17), and hundreds of years later He repeatedly tested the Israelites in the wilderness (Exodus 20:20; Deuteronomy 8:2; Psalm 81:7). King David declared how the Lord “tested” and “tried” him (Psalm 17:3), while his son Solomon wrote: “The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, but the Lord tests the hearts” (Proverbs 17:3). Roughly 1,000 years later, the apostle Paul declared the same inspired truth—“God...tests our hearts” (1 Thessalonians 2:4). Even when God revealed Himself in the person of Jesus, He tested man. For example, once when Jesus saw “a great multitude coming toward Him, He said to Philip, ‘Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?’” John revealed, however, that Jesus asked this question to “test” Philip (John 6:5-6).

There are certain tests administered by God that some find cold and heartless, partly because they fail to recognize that a test is underway. One such event is recorded in Matthew 15:21-28. In this passage, the reader learns that Jesus: (1) initially remained silent when a Canaanite woman cried out for mercy (vss. 22-23); (2) informed her that He was “not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (vs. 24); and (3) told her that it was not fitting to take that which was meant for the Jews and give it to the “little dogs,” i.e., Gentiles (vs. 26). In addition, Jesus’ disciples urged Him to “[s]end her away, for she cries out after us” (vs. 23). Although Jesus eventually healed the Canaanite woman’s demon-possessed daughter, some believe that Jesus’ overall encounter with the woman indicates that He was unkind³³ and intolerant.³⁴

First, Jesus is completely exonerated from any wrong doing when a person considers: (1) “that the Jewish nation **was** Jesus’ primary target for evangelism during His earthly ministry” (Matthew 10:5-6; Acts 1:8; Romans 1:16);³⁵ and (2) that the term dog could be used in just as kind a manner 2,000 years ago as it can be today (e.g., “cute as a puppy;” “top dog”).³⁶

Second, given other information in Matthew’s gospel account as well as the overall context of Matthew chapter 15, it appears that more was going on in these verses than Jesus simply wanting the Gentile woman to understand that He was “not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (15:24). Consider that Matthew had earlier recorded how a **Roman centurion** approached Jesus on behalf of his paralyzed servant. Jesus did not respond in that instance as He did with the Syrophoenician woman. He simply stated: “I will come and heal him” (8:7). After witnessing the centurion’s refreshing humility and great faith (pleading for Christ to “only speak a word” and his servant would be healed—vss. 8-9), Jesus responded: “I have not found such great faith, **not even in Israel**” (vs. 10).

If Jesus so willingly responded to a Gentile in Matthew chapter eight by miraculously healing his servant of paralysis, why did He initially resist healing the Gentile woman’s demon-possessed daughter in Matthew chapter 15? Consider the immediate context of the chapter. The scribes and Pharisees had once again come to criticize and badger Jesus (15:1-2). The Son of God responded with a hard-hitting truth: that His enemies were hypocrites who treasured tradition more than the Word of God, and whose religion was heartless (vss. 3-9). What was

the reaction of the Pharisees? Matthew gives no indication that their hearts were pricked by the Truth. Instead, Jesus' disciples reported to Him that "the Pharisees were **offended**" by Jesus' teachings (vs. 12), to which Jesus responded: "Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch" (vss. 13-14). Unlike many modern-day preachers who water down the Gospel and apologize for the Truth, Jesus did not sugar coat it. It may be a difficult pill to swallow, but sincere truth-seekers will respond in all humility, regardless of being offended.

Being offended is exactly what many people would have been had they initially been turned down by Jesus as was the Canaanite woman. While she pled for mercy, at first Jesus remained silent. Then, after being informed that Jesus "was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (vs. 24), she worshiped Him and begged Him for help (vs. 25). Even after being told, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs" (vs. 26), this persistent, humble woman did not allow potentially offensive remarks to harden her heart. Unlike the hypocritical Jewish scribes and Pharisees who responded to Jesus with hard-heartedness, this Gentile acknowledged her unworthiness, while persistently pursuing the Holy One for help (15:27). Ultimately, her faith resulted in the healing of her daughter and served as an admonition to those witnessing the event about the nature of true faith.

What many people miss in this story is what is so evident in other parts of Scripture: Jesus was testing this Canaanite woman, while at the same time teaching

His disciples how the tenderhearted respond to possibly offensive truths. The fact is, the truth can hurt (cf. Acts 2:36-37). However, we must remember to respond to God's tests and teachings of truth with all humility, rather than haughtiness (James 4:6,10).

DID JESUS DENY HIS DEITY AND MORAL PERFECTION?

Mark 10:18

The New Testament writers repeatedly testified to the fact that, though Jesus “was in all points tempted as we are,” He was “without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). Paul claimed that Jesus “knew no sin” (2 Corinthians 5:21). Peter said that Christ “committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth”—that He was the perfect sacrificial Lamb, “without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 2:22; 1:19). Likewise, John wrote that in Christ “there is no sin” (1 John 3:5). Jesus was supremely “pure,” “righteous,” and “good” (1 John 3:3; 2:1; John 10:11,14).

Additionally, the New Testament has much to say about the divine nature of Christ. Jesus claimed to be the Messiah (Mark 14:62; John 4:25-26), Whom Isaiah prophesied would be “Mighty God” and “Jehovah” (Isaiah 9:6; 40:3, ASV). Jesus accepted worship while in the form of a man (John 9:38)—implying that He, too, was Deity (Matthew 4:10; cf. Acts 12:21-23; 14:14-15). Jesus forgave sins, which only God can do (Mark 2:5-10). The apostle John said that Jesus “was God” (John 1:1). Jesus claimed to be “one” with God (John 10:30), leading His hearers to believe that He made Himself “God” (10:33). And, after the apostle Thomas called

Jesus “Lord” and “God” (John 20:28), Jesus immediately acknowledged Thomas’ faith, rather than deny the deity that Thomas had just professed. In his letter to the Philippians Paul wrote that Christ Jesus “being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God” (Philippians 2:6). In fact, “in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form” (Colossians 2:9, NASB).

In light of the fact that the Bible claims repeatedly that Jesus was both “good” and “God,” some contend that in Mark 10:18 (and Matthew 19:17) Jesus said just the opposite. In an article titled “New Testament Contradictions,” Paul Carlson stated that Mark 10:18 (among other passages) is “an embarrassment to the church,” as it indicates “Jesus did not consider himself sinless.”³⁷ By saying, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God” (Mark 10:18), allegedly “Jesus made a clear distinction between himself and God,” and, according to Muslims, Matthew and Mark “believed that Jesus was **not** God.”³⁸ According to skeptic Dennis McKinsey, in Mark 10:18, “Jesus is not only admitting that he is not perfectly moral but that he is not God.”³⁹

Does Jesus actually admit not being “good” and “God” in Mark 10:18? How did Jesus respond to the wealthy young ruler who asked Him, “Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?” (Mark 10:17). Did He deny being perfectly moral and Divine? The simple fact is, Jesus never denied being good or God.

So what did Jesus mean? Before answering this question, one must keep in mind that Jesus often responded

to questions in unexpected, masterful ways. He offered thought-provoking, soul-searching answers (often in the form of questions) that, unfortunately, many people have misinterpreted. As noted in a previous section, when the Pharisees asked Jesus about why His disciples allegedly broke the Law of Moses and plucked heads of grain as they walked through the fields on the Sabbath, rather than explicitly deny that the apostles were disregarding the Law of Moses, Jesus asked His accusers two very appropriate (and very perceptive) questions:

Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God and ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless? (Matthew 12:3-5).

Although many have misinterpreted Jesus' response on this occasion to justify situation ethics, Jesus did nothing of the sort. The only "law" that Jesus' disciples broke while going through the grain fields (Matthew 12:1-8) was **the Pharisaical interpretation of the Law**.

The rich young ruler was confident in his keeping of various commandments (Mark 10:20), but he surely never thought that Jesus would instruct him to sell whatever he had and give it to the poor—to leave everything and follow Him (10:21). Similarly, when the young ruler initially came to Jesus, saying, "Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" he never expected Jesus to say, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God" (10:17-18).

The young man seems to have regarded himself as “good” (since he professed to have kept all of the commandments that Jesus mentioned—Mark 10:20). Perhaps the gentleman simply wanted to know—from one good man to another good man (a “good teacher”)—what do I need to do to inherit eternal life. Rather than immediately answer the young man’s question, however, it seems Jesus first wanted (1) to humble him, by highlighting that he was not as “good” as he considered himself to be, and (2) for him to realize Who exactly he was questioning. He wasn’t merely petitioning a “good” (Greek *agathos*) **man**.

The Bible records various (mere) human beings who were called “good” (*agathos*). Luke recorded that Barnabas “was a good man” (Acts 11:24). Paul indicated that Christians are to “do good to all” (Galatians 6:10). (Are Christians who do good, “good” Christians?) Even Jesus stated previous to His encounter with the rich young ruler that “[a] good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things” (Matthew 12:35). Thus, clearly when Jesus spoke to the wealthy ruler He was not using “good” in the sense of a **man** being “good.” Rather, He was using it in the sense of **God** being **absolutely, supremely good**. The kind of goodness to which He was referring belongs only to God. The only way man can objectively call someone “good” is if there is an ultimate standard for goodness—the supreme, unblemished, good God.

Jesus never said what skeptics, Muslims, and others allege He said—that He was not good, or that He was not God. Instead, Jesus attempted to get the rich young ruler to see the implications of calling Him “**Good** Teacher.”

Do good (merely) **human** teachers claim to be the Messiah? Do good **men** accept worship and honor due only to God (John 5:23)? Do good **men** claim to have the power to forgive sins? Absolutely not! But Jesus had the power to forgive sins. He actually claimed to be the Messiah and accepted worship. So what was Jesus implying when He asked the young ruler, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God?” As Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe observed:

Jesus was saying to him, “Do you realize what you are saying when you call Me Good? Are you saying I am God?”... Jesus was forcing him to a very uncomfortable dilemma. Either Jesus was good and God, or else He was bad and man. A good God or a bad man, but not merely a good man. Those are the real alternatives with regard to Christ. For no good man would claim to be God when he was not. The liberal Christ, who was only a good moral teacher but not God, is a figment of human imagination.⁴⁰

To contend that Mark 10:18 proves that Jesus thought Himself to be neither morally perfect nor God is (1) to disregard the overall context of the Bible, (2) to twist the Scriptures like untaught and unstable people do—“to their own destruction” (2 Peter 3:16), and (3) to take a superficial reading of the text. Far from denying the deity of Christ, Mark 10:17-22 actually affirms it. The young ruler “called Christ a ‘good teacher,’ with no indication that he understood Jesus to be the Messiah. Jesus seized on the word ‘good,’ pointed out that if the man thought He was good, then He must be God,”⁴¹ because only God is innately and supremely good.

WAS JESUS A HYPOCRITE?

Matthew 5:22; 23:16-17

A man who instructs a person to refrain from doing something he deems inappropriate, but then proceeds to do the very thing he forbade the other person to do, is considered a hypocrite. A preacher who teaches about the sinfulness of drunkenness (cf. Galatians 5:21), but then is seen a short while later stumbling down the street, intoxicated with alcohol, could be accused of being guilty of hypocrisy. Some have accused Jesus of such insincere teaching. Allegedly, in the very sermon in which He condemned the Pharisees for their unrighteousness (Matthew 5:20), Jesus revealed His own sinfulness by way of condemning those who used a word He sometimes uttered. Based upon His forbiddance of the use of the word “fool” in Matthew 5:22, and His use of this word elsewhere, skeptics have asserted that Jesus (Whom the Bible claims “committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth”—1 Peter 2:22; cf. 2 Corinthians 5:21), was guilty of hypocrisy.⁴² In Matthew 5:21-22, Jesus stated:

You have heard that it was said to those of old, “You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.” But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, “Raca!” shall be in danger of the council. But **whoever says, “You fool!” shall be in danger of hell fire** (Matthew 5:21-22).

Whereas in this passage Jesus warned against the use of the word “fool,” in other passages Jesus openly used this term to describe various people. Near the end of

the “Sermon on the Mount,” Jesus likened the person who heard His teachings, but did not follow them, to “**a foolish man** who built his house on the sand” (Matthew 7:26). When teaching about the need to be prepared for His second coming, Jesus compared those who were not ready for His return to **five foolish virgins** (Matthew 25:1-12). Then, while Jesus was condemning the Pharisees for their inconsistency in matters of religion, He stated: “Woe to you, blind guides, who say, ‘Whoever swears by the temple, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obliged to perform it.’ **Fools and blind!** For which is greater, the gold or the temple that sanctifies the gold?” (Matthew 23:16-17; cf. 23:18-19). The question that some ask in response to these alleged hypocritical statements is, “How could Jesus condemn the use of the word ‘fool’ in Matthew 5:22, but then proceed to use this word Himself on other occasions?”

First, for Jesus’ statement in Matthew 5:22 to contradict His actions recorded in other passages, the skeptic must prove that the term “fool,” as used in 5:22, is the same word used elsewhere. The Greek word “Raca,” used earlier in Matthew 5:22, is a transliteration of the Aramaic term whose precise meaning is disputed. [Most likely, it means “an empty one who acts as a numskull.”⁴³] The exact meaning of the term “fool” (Greek *mōre*) in this context also is debated. “Most scholars take it, as the ancient Syrian versions did, to mean **you fool**.”⁴⁴ Although some assume that *mōre* is the vocative of the Greek *moros*, in all likelihood,

just as “Raca” is a non-Greek word, so is the word *mōre* that Jesus used here. If so, then it is a word

which to a Jewish ear meant “rebel (against God)” or “apostate”; it was the word which Moses in exasperation used to the disaffected Israelites in the wilderness of Zin...(Numbers 20:10). For these rash words, uttered under intense provocation, Moses was excluded from the Promised Land.⁴⁵

Thus, it is quite possible that *mōre* (translated “You fool” in Matthew 5:22) is not the normal Greek *moros* (fool) that Jesus applied to the Pharisees on other occasions (Matthew 23:17,19), but represents the Hebrew *moreh* (cf. Numbers 20:10). [For this reason, translators of the American Standard Version added a marginal note to this word in Matthew 5:22: “Or, **Moreh, a Hebrew expression of condemnation.**”⁴⁶] Obviously, if two different words are under consideration, Jesus logically could not be considered a hypocrite.

Second, it must be remembered that Jesus’ comments in Matthew 5:22 were made within a context where He was condemning unrighteous anger (5:21-26). Whereas the Pharisees condemned murder, but overlooked the evil emotions and attitudes that sometimes led to the shedding of innocent blood, Jesus condemned both the actions and the thoughts. Instead of dealing with only “peripheral” problems, Jesus went to the heart of the matter. As someone Who “knew what was in man” (John 2:25), Jesus was more than qualified to pronounce judgment upon the hypocritical Pharisees (cf. John 12:48). Like the unrighteousness that characterized the Pharisees’ charitable deeds (Matthew 6:1-4), prayers (6:5-15), fasting (6:16-18), and judgments (7:1-5), Jesus also condemned their unrighteous anger. [NOTE: Jesus did not condemn **all** anger (cf. Ephesians 4:26;

John 2:13-17), only **unrighteous** anger.] It was in this context that Jesus warned against the use of the word “fool.” Jesus was not prohibiting a person from calling people “fools” if it was done in an appropriate manner (cf. Psalm 14:1), but He was forbidding it when done in the spirit of malicious contempt. He “warned against using the word fool as a form of abuse” that indicated “hatred in one’s heart toward others”⁴⁷ (cf. Matthew 5:43-48). As in many other situations, it seems that the attitude, rather than actual words, is the focus of the prohibition.

While Matthew 5:22, when taken in its context, is seen to be consistent with Jesus’ words and actions recorded elsewhere in the gospel accounts, His prohibition regarding the **manner** of a word’s usage should not be overlooked in the apologist’s effort to defend biblical inerrancy. We may call an atheist a “fool” for not acknowledging God’s existence (Psalm 14:1), but to do so in a hateful, malicious manner is sinful. Remember, the Christian is called to “give a defense to everyone” in a spirit of “meekness and fear” (1 Peter 3:15).

Chapter 4



ALLEGED CONTRADICTIONS AND THE FLOOD

Name a Bible subject that has been scoffed at or ridiculed more than the account of the Noahic Flood. Name a topic that has borne the brunt of more jokes, or that the unbeliever has used more often to poke fun at the Bible, than Noah's ark. Likely it would be difficult to find any Bible subject that has received more derision in modern times, or has been the subject of more mockery than the story recorded in Genesis 6-9.

The biblical account of the great Flood is one of the more prominent stories in Scripture, with more space allotted to it in the book of Genesis than to the creation of "the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them" (Exodus 20:11; Genesis 1-2). Four of the first nine chapters of Genesis are devoted to the record of Noah,

his immediate family, and the Flood. We know more about the Flood than any other event (recorded in Holy Writ) from approximately the first 2,000 years of man's existence on Earth. What's more, there are several New Testament references to Noah and the Flood (Matthew 24:37-39; Luke 17:26-27; Hebrews 11:7; 1 Peter 3:20; 2 Peter 2:5). Yet, the account of Noah, his ark, and the great Flood has been, and still is, a favorite target of Bible critics.

More than a century ago, renowned American agnostic Robert Ingersoll penned his infamous book titled *Some Mistakes of Moses*. Regarding Noah's ark and the Flood, he wrote: "Volumes might be written upon the infinite absurdity of this most incredible, wicked and foolish of all fables contained in that repository of the impossible, called the Bible. To me it is a matter of amazement, that it ever was for a moment believed by any intelligent human being."¹ In more recent times, evolutionist Douglas Futuyma asked: "Can you believe that any grown man or woman with the slightest knowledge of biology, geology, physics, or any science at all, not to speak of plain and simple common sense, can conceivably believe this?"² What's more, skeptic Dennis McKinsey, the one-time editor of the journal *Biblical Errancy* (touted as "the only national periodical focusing on biblical errors"), argued that there is a "**large number** of contradictions between biblical verses with respect to what occurred" in Genesis 6-9.³ McKinsey alleged there exists a "great number of difficulties, impossibilities, and unanswered questions accompanying the biblical account" of the Flood.⁴ He added: "Anyone believing in the Flood must provide **rational answers**

to...questions”⁵ regarding Noah’s ark, the number of clean and unclean animals on the ark, where the ark eventually rested, what happened to all of the Flood waters, etc. The fact is, rational answers do exist to these questions and many others. Given adequate time and tools (beginning with the Bible), an apologist can reasonably counter any and all criticisms of the Flood and Noah’s ark.

Before answering some of the alleged problems with the Flood and Noah’s ark, one must first recognize that we are addressing four chapters of the Bible that involve the prevailing power of an omnipotent God Who performed various supernatural feats. Although a skeptic might consider any mention of the miraculous in connection with the Flood as an untenable defense by a Bible believer, the simple truth is that Genesis chapters 6-9 make it clear that God worked several miracles during the Flood. Just as God worked miracles prior to the Flood (e.g., creating the world and everything in it—Genesis 1-2), and just as He worked miracles after the Flood (e.g., confusing the language of all the Earth—Genesis 11:1-9), He performed various wonders during the Flood. As John Whitcomb noted in his book *The World That Perished*: “A careful analysis of the relevant exegetical data reveals at least six areas in which supernaturalism is clearly demanded in the doctrine of the Flood.”⁶ What are these areas? “(1) [T]he divinely-revealed design of the Ark; (2) the gathering and care of the animals; (3) the uplift of the oceanic waters from beneath; (4) the release of waters from above; (5) the formation of our present ocean basins; and (6) the formation of our present continents and mountain ranges”⁷

(cf. 2 Peter 3:4ff.). The fact is, “one cannot have any kind of a Genesis Flood without acknowledging the presence of supernatural powers.”⁸

Thus, certain “difficulties, impossibilities, and unanswered questions accompanying the biblical account”⁹ of the Flood may be explained sufficiently simply by acknowledging God’s supernatural involvement. However, apologists do not have to appeal to an “endless supplying of miracles to make a universal flood feasible,” as Bernard Ramm suggested.¹⁰ In truth, many of the alleged contradictions and proposed absurdities involving Noah and the Flood are logically explained by an honest and serious study of the Scriptures.

ADEQUATE ARK OR DEFICIENT DINGHY?

Genesis 6:15; 7:2-3

One of the most frequently criticized parts of the biblical account of the Flood involves the size of Noah’s ark and the number of animals that lived in the vessel during the Flood. Allegedly, “[T]he ark...was far too small to be able to contain the earth’s millions of...animal species.”¹¹ Another critic asked: “How could two of every animal survive for approximately 10 months on a boat encompassing 1,518,750 cubic feet. The food alone would absorb tremendous space.”¹² In a document titled “Biblical Absurdities,” infidel.org contributing writer Donald Morgan wrote: “The size of Noah’s Ark was such that there would be about one and a half cubic feet for each pair of the 2,000,000 to 5,000,000 species to be taken aboard.”¹³ Even one of the evolutionary scientists

interviewed in Ben Stein's documentary, *Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed*, mocked the Bible's account of Noah housing all of the various kinds of land animals on the ark.¹⁴ All of these criticisms beg the question, "Was Noah's vessel an adequate ark or a deficient dinghy?"

First, contrary to popular belief, the Bible does not teach that Noah took aboard the ark two of every **species** of animal on Earth. The Hebrew term used in the Flood account (as in the Creation account) to distinguish animals is *min* (translated "kind" 10 times in Genesis 1 and 7 times in Genesis 6-7). The Bible was written long before man invented the Linnaean classification system. The "kinds" of animals that Adam named on the sixth day of Creation and that accompanied Noah on the ark were likely very broad. As Henry Morris observed: "[T]he created kinds undoubtedly represented broader categories than our modern species or genera, quite possibly approximating in most cases the taxonomic **family**."¹⁵ Instead of Noah taking aboard the ark two of the brown bears species (*Ursus arctos*), two of the polar bear species (*Ursus maritimus*), two of the American black bear species (*Ursus americanus*), etc., he could have simply taken two members of the bear family (*Ursidae*), which could have possessed enough genetic variety so that bears thousands of years later could look significantly different. Even in recent times, scientists have learned of a polar bear and brown bear producing an offspring. Some have tagged the bear with the name "pizzly" in order to reflect its "polar" and "grizzly" heritage.¹⁶ Truly, "[i]t is unwarranted to insist that all the present species, not to mention all the varieties and sub-varieties of animals in the world today, were represented in the

Ark.”¹⁷ Still, even after analyzing the number of birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians proposed by evolutionary taxonomist Ernst Mayr, creationists Whitcomb and Morris concluded that “there was need for no more than 35,000 individual vertebrate animals on the Ark,” plus the small, non-marine arthropods and worms.¹⁸ Needless to say, the “2,000,000 to 5,000,000 species” proposed by Donald Morgan is grossly overstated.

Second, supposing that the cubit in Noah’s day was 17.5 inches (a most conservative “cubit” considering the Egyptian cubit, the Mesopotamian cubit, and the “long” cubit of Ezekiel 40:5 all exceeded this measurement by two inches),¹⁹ then Noah’s ark would have been **at the very least** 437.5 feet long, 72.92 feet wide, and 43.75 feet high. “[T]he available floor space of this three-decked barge was over 95,000 square feet,” the equivalent of slightly more than 20 standard basketball courts, “and its total volume was 1,396,000 cubic feet,”²⁰ which means “the Ark had a carrying capacity equal to that of 522 standard stock cars as used by modern railroads.”²¹ What’s more, “if 240 animals of the size of sheep could be accommodated in a standard two-decked stock car,” then 35,000 animals could be housed in less than 150 such cars,²² which is less than 30% of the ark’s total capacity. Suffice it to say, “[T]he dimensions of the Ark were sufficiently great to accomplish its intended purpose of saving alive the thousands of kinds of air-breathing creatures that could not otherwise survive a year-long Flood.”²³ [NOTE: God likely allowed Noah to take young animals into the ark, instead of those that were fully grown, in order to save space and reduce the amount of necessary food. It also would

have meant that, on average, the animals would have lived longer and produced even more offspring after the Flood.]

THE “WINDOW” OF THE ARK

Genesis 6:16

After informing Noah about an upcoming world-wide flood, and commanding him to build a massive boat of gopher wood, God instructed His faithful servant, saying, “You shall make **a window** for the ark, and you shall finish it to a cubit from above” (Genesis 6:16). Upon reading about this window in Noah’s ark, many have challenged its usefulness. Since, historically, windows have served two basic purposes (lighting and ventilation), inquiring minds want to know what good one window, about 18 inches square, would be on an ark with a capacity of roughly 1,400,000 cubic feet, occupied by thousands of animals. Dennis McKinsey has asked: “How could so many creatures breathe with only one small opening which was closed for at least 190 days?”²⁴ Other skeptics also have ridiculed the idea that sufficient ventilation for the whole ark could have come through this one window.²⁵ In fact, anyone even slightly familiar with animal-house ventilation needs is taken aback by the apparent lack of airflow allowed by the ark’s design. Unless God miraculously ventilated the ark, one little window on a three-story boat, the length of which was approximately a football-field-and-a-half long, simply would not do.

Questions regarding the “window” on Noah’s ark and the problem of ventilation have escalated largely because the Hebrew word translated window (*tsohar*) in

Genesis 6:16 appears only here in the Old Testament, and linguistic scholars are unsure as to its exact meaning.²⁶ Translators of the KJV and NKJV use the word “window” to translate *tsohar*; however, according to Old Testament commentator Victor Hamilton, they “do so on the basis of the word’s possible connection with *sahorayim*, ‘noon, midday,’ thus an opening to let in the light of day.”²⁷ Hebrew scholar William Gesenius defined *tsohar* in his Hebrew lexicon as simply “light,” and translated Genesis 6:16 as “thou shalt make light for the ark.”²⁸ He then surmised that this “light” represented, not **a** window, but **windows** (plural). The ASV translators also preferred “light” as the best translation for *tsohar*. Still more recent translations, including the RSV, NIV, and ESV, have translated Genesis 6:16 as “[m]ake a **roof**” for the ark, instead of make a “window” or “light.”

Such disagreement among translations is, admittedly, somewhat discouraging to the person who wants a definite answer as to how *tsohar* should be translated. What is clear, however, is that the word translated “window” two chapters later, which Noah is said to have “opened” (8:6), is translated from a **different** Hebrew word (*challôwn*) than what is used in Genesis 6:16. *Challôwn* (8:6) is the standard Hebrew word for “window” (cf. Genesis 26:8; Joshua 2:18). Yet, interestingly, this is **not** the word used in 6:16. One wonders if, in 8:6, Noah opened one of a plurality of aligned windows that God instructed him to make in 6:16.

Another assumption often brought into a discussion regarding the “window” (*tsohar*) of 6:16 is that it was one square cubit. Although many people have imagined

Noah's ark as having one small window about 18 inches high by 18 inches wide, the phrase "you shall finish it to a cubit from above" (6:16, NKJV; cf. RSV) does not give the Bible reader any clear dimensions of the opening. The text just says that Noah was to "finish it to a cubit from the top" (NASB; "upward," ASV). The simple truth is, the **size** of the lighting apparatus mentioned in this verse is unspecified. The text indicates only the distance the opening was from the top of the ark, rather than the actual size of the window. Thus we cannot form a definite picture of it. But, we do know that nothing in the text warrants an interpretation that the "window" was just a "small opening" (as critics allege). A more probable theory, which aligns itself appropriately with the text, is that the opening described in Genesis 6:16 extended around the ark's circumference 18 inches from the top of the ark with an undeterminable height. According to geologist John Woodmorappe, such an opening would have provided sufficient light and ventilation for the ark.²⁹ [For further reading on this subject, see Woodmorappe's book, *Noah's Ark: A Feasibility Study*.]

It is important to remember that many details about biblical events are **not** revealed to the reader. So it is with the plans for Noah's ark. As Henry Morris commented, "It was obviously not the intention of the writer to record the complete specifications for the ark's construction, but only enough to assure later readers that it was quite adequate for its intended purpose... 'to preserve life on the earth.'"³⁰ Truly, absolute certainty regarding the openings on the ark cannot be determined. We know of an opening mentioned in Genesis 6:16 (*tsohar*), as well as one mentioned in 8:6 (*challôwn*). And, since Noah, his

family, and the animals on the ark survived the Flood, it is only logical to conclude that God made proper ways to ventilate the ark in which they lived during the Flood. Although nothing in Scripture demands that those living millennia after the Flood know how it was ventilated, lighted, etc., it is very likely that God used the opening mentioned in Genesis 6:16.

CLEAN AND UNCLEAN ANIMALS BEFORE THE LAW OF MOSES?

Genesis 7:2; 8:20

One particular allegation that skeptics have made for many years concerning the biblical account of Noah and the Flood is that “[c]lean and unclean animals were not delineated until the eleventh chapter of Leviticus.... There were no...clean/unclean animals in Noah’s time.”³¹ Early America’s most outspoken critic of the Bible, Thomas Paine, remarked in a letter to the editor of a paper known as *The Prospect*, saying:

On the absurd story of Noah’s Flood, in Gen. 7, I send you the following: The second verse makes God to say unto Noah, “Of every clean beast thou shalt take to thee by sevens, the male and his female, and of every beast that are not clean, by two, the male and his female.”

Now, there was no such thing as beasts clean and unclean in the time of Noah.... The story, therefore, detects itself, because the inventor forgot himself, by making God make use of an expression that could not be used at the time. The blunder is of the same kind, as if a man in telling a story about America a hundred years ago, should

quote an expression from Mr. Jefferson's inaugural speech as if spoken by him at that time.³²

Supposedly, the biblical placement of instructions regarding clean and unclean animals in the time of Noah in the book of Genesis is anachronistic.

Skeptics apparently have refused to acknowledge that, though Moses made laws concerning clean and unclean animals at a much later time than the Flood, it does not mean that such rules concerning animals could not have existed prior to Moses—yes, even prior to the Flood. As commentator John Willis noted: “A law or a truth does not have to have its origin with a certain individual or religion to be a vital part of that religion or to be distinctive in that religion.”³³ Jesus, for example, was not the first person to teach that man needs to love God with all of his heart (cf. Deuteronomy 6:5), or that man must love his neighbor (cf. Leviticus 19:18) **and** his enemies (cf. Exodus 23:4-5; Proverbs 25:21-22). Yet these teachings were central to Christ's message (cf. Matthew 22:34-40; Matthew 5:43-48). Similarly, simply because God chose circumcision as a sign between Himself and Abraham's descendants, does not necessarily mean that no male in the history of mankind had ever been circumcised before the circumcision of Abraham and his household (Genesis 17). What's more, Moses wrote in the book of Leviticus years after Abraham lived: “If a woman has conceived, and borne a male child, then she shall be unclean seven days; as in the days of her customary impurity she shall be unclean. And **on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised**” (12:2-3). Moses, however, was not prescribing a new law. On

the contrary, he knew very well what was expected from God concerning the matter of circumcision, even before he included this sort of instruction as part of Mosaic Law (read Exodus 4:24-26).

For skeptics to allege that differentiation between clean and unclean animals was nonexistent prior to Moses is totally unsubstantiated. Humanity had been sacrificing animals since the fall of man (cf. Genesis 3:21). That God had given laws concerning animal sacrifices since the time of Cain and Abel is evident from the fact that the second son of Adam was able to offer an animal sacrifice “by faith” (Hebrews 11:4; Genesis 4:4). Since “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17), Abel must have received revelation from God on how to offer acceptable animal sacrifices. Such revelation easily could have dealt with which sacrificial animals were acceptable (“clean”), and which were unacceptable (“unclean”). Furthermore, more than 400 hundred years before Moses gave the Israelites laws differentiating clean and unclean animals, God made a covenant with Abraham concerning the land that his descendants eventually would possess (Genesis 15). Part of the “sign” that Abraham was given at that time involved the killing of a heifer, a female goat, a ram, a turtledove, and a pigeon (Genesis 15:9). Interestingly, all of these animals were later considered clean under the Law of Moses (cf. Leviticus 1:2,10,14).

Without a doubt, the distinction between clean and unclean animals existed long before the Law of Moses was given. Although this distinction did not include all of the details and applications given by Moses (prior to the Flood the distinction seems only to have applied to

the matter of animals suitable for sacrifice, not for consumption—cf. Genesis 9:2-3), animal sacrifice to God **was practiced** during the Patriarchal Age, and it is apparent that the faithful were able to distinguish between the clean and unclean. Noah certainly knew the difference.

HOW MANY ANIMALS OF EACH KIND DID NOAH TAKE INTO THE ARK?

Genesis 6:19; 7:2-3

Ask children who are even vaguely familiar with the biblical account of the Flood how many animals of each kind Noah took into the ark, and you likely will hear, “Two!” Most Bible students are familiar with the instructions recorded in Genesis 6:19 that God gave to Noah: “And of every living thing of all flesh you shall bring **two of every sort into the ark**, to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female” (Genesis 6:19; cf. 7:15). It seems that fewer people, however, are aware that God also instructed Noah, saying, “You shall take with you **seven** each of every clean animal, a male and his female; two each of animals that are unclean, a male and his female; also **seven** each of birds of the air, male and female, to keep the species alive on the face of all the earth” (Genesis 7:2-3). According to Bible critics, these verses are contradictory. “Are clean beasts to enter by 2’s or by 7’s?” asked Dennis McKinsey.³⁴ Michelle Andrews, writing for a special 2004 collector’s edition of *U.S. News and World Report*, was so bothered by the differences between Genesis 6:19 and 7:2-3 that she claimed, “there are two versions of the story of Noah and the flood” in Genesis, neither of which supposedly was written by Moses.³⁵

The biblical text, however, is rather easy to understand without giving up on the inspiration of Genesis, or the authorship of Moses: the **clean** beasts and birds entered the ark “by sevens” (Genesis 7:2-3, KJV), while the unclean animals went into the ark by twos. There is no contradiction here. Genesis 6:19 indicates that Noah was to take “two of every sort into the ark.” Then, four verses later, God **supplemented** this original instruction, informing Noah in a more detailed manner, to take more of the clean animals. If a farmer told his son to take two of every kind of farm animal to the state fair, and then instructed his son to take several extra chickens and two extra pigs for a barbecue, would anyone accuse the farmer of contradicting himself? Certainly not. It was necessary for Noah to take additional clean animals because, upon his departure from the ark after the Flood, he “built an altar to the Lord, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar” (Genesis 8:20). If Noah had taken only two clean animals from which to choose when sacrificing to God after departing the ark, then he would have driven the various kinds of clean beasts and birds into extinction by sacrificing one of each pair. Thus, after God told Noah to take two of every kind of animal into the ark, He then instructed him to take extras of the clean animals. Similar to how Genesis chapter 2 supplements the first chapter of Genesis by giving a more detailed account of the Creation,³⁶ the first portion of Genesis 7 merely supplements the end of the preceding chapter, “containing several particulars of a minute description which were not embraced in the general directions first given to Noah.”³⁷

One translation difficulty, which should not trouble a person's faith, revolves around the actual number of clean animals taken into the ark. Through the years, various Bible students have wondered whether this number was seven or fourteen (Genesis 7:2). The Hebrew phrase *shibb'ah shibb'ah* is translated somewhat vaguely in both the King James and American Standard versions. [According to the King James Version, clean animals were taken into the ark "by sevens" (Genesis 7:2). The American Standard Version has the clean animals taken "seven and seven."] Newer translations are worded more clearly, but there is general disagreement among them. The New King James and New International versions both agree that Noah took **seven** of each clean animal into the ark, whereas the Revised Standard Version, the New English Bible, and the English Standard Version all translate *shibb'ah shibb'ah* to mean "seven pairs" of clean animals. Although some believe that "there can be no certainty on this point,"³⁸ H.C. Leupold argued that the Hebrew phrase *shibb'ah shibb'ah* "would be a most clumsy method of trying to say 'fourteen.'"³⁹ Comparing similar language within Genesis 7, Whitcomb and Morris persuasively argued: "The Hebrew phrase 'seven and seven' no more means fourteen than does the parallel phrase 'two and two' (Gen. 7:9,15) mean four!"⁴⁰

WHERE DID ALL OF THE FLOOD WATERS GO?

Genesis 7:19-20

According to evolutionist Bill Butler, "The greatest geologic fiction that the Creationists adhere to is

Noah's Flood."⁴¹ The idea that water ever covered the entire Earth, including the highest hills and mountains (Genesis 7:19-20), supposedly is unthinkable (and impossible). In Butler's article, "Creationism = Willful Ignorance," he asked: "If the earth's surface were covered by an additional 29,000+ feet of water, how do you get rid of it?"⁴² If Mount Everest reaches a height of over 29,000 feet, then the Bible allegedly indicates that the Flood waters reached even higher—approximately 23 feet higher than the peak of Mount Everest (Genesis 7:20). If such is the case, where did all of the water go?

First, the Bible is more specific about **Who** caused the waters to subside, than **where** exactly all of the waters went. Moses wrote: "**God made** a wind to pass over the earth, and the waters subsided.... And the waters receded continually from the earth" (Genesis 8:1,3). Years later, the prophet Isaiah recorded how the Lord compared a promise He made to Israel with His promise "that the waters of Noah would no longer cover the earth" (Isaiah 54:9). Although these passages do not tell us exactly where the waters went, for the person who believes that God worked several miracles during the Flood, it is reasonable to conclude that **God did something** with the Flood waters.

Second, the skeptic's assertion (that there presently is not enough water on the Earth for there ever to have been the kind of flood described in Genesis 6-8) is based upon invalid assumptions. The truth is, no one knows the height of the mountains or the depth of the ocean valleys in Noah's day. Thus, one cannot know how much water was on the Earth during the Noahic Flood. Psalm 104:6-8 indicates that, at some time in the

past, God established **new** heights and depths for the Earth's mountains and valleys. Directing his comments to Jehovah, the psalmist proclaimed:

You covered it [the Earth] with the deep sea as with a garment; the waters were standing above the mountains. They fled from Your rebuke, at the sound of Your thunder they hurried away. **The mountains rose; the valleys sank down to the place which You established for them** (NASB).

Just as God miraculously altered the Earth's topography during the Creation week (Genesis 1:9-13), and just as He miraculously sent flood waters upon the Earth, God could have miraculously caused the waters to subside. In all likelihood, the antediluvian world was vastly different from the Earth of today (cf. 2 Peter 3:6). It is reasonable to believe that the mountains of Noah's day were much smaller than such peaks as Mount Everest or Mount McKinley that are so well known to us. Thus, the Flood would not have had to rise to levels of 29,000+ feet to cover everything on the Earth. According to the Scriptures, the waters rose above the mountaintops; however, we simply cannot know the heights reached by the antediluvian mountains. (Interestingly, marine fossils have been found in the Himalayas.)⁴³

In an attempt to defend his criticism of the Noahic Flood, and to discredit anyone who would argue that the Earth's topography after the Flood was likely very different than it was before the Flood, Butler suggested the following. First, he emphatically states that, since "[t]he Tigris/Euphrates valley existed in its present form before the flood," the topography of the Earth

could not have changed that much during (and after) the Flood. Second, he argued that “the text specifically states the flood covered ‘all the high mountains.’ If the mountains were low at this time, the word ‘high’ would not be used.”⁴⁴

Notice, however, the faulty reasoning involved in both points Butler made. First, there is **no proof** that “The Tigris/Euphrates valley existed in its present form before the flood.” In fact, according to Genesis 2:10-14, there was one river that went out of Eden that then parted and became four rivers. The Tigris and Euphrates rivers of today, however, do not branch from a common source, but flow from separate sources in the Armenian mountains. The rivers of the same name in Genesis 2 are different from those that exist today by the same name. (It is very possible that the people who left the ark, as well as their descendants, used familiar names for the new rivers they found.) Second, simply because Genesis 7:19-20 stresses that the Flood waters covered “all the **high** hills/mountains,” does not mean these mountains could not have been somewhat lower than the mountains of today. Though Butler stated: “If the mountains were low at this time, **the word ‘high’ would not be used**,” on what basis does he make such an assertion? If in a particular class of dwarfs, some were taller than others, could we not speak of certain “tall dwarfs” in his class? Who is to say that we could not use the word “tall” when speaking of a few particular dwarfs who might be much taller than the rest of the class? Similarly, just because Genesis 7:19-20 uses the word “high,” does not mean that the antediluvian mountains were at their current height.

Truthfully, however tall the mountains were before the Flood, some were “higher” than others, and thus could be referred to as the “high mountains.”

Third, Butler wrote: “Water is less dense than the rock of the earth’s surface. Thus it would not drain down below the surface. Even if you forced it down, where is it? No oil or gas well has ever hit a subterranean ocean 29,000+ feet thick.”⁴⁵ As is often the case with Bible critics, time is not their friend. Repeatedly throughout history, time has helped exonerate Bible writers. Whether it is archaeologists finding remains of a particular biblical people, which critics once alleged never existed (e.g., the Hittites),⁴⁶ or scientists finally learning why the eighth day of a child’s life would have been the perfect day to perform circumcision,⁴⁷ again and again time has turned out to be a friend of the Bible and a foe to the ever-changing theories of man. Consider Butler’s comments. He confidently asserted that the Flood waters would be unable to “drain down below the surface.” He then asked, “even if you forced it [the Flood water–EL] down, where is it?” Apparently, in 2002, no one knew about great amounts of water below the crust layer of the Earth. With the passing of time, however, scientists have learned differently.

Livescience.com staff writer Ker Than reported that “[s]cientists scanning the deep interior of Earth have found evidence of a **vast water reservoir** beneath eastern Asia that is **at least the volume of the Arctic Ocean**.”⁴⁸ “The discovery,” Ker Than added, “marks the first time such a **large body of water** was found in the planet’s **deep mantle**.”⁴⁹ Butler criticized the biblical Flood account because the Flood waters supposedly

“would not drain below the surface” of the Earth, yet a large amount of water has been discovered “in the planet’s deep mantle.” What’s more, “researchers estimate that up to 0.1 percent of the rock sinking down **into the Earth’s mantle** in that part of the world [eastern Asia–EL] **is water.**”⁵⁰

Once again, time has become the foe of the Bible’s critics. Although no one can be certain what happened to **all** of the water that once flooded the Earth, it is very possible that God sent some of it to reside “in the planet’s deep mantle.” Regardless, it is unreasonable to reject the Genesis Flood account because one **assumes** some of the Flood waters could not have relocated beneath the Earth’s crust. One wonders how Flood critics will react to news of a “vast water reservoir beneath eastern Asia.”

Where did all of the Flood waters go? The most logical answer in light of the Scriptures appears to be that God made room for the waters by adjusting the Earth’s topography. Much of the water from the Flood likely has retreated into the deeper ocean trenches—valleys that, in places, are over seven miles deep. What’s more, some of it may very well be under the Earth’s crust.

NOAH, THE FLOOD, AND 120 YEARS

Genesis 6:3; 9:29

In his article “Bible Inconsistencies – Bible Contradictions?” Donald Morgan juxtaposed Genesis 6:3 and Genesis 9:29, suggesting the two verses are inconsistent. Since God said, “My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, for he is indeed flesh; yet his days shall be **one**

hundred and twenty years” (Genesis 6:3), and since Noah lived 950 **years** (Genesis 9:29), then these two verses are (allegedly) problematic. What’s more, skeptic Steve Wells asked, “What is the human life span?” He then answered his question (about Genesis 6:3),⁵¹ saying, “After the flood, many men (and at least one woman) lived longer than God’s 120 year limit.”⁵² Wells then went on to give 13 examples of individuals who lived longer than 120 years. Thus, the critic claims, “Genesis 6:3 is simply a false statement.”

Whether skeptics or not, the fact is, many have questioned the 120-year figure of Genesis 6:3. Indeed, **many have lived longer than 120 years**—before and after the Flood. Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, and Jacob all lived to be older than 120 (Genesis 25:7; 25:17; 35:28; 47:28). Even Aaron, the first high priest of Israel, who lived approximately 1,000 years after the Flood, lived to be 123 (Numbers 33:39). What’s more, according to the *Encyclopedia of Genetics*, Jeanne Calment of France, “died in 1998 at the age of 122.”⁵³ How can Genesis 6:3 be so glaringly wrong? (Or is it?)

Though overlooked by many, **the immediate and remote Bible verses suggest the 120 years is a reference to something very different than the limit of a person’s lifespan.** The people on Earth during Noah’s pre-Flood life were extremely wicked. In fact, “the wickedness of man” was so “great,” that “every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5). The Earth had become so depraved and filled with so much violence by the time Noah was 500 that God decided to bring destruction upon the Earth, the likes of which the world had never seen

(6:13; 7:6). However, since God is perfect in His patience and desires to see sinners repent rather than perish (whether in the Flood or in eternal hell—2 Peter 3:9; cf. Romans 15:4-5; 1 Timothy 2:4), “**the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah**” (1 Peter 3:20). Similar to how God patiently waited hundreds of years before bringing judgment upon the increasingly wicked Canaanites (since at the time of Abraham their sin had “not yet reached its full measure”—Genesis 15:16, NIV), God waited year after year, and decade after decade “while the ark was being prepared” (1 Peter 3:20).

During this waiting period, God’s “Spirit” contended with a works-of-the-flesh-loving mankind for 120 years (Genesis 6:3; cf. Galatians 5:19-21). Notice that when Peter wrote about Noah, his disobedient contemporaries, and the patience of God (1 Peter 3:20), he remarked that “**the Spirit**” of Christ “went and **preached** to the spirits in prison” (1 Peter 3:18-19).

- **When** exactly did the Spirit of Christ do this? When “the Divine longsuffering waited **in the days of Noah**” (3:20).
- **How** did God’s Spirit go about His work? We are not informed in all the ways He worked during the years leading up to the Flood, but we do know that Noah was “a preacher of righteousness” (2 Peter 2:5). It may be that Lamech and Methuselah (Noah’s father and grandfather) were also godly preachers through whom God’s Holy Spirit spoke.
- **To whom** did the Spirit speak? Peter says, “[T]o the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient” (3:19-20). How did **the Spirit** speak to spirits **in prison**? Dave Miller explained: “[A]t the time Peter was writing

the words, that is where those people were situated. Those who were drowned in the Flood of Noah's day descended into the hadean realm, where they continued to reside in Peter's day. This realm is the same location where the rich man was placed (Luke 16:23), as were the sinning angels ('Tartarus'—2 Peter 2:4)."⁵⁴

Indeed, in the days of Noah the Spirit of Christ spoke to disobedient souls (before they departed from their bodies in death for the hadean realm, i.e., "spirit prison"). Since God is longsuffering with mankind, He "waited patiently" (1 Peter 3:20, NIV). He did not bring judgment upon the world hastily. Our gracious God did not fail to give mankind ample time to repent. However, the Lord's longsuffering is not eternal suffering. He did not wait forever. Rather, as the Lord said in Genesis, "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, for he is indeed flesh; yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years" (6:3). It seems biblically consistent and perfectly logical to conclude that **this period of 120 years was the amount of time that the human race as a whole had to repent before the Flood waters destroyed the Earth.**

To some, however, this conclusion seems impossible. After all, if, before we ever learn about the coming Flood, Genesis 5:32 indicates that Noah was 500 years old when he "begot Shem, Ham, and Japheth," and Genesis 7:6 specifies that the Flood occurred when Noah was 600, then only 100 years of time is possible, not 120, right? As with all perceived problems with the inspired Word of God, the difficulty is not with the inspired penmen, but with uninspired interpreters. There actually is no difficulty whatsoever **if** we take

into account the fact that neither the book of Genesis nor the Bible as a whole was written in a strict chronological fashion.⁵⁵ Genesis 2:5-25 does not pick up where Genesis 1 left off. What's more, Genesis 11 speaks of an event that actually occurred when some of the people mentioned in the **previous** chapter (Genesis 10) actually lived.⁵⁶ Similarly, the 120 years of Genesis 6:3 could reasonably extend back to when Noah was 480 years old, not 500. Simply because the Bible reader learns that Noah was 500 when he began having sons (Genesis 5:32),⁵⁷ does not mean that God could not have begun communicating at an earlier time about His impending judgment upon the world.

Finally, notice that Genesis 5:32 serves as the conclusion to the Adam-to-Noah genealogy. As with other Bible passages where one or more genealogies **precede** the mention of certain events that actually occurred **during** or **before** the lifetimes of some of those previously mentioned in the genealogies,⁵⁸ some of the events in Genesis 6:1-9 (including God's expressed warning in 6:3) took place **before** Noah actually began siring sons at age 500.

THE FLOOD: HIGH-WATER HYPERBOLE OR A CLEAR- CUT CATACLYSM?

If Bible students fail to recognize the inspired writers' use of hyperbole (exaggeration), it will be impossible to correctly understand many sections of Scripture. Just as English-speaking Americans are expected to recognize and properly interpret hyperbolic expressions like "I'm so hungry I could eat a horse," or "I have a ton

of homework,” Bible students must also be aware that Scripture contains many figures of speech, including hyperbole. When King David sorrowfully stated, “I am weary with my groaning; **all night I make my bed swim**” (Psalm 6:6), he did not literally mean that his bed swam in tears. Likewise, when Paul noted in his letter to the church in Colosse that the Gospel “was preached to **every creature** under heaven” (1:23), he was not technically saying that every living thing on Earth heard the Gospel. He’s not even saying that every person, including every infant, invalid, and mentally ill person, heard the Gospel. Paul was using hyperbole to communicate an astounding truth: the then-known world (of both Jews and Gentiles) had been exposed to the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Sometimes, however, a biblical statement or account is wrongfully interpreted as hyperbolic. Such is the case with the Genesis Flood. Many have concluded that all of the statements in Genesis 6-9 that could be interpreted literally to refer to a global flood (e.g., “all the high hills... were covered”—7:19) should be understood hyperbolically. That is, the Noahic Flood allegedly was just a localized flood and not a worldwide deluge. However, such an interpretation is riddled with error. There is not just one verse in Genesis 6-9 that points to a universal catastrophe; there are many (6:12,13,17,20; 7:4,11,19,20,21,22,23,24; 8:5,14,21; 9:11,19). Furthermore, the burden of proof is on those who take a figurative interpretation of the oft-repeated universal language in this passage. As D.R. Dungan noted in his excellent book titled *Hermeneutics*:

We have already seen that much of the Scriptures was written in language that was highly figurative;

that its poetry and prophecy, and very much of its prose, contain the loftiest of Oriental hyperbole. It becomes, us, then, to acquaint ourselves with the rules governing this kind of speech. We know that if we shall interpret literal language as if it were figurative, or figurative as if it were literal, we will certainly miss the meaning.

How can we know figurative language? **The sense of the context will indicate it.** As before said, **nothing should be regarded as figurative unless such a demand is made** by the meaning of the immediate context, or by the evident meaning of the passage as a whole.⁵⁹

In truth, the Noahic Flood should no more be interpreted hyperbolically (as a localized flood) than the days of Creation should be understood figuratively (as long ages of evolutionary time). **Neither the immediate nor remote context demands such an interpretation.**

Moses repeatedly testified that the same omnipotent God who created the Universe and everything in it out of nothing in six days (Genesis 1; Exodus 20:11) caused the entire Earth to be covered with water.

1. With the exception of those on the ark, God promised to “destroy man...**from the face of the earth**, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air” (6:7).
2. God said, “The end of **all** flesh has come before Me” (6:13).
3. He promised to bring “floodwaters on the earth, to destroy from under heaven **all flesh** in which is the breath of life; **everything** that is on the earth shall die” (6:17).

4. God commanded Noah, “[O]f **every** living thing of **all** flesh you shall bring two of every sort into the ark, to keep them alive” (6:19), because He was going to “destroy **from the face of the earth all** living things” that He had made (7:4).
5. “[A]ll the fountains of the great deep were broken up” (7:11).
6. “[A]ll the **high** hills under the **whole** heaven were covered. The waters prevailed fifteen cubits upward, and the **mountains** were covered” (7:19).
7. “[A]ll flesh died that moved on the earth.... **All** in whose nostrils was the breath of the spirit of life, **all** that was on the dry land, died. So He destroyed **all** living things which were on the face of the ground.... **Only** Noah and those who were with him in the ark remained alive” (7:21-23).

Not only are there no demands from the immediate or remote contexts for a figurative interpretation, the very opposite is true. The context demands a universal, catastrophic interpretation!

1. Why build an ark if the Flood was not universal? Why not just instruct Noah and his family to move a few hundred or thousand miles away?
2. Why go through the trouble of taking care of animals for a year on the ark if the animals could have just migrated to other areas of the world?

3. Why did Noah and his family stay on the ark for more than a year (7:11; 8:14), if the Flood was just a local event?
4. Why did God promise, “Never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood; never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth” (9:11), if innumerable localized floods since then have ravaged many places on Earth and killed millions of people and animals? A hyperbolic interpretation of Genesis 6-9 (i.e., “this was just a local flood”) makes God a covenant breaker.

Admittedly, the Bible writers used a variety of figures of speech throughout Scripture, but there is no logical reason to interpret Genesis 6-9 as hyperbolic. On the contrary, everything in these chapters points to a world-wide Flood. One wonders what else God would have had to say to get a Bible reader to believe in the universality of the Flood than what He said? Sadly, many will continue to reject a literal interpretation of Genesis 6-9 for the same reasons they reject a literal interpretation of Genesis 1: they would rather interpret Scripture in light of the ever-changing evolutionary, uniformitarian “science”⁶⁰ than in view of reason, revelation, and real, observational science.

HOW LONG DID THE FLOOD LAST?

Although some have accused the Genesis text of error in regard to how long the Flood waters were upon the Earth, a careful reading of Genesis 7-8 reveals that the Deluge lasted right at about one year. The sequence of events included the following:⁶¹

40	Days of rain (Genesis 7:4)
110	Additional days of water “prevail[ing] on the earth,” for a total of 150 days (Genesis 7:24)
74	Days until mountains were viewed. This was from the 17 th day of the seventh month to the 1 st day of the tenth month: 13 + 30 + 30 + 1 (Genesis 8:5).]
40	Days elapsed before Noah sent out the raven (Genesis 8:6-7)
7	Days elapsed before Noah sent out the dove for the first time (8:8)
7	Days elapsed before Noah sent out the dove for the second time (Genesis 8:10)
7	Days elapsed before Noah sent out the dove the final time (Genesis 8:12)
29	Days elapse to correlate with the date of 601 st year, 1 st month, 1 st day (Genesis 8:13)
57	Days elapse before Noah and the animals disembark (Genesis 8:14-16)

371 **Days total**

An individual writing for *Newsweek* magazine once ridiculed the inerrancy of the book of Genesis because it (allegedly) indicates that the Flood lasted both “40 days and 40 nights” and “a whopping 370 days and nights.”⁶² The elementary explanation to this alleged conundrum, which it seems most anyone with a cursory knowledge of the Genesis Flood account would know, is that God caused it “to **rain** on the earth forty days and forty nights” (Genesis 7:4), but the land was still covered with water, and Noah was not allowed out of the ark, for another 331 days (Genesis 7:24; 8:5-16). Obviously, there is a difference between how long it

rained on the Earth, and how long the Flood waters actually **remained** upon the Earth. Considering that a young child can make such a distinction, one cannot help but wonder why some Bible critics cannot or will not do the same?

THE IMPORTANCE OF FLOOD LEGENDS⁶³

Although for many years skeptics have rejected the factuality of the Bible's account of a worldwide flood, interestingly, anthropologists who study legends and folktales from different geographical locations and cultures consistently have reported corroboration from secular flood stories in practically every civilization. Legends have surfaced in hundreds of cultures throughout the world that tell of a huge, catastrophic flood that destroyed most of mankind, and that was survived by only a few individuals and animals. Although most historians who have studied this matter estimate that these legends number into the 200s, according to evolutionary geologist Robert Schoch, "Noah is but one tale in a worldwide collection of at least **500 flood myths**, which are the most widespread of all ancient myths and therefore can be considered among the oldest."⁶⁴ Schoch went on to observe:

Narratives of a massive inundation are found all over the world.... Stories of a great deluge are found on every inhabited continent and among a great many different language and culture groups.⁶⁵

Over a century ago, the famous Canadian geologist, Sir William Dawson, wrote about how the record of the Flood

is preserved in some of the oldest historical documents of several distinct races of men, and is indirectly corroborated by the whole tenor of the early history of most of the civilized races.⁶⁶

Legends have been reported from nations such as China, Babylon, Mexico, Egypt, Sudan, Syria, Persia, India, Norway, Wales, Ireland, Indonesia, Romania, etc.—comprising a list that could go on for many pages.⁶⁷ Although the vast number of such legends is surprising, the similarity between much of their content is equally amazing. James Perloff noted:

In 95 percent of the more than two hundred flood legends, the flood was worldwide; in 88 percent, a certain family was favored; in 70 percent, survival was by means of a boat; in 67 percent, animals were also saved; in 66 percent, the flood was due to the wickedness of man; in 66 percent, the survivors had been forewarned; in 57 percent, they ended up on a mountain; in 35 percent, birds were sent out from the boat; and in 9 percent, exactly eight people were spared.⁶⁸

American Indian Legends

The Aztecs tell of a worldwide global flood in a story with striking parallels to the biblical deluge. “Only two people, the hero Coxcox and his wife, survived the flood by floating in a boat that came to rest on a mountain.”⁶⁹ Then, soon after the flood, giants constructed a great pyramid in an endeavor to reach the clouds. Such ambition is said to have angered the gods, who scattered the giants with fire sent from the heavens (cf. Genesis 11:1-9).

In the ancient land we now refer to as Mexico, one tribe of Indians, known as the Toltecs, told of a great flood. In their legend, a deluge destroyed the “first world” 1,716 years after it was created. Only a few people escaped this worldwide flood, and did so in a “toptlipetlocali” (a word that means “closed chest”). After these few people exited the closed chest, they wandered about the Earth, and found a place where they built a “zacuali” (a high tower) in case another flood came upon the Earth. At the time of the “zacuali,” the Toltecs’ languages were confused and they separated to different parts of the Earth.

Another ancient tribe of Mexico told the story of a man named Tezpi who escaped the deluge in a boat that was filled with animals. Similar to Noah, who sent out a raven (a scavenger bird) that never returned, and a dove that came back with an olive leaf, “Tezpi released a vulture, which stayed away, gorging on cadavers. Then he let a hummingbird go, and it returned to him bearing a twig.”⁷⁰

Ancient Greek Mythology

According to the Greek legend of the deluge, humans became very wicked. Zeus, the leader of the many gods in Greek mythology, wanted to destroy humans by a flood and then raise up another group. However, before he could do this, a man by the name of Deucalion and his wife Pyrrha were warned of the impending disaster. This fortunate couple was placed in a large wooden chest by one of the immortals named Prometheus. For nine days and nights, the flood waters covered almost all of the Earth. Only a few mountain peaks remained. The wooden chest

came to rest on the peak of Mount Parnassus. Later, after leaving the wooden chest, Deucalion sacrificed to Zeus.

Chinese and Asian Legends

In the land of China, there are many legends about a great flood. One of those comes from a group of people known as the Nosu. According to their legend, God sent a personal messenger to Earth to warn three sons that a flood was coming. Only the youngest son, Dum, heeded the messenger. He constructed a wooden boat to prepare for the coming flood. When the waters arrived, Dum entered his boat and was saved. After the waters began to recede, the boat landed on the mountains of Tibet, where Dum had three sons who repopulated the Earth. Interestingly, even the Chinese character for “boat” possibly reveals the story of Noah and the other seven people on the ark. The three elements used to symbolize a boat are:

$$\begin{array}{ccccccc} \text{舟} & + & \text{八} & + & \text{口} & = & \text{船} \\ \text{vessel} & & \text{eight} & & \text{mouth} & & \text{boat} \\ & & & & \text{(or people)} & & \end{array}$$

The Iban people of Sarawak tell of a hero named Trow, who floated around in an ark with his wife and numerous domestic animals.⁷¹ Natives from India tell a story about a man named Manu who built an ark after being warned of a flood. Later, the waters receded, and he landed on a mountain.⁷²

Ancient Babylonian Mythology

Possibly the most famous flood account (aside from the biblical record of Noah and the Flood) comes from the

ancient Babylonian empire. The *Gilgamesh Epic*, written on twelve clay tablets that date back to the seventh century B.C., tells of a hero named Gilgamesh. In his search for eternal life, Gilgamesh sought out Utnapishtim, a person who was granted eternal life because he saved a boatload of animals and humans during a great flood. On the eleventh tablet of this epic, a flood account is recorded that parallels the Genesis account in many areas. According to the story, the gods instructed Utnapishtim to build a boat because a terrible flood was coming. Utnapishtim built the boat, covered it with pitch, and put animals of all kinds on it, as well as certain provisions. After Utnapishtim entered the boat with his family, it rained for six days and nights. When the flood ended, the boat rested on Mount Niser. After seven days, Utnapishtim sent out a dove to see if the waters had receded. The dove came back, so he sent a swallow, which also returned. Finally, he sent out a raven—which never returned. Utnapishtim and his family finally exited the boat and sacrificed to their gods.⁷³

What is the significance of the various flood legends? The answer seems obvious: (a) we have well over 200 flood legends that tell of a great flood (and possibly more than 500);⁷⁴ (b) many of the legends come from different ages and civilizations that could not possibly have copied any of the similar legends; (c) the legends were recorded long before any missionaries arrived to relate to them the Genesis account of Noah; and (d) almost all civilizations have some sort of flood legend. The conclusion to be drawn from such facts is that in the distant past, there was a colossal flood that forever affected the history of all civilizations.

Those living soon after the Flood did not have the book of Genesis to read to their descendants. (Genesis was not written until several hundred years after the Flood.) The account of the Flood was passed from one generation to the next. Many parents and grandparents told their children and grandchildren about the huge ark, the wonderful animals, and the devastating Flood, long before the Genesis record ever existed. Over the years, the details of the story were altered, but many of the actual details remained the same. Alfred Rehwinkel wrote:

Traditions similar to this record are found among nearly all the nations and tribes of the human race. And this is as one would expect it to be. If that awful world catastrophe, as described in the Bible, actually happened, the existence of the Flood traditions among the widely separated and primitive people is just what is to be expected. It is only natural that the memory of such an event was rehearsed in the ears of the children of the survivors again and again, and possibly made the basis of some religious observances.⁷⁵

Harold W. Clark, in his volume, *Fossils, Flood and Fire*, commented:

Preserved in the myths and legends of almost every people on the face of the globe is the memory of the great catastrophe. While myths may not have any scientific value, yet they are significant in indicating the fact that an impression was left in the minds of the races of mankind that could not be erased.⁷⁶

After the “trappings” are stripped away from the kernel of truth in the various stories, there is almost complete

agreement among practically all flood accounts: (a) a universal destruction by water of the human race and all other living things occurred; (b) an ark, or boat, was provided as the means of escape for some; and (c) a seed of mankind was provided to perpetuate humanity. As Furman Kearley once observed: "These traditions agree in too many vital points not to have originated from the same factual event."⁷⁷ In volume three of his multi-volume set, *The Native Races of the Pacific Slope—Mythology*, H.H. Bancroft wrote: "There never was a myth without a meaning; ...there is not one of these stories, no matter how silly or absurd, which was not founded on fact."⁷⁸

Among the noted scholars of days gone by who have studied these matters in detail are such men as James G. Frazer (*Folklore in the Old Testament*) and William Wundt (*Elements of Folk Psychology*). Wundt, who did his utmost to find some kind of reasonable case for independent origins of the various flood sagas (and who had no great love for the biblical evidence), was forced to admit:

Of the combination of all these elements into a whole (the destruction of the earth by water, the rescue of a single man and seed of animals by means of a boat, etc.), however, we may say without hesitation, it could not have arisen twice independently.⁷⁹

Or, as Dawson concluded more than a century ago:

[W]e know now that the Deluge of Noah is not mere myth or fancy of primitive man or solely a doctrine of the Hebrew Scriptures.... [N]o historical event, ancient or modern, can be more firmly established as matter of fact than this.⁸⁰

Chapter 5



ALLEGED CHRONOLOGICAL CONTRADICTIONS

Since the Bible begins at the Creation with Genesis—the book of beginnings—and ends with the book of Revelation (which many scholars believe was the last recorded book of the Bible), students of the Scriptures often assume that the Bible was compiled chronologically. Many students approach their reading of the Bible with the mindset that everything in Scripture is arranged “from A to Z.” Since Genesis records what took place at the beginning of time, and it is the first book of the Bible, then the rest of the Bible follows suit, right? Actually, what the diligent student eventually finds is that the Bible is **not** a book of strict chronology. All sixty-six books of the Bible are not arranged in the order in which they were written. Furthermore, all of the events contained within each

book also are not recorded chronologically.

Consider the following arrangement of books in the Bible:

- Although the books of Haggai and Zechariah have been placed near the end of the Old Testament, these men prophesied during the days of Ezra and Nehemiah (cf. Ezra 5:1; 6:14). Twenty books separate Haggai and Zechariah from the book of Ezra, yet the events recorded in each book were occurring at the same time. Obviously, these books are not arranged in chronological order.
- Even though 2 Chronicles appears before the book of Job, the events recorded in Job took place long before those that are recorded in 2 Chronicles. In fact, if the Bible were a book of strict chronology, the events recorded in Job would be placed somewhere within the book of Genesis, likely somewhere after chapter nine (cf. Job 22:15-16; 42:16-17).
- In the New Testament, one might assume that since 1 Thessalonians comes after the book of Acts, that Luke penned Acts earlier than Paul penned his first letter to the church at Thessalonica. The truth is, however, 1 Thessalonians was written years before the book of Acts was completed.

In addition to the books of the Bible not being arranged chronologically, inspired writers did not always record information in a strictly chronological sequence. Making the assumption that the entire Bible was written chronologically hinders a proper understanding of the text. As you will see throughout this chapter, several alleged contradictions are resolved simply by acknowledging that many times Bible writers did not record events in a strict sequential order.

DID SAUL KNOW DAVID PRIOR TO GOLIATH'S DEATH?

1 Samuel 16:14-23; 17:58

Following the account of Samuel's visit to Bethlehem to anoint David as the future king of Israel, the book of 1 Samuel indicates that David became the harp player and armor bearer for King Saul (16:14-23). Subsequent to this information, the reader is told of David's magnificent triumph over Goliath (1 Samuel 17), which then is followed by an "interrogation" by King Saul, who asked David, "Whose son are you, young man?" (17:58). A general reading through the text of 1 Samuel 16-17 has led some Bible believers to question why Saul (it seems) knew David, then did not know David, and then got to know him again. Skeptics, likewise, have inquired about the consistency of this story.¹ Paul Tobin, in an article titled "Internal Contradictions in the Bible," summed up the skeptic's argument by stating that 1 Samuel 16 "clearly shows that David...was known to Saul. Yet a little later, after David's fight with Goliath, Saul is made to enquire from his chief captain as to the identity of the giant slayer (I Samuel 17:56). And he is again made to inquire from David who he is, when he should have known this all along."² Allegedly, the Bible's portrayal of Saul's ignorance of David **after** Goliath's death is proof of the Bible writers' imperfection when penning the Scriptures.

First, it is imperative for one to recognize that, as with other Bible passages, nowhere in 1 Samuel 16-17 are we told that all of these events occurred in chronological order. Although throughout 1 Samuel, there is a general,

sequential progression, such does not demand that **every** event recorded in the book must be laid out chronologically. In fact, within chapter 17 there is evidence that this is not the case. For example, the events recorded in 17:54 (i.e., David putting his armor in his tent, and taking the head of Goliath to Jerusalem) postdate the conversations mentioned in verses 55-58 (as verse 57 makes clear). More precisely, verses 55-56 synchronize with verse 40, while verses 57-58 could be placed immediately following verse 51.³ And, regarding chapter 16, who can say for certain that David was not already playing the harp for Saul before Samuel anointed him? First Samuel 17:15 indicates that “David occasionally went and returned from Saul to feed his father’s sheep at Bethlehem.” Perhaps it was during one of these furloughs that he was anointed as the future king of Israel (16:1-13). Unless the text clearly distinguishes one event as occurring before or after another, a person cannot conclude for certain the exact chronology of those events. Just because one historical event recorded in the Bible precedes another, does not mean that it could not have occurred at a later time (or vice versa). Truly, the ancients were not as concerned about chronology as is the average person in 21st-century America.

Aside from the fact that one cannot be certain about the exact sequence of events recorded in 1 Samuel 16-17, several possible explanations exist as to why Saul appeared not to recognize David after his triumphal victory over Goliath. First, enough time could have lapsed so that David’s appearance changed significantly since the last time he appeared before King Saul. William M. Thomson, a missionary in Syria and Palestine for

nearly half of the 19th century, once described the sudden changes in the physical development of Eastern youths in his book titled *The Land and the Book*.

They not only spring into full-grown manhood as if by magic, but all their former beauty disappears; their complexion becomes dark; their features hard and angular, and the whole expression of countenance stern and even disagreeable. I have often been accosted by such persons, formerly intimate acquaintances, but who had suddenly grown entirely out of my knowledge, nor could I without difficulty recognize them.⁴

Few would deny that young men can change quickly over a relatively short period of time. Facial hair, increased height and weight, larger, more defined muscles, darker skin, a deeper voice, as well as the wearing of different apparel, may all factor into why a person may say to someone that he or she knows, but has not seen for some time, “I hardly recognized you. You’ve changed.” Surely, it is more than possible that between the time David served Saul as a harpist, and the time he slew Goliath, he could have experienced many physical changes that prevented a “distressed” king from recognizing his former harpist.

A second reason Saul might have failed to recognize David is because he may have lapsed into another unreliable mental state. Saul’s intermittent deviation from normalcy is seen throughout the book of 1 Samuel (cf. 16:14-23; 18:9-12; 19:22-24; 22:6-19), and it is possible that 17:54-58 is another allusion to his defective perception. In his discussion of 1 Samuel 17, biblical commentator Robert Jamieson mentioned this

possibility, saying, “The king’s moody temper, not to say frequent fits of insanity, would alone be sufficient to explain the circumstance of his not recognizing a youth who, during the time of his mental aberration, had been much near him, trying to soothe his distempered soul.”⁵

Third, it could be that Saul did, in fact, remember David, but because of jealousy over David’s momentous victory (cf. 1 Samuel 18:8-11), and perhaps on hearing that Samuel had been to Bethlehem to anoint him as the next king (1 Samuel 16:1-13), Saul simply wanted to **act** like he did not know David. Such a scenario is not difficult to envision. Today, a teacher or coach might inquire about a student whom he or she already knows, yet in hopes of instilling more submission into the arrogant teen, the faculty member acts somewhat aloof. One textual indication that such may be the explanation of 1 Samuel 17:54-58 is that Saul still referred to David, the bear-killing, lion-slaying, Goliath-demolisher, as a “stripling” (Hebrew *ʾelem*—17:56, ASV) and “young man” (Hebrew *nàʾar*—17:55,58, NIV). Although these two words do not necessarily carry a belittling connotation, neither designation seems very appropriate for a man who had just tried on the armor of King Saul—a man once described as “shoulders upward...taller than any of the people” (1 Samuel 9:2)—and had just killed one of the fiercest enemies of Israel. Truly, Saul’s supposed ignorance of David and his family may well have been a “performance” instigated by what physician Herman van Praag once called, “haughtiness fed by envy.”⁶

Finally, one must realize that the text does not even actually say that Saul did not know **David**. It only records that Saul asked, “[W]hose son is this youth?” (1 Samuel 17:55; cf. vss. 56,58). It is an assumption to conclude that Saul did not recognize David. The king simply could have been inquiring about David’s family. Since Saul had promised to reward the man who killed Goliath by giving “**his father’s house** exemption from taxes in Israel” (17:25), Saul might have been questioning David in order to ensure the identity of David’s family. Furthermore, 18:1 seems to presuppose an extended conversation between the two, which would imply that Saul wanted even more information than just the name of David’s father.

Truly, any of these possibilities could account for Saul’s examination of David. The burden of proof is on the skeptic to show otherwise. As respected law professor Simon Greenleaf concluded regarding the rule of municipal law in relation to ancient writings:

Every document, apparently ancient, coming from the proper repository or custody, and bearing on its face no evident marks of forgery, **the law presumes to be genuine, and devolves on the opposing party the burden of proving it to be otherwise.**⁷

Until skeptics logically negate the above possible solutions to the questions surrounding 1 Samuel 16-17, and are able to prove beyond doubt that the Bible writer made a genuine mistake, one should not doubt the integrity of the biblical text.

KINGLY CHRONOLOGY IN THE BOOK OF EZRA

Ezra 4:7-23; 4:24-6:15

As if the spelling and pronunciation of Ahasuerus and Artaxerxes were not problematic enough for the average Bible student, one must also consider these Persian kings in light of the order in which they are mentioned in the book of Ezra. According to history, the Persian kings reigned in the following order: Cyrus (560-530 B.C.), Cambyses (530-522), Smerdis (522), **Darius I** (522-486), Ahasuerus (486-465), **Artaxerxes I** (465-424), Darius II (423-405), and Artaxerxes II (405-358).⁸ The difficulty that presents itself in the book of Ezra is that events surrounding letters which King Artaxerxes received from, and wrote to, the enemies of the Jews (see Ezra 4:7-23) are mentioned **before** the reign of Darius I (Ezra 4:24-6:15). If it is a proven fact that Darius served as king before Artaxerxes, why is the kingship of Darius recorded in the book of Ezra subsequent to the reign of Artaxerxes (recorded in Ezra 4:7-23)?

First, it needs to be pointed out that the Darius of the book of Ezra was in fact Darius I and not Darius II. The second Darius lived too late in history to have been contemporary with the rebuilding of the temple. Thus, one cannot solve the question at hand simply by suggesting that the Darius cited in Ezra was really Darius II, who lived after Artaxerxes I.

Second, some may attempt to solve this difficulty by alleging that Artaxerxes II was the king who reigned during the days of Ezra and Nehemiah's return to Jerusalem, while Artaxerxes I was the king mentioned

prior to Darius' reign (Ezra 4:7-23). This solution is unacceptable, however, since Artaxerxes II lived several years after the events recorded in Ezra and Nehemiah.

So what is the answer? Why is the kingship of Darius recorded in the book of Ezra following events connected with the kingship of Artaxerxes (Ezra 4:7-23)—a king who is thought to have reigned after Darius? One possible solution to this difficulty is that Ahasuerus and Artaxerxes of Ezra 4:6,7-23 were respectively Cambyses (530-522) and Smerdis (522)—kings of Persia (listed above) who reigned before Darius I. Since Persian kings frequently had two or more names, it is not unfathomable to think that Cambyses and Smerdis also may have gone by the names Ahasuerus and Artaxerxes.⁹

Another explanation to this perceived dilemma is that the information concerning the kings of Persia in Ezra 4 is grouped according to theme rather than by chronology. Instead of having a record where everything in chapter four is in sequential order, it is reasonable to conclude that verses 6-23 serve as a parenthetical comment and that Ahasuerus and Artaxerxes (4:6-7) are indeed Ahasuerus (486-465) and Artaxerxes I (465-424) of history (rather than the aforementioned Cambyses and Smerdis).

Bible students must keep in mind that just as there is more than one way to write a book in the 21st century, ancient writers frequently recorded events chronologically while occasionally inserting necessary non-sequential material (e.g., Genesis 10-11; Matthew 28:2-4). It would have been natural for the writer of the book of Ezra to follow a discussion of the problems

related to rebuilding the Jerusalem **temple** (4:1-5) with information on a similar resistance the Jews encountered while rebuilding the **walls** of Jerusalem (4:6-23). Although the details in verses 6-23 initially may puzzle our chronologically preconditioned mindset, they actually fit very well in their arrangement with the overall theme of the chapter. In verse 24, the story picks up where it left off in verse 5. The writer returns to his focus on the problems with the rebuilding of the temple, which lingered until “the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia” (Ezra 4:24).

Regardless of which explanation one accepts for the inclusion of verses 6-23 in Ezra 4, they both provide a sufficient answer to the perceived difficulty. It is my judgment that the second of these two possibilities serves as the best, and most logical, explanation.

LUKE’S “ORDERLY” ACCOUNT

In the prologue to Luke’s gospel narrative, he informed his readers that he sought to write “an orderly account” of the life of Christ (Luke 1:3). Based upon this statement, some tend to believe that everything in Luke’s narrative must have been recorded chronologically. Others have come to the conclusion that this statement must also mean that Luke’s account avoided the omissions that the other writers made from time to time. The evidence suggests, however, that though Luke’s account should be understood as being orderly to a degree, it is erroneous to contend that **everything** in Luke’s narrative is arranged in a precise chronological sequence.

One indication of Luke’s “orderly account” not being a strict sequence of events is found in Luke 3. Immediately

following the record of John the baptizer teaching the Jews about the coming of the Christ, Luke wrote: “And with many other exhortations he preached to the people. But Herod the tetrarch, being rebuked by him concerning Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife, and for all the evils which Herod had done, also added this, above all, that **he shut John up in prison**” (3:18-20). Had Luke already covered everything that John the baptizer accomplished before his imprisonment and subsequent death, this statement might still be considered sequentially in order with everything else in the life of Christ. The fact is, however, the very next paragraph clearly indicates that Luke sometimes strayed from a normal chronology. Luke proceeded to inform his readers of Jesus’ baptism, saying, “When all the people were baptized, it came to pass that Jesus also was baptized” (3:21). John baptized Jesus prior to his imprisonment (cf. Matthew 3:1-17; 4:12; John 1:29-34), yet Luke places John’s imprisonment before Jesus’ baptism. Although Luke does not indicate why he mentioned this event earlier than one might expect, Luke’s account is still very much characterized as being “orderly” and logical. It seems clear that Luke simply wanted to move John off the stage before focusing on the ministry of Christ. Luke did mention John a few more times in his narrative,¹⁰ but “the story of John’s active ministry as a free man ends here.”¹¹

A second example indicating Luke’s “orderly account” is not as chronological and all-encompassing as some might initially think, appears near the end of his narrative. Luke began his final chapter “on the first day of the week” when Jesus rose from the grave (24:1). He

concluded this chapter (and the narrative as a whole) informing the reader of Jesus' ascension into heaven. Of interest is that Luke never indicated that the events of chapter 24 covered any more than one day. Someone might read the entire chapter and assume that Jesus rose from the dead, appeared to His disciples, and ascended into heaven all on the same day, when actually what Luke recorded in this final chapter covered a period of more than five weeks (cf. Acts 1:3). Luke simply omitted most of what Jesus and the apostles did during this time, including the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus in Galilee mentioned by both Matthew (28:16) and John (21:1ff.). Luke chose to focus most of his attention on what happened in (and around) Jerusalem on the day of Jesus' resurrection. In order to get a more comprehensive chronological view of what occurred after Jesus' resurrection and before His ascension, a person must consult the other gospel accounts.

Luke's narrative certainly is an "orderly account." It begins with the announcement, birth, and ministry of John the baptizer—the forerunner of Christ, and then proceeds to focus on the life and teachings of Christ—from birth to death, and from resurrection to ascension. Luke's account is not confusing, but "orderly." Nevertheless, one must be careful not to force his orderly account into a strict arrangement in which every single detail falls into chronological order. In fact, according to Greek lexicographer Frederick Danker, the Greek word Luke used for "orderly" (*kathexes*) can refer to "sequence in time, space, **or logic**."¹² Thus, similar to modern-day history books that are arranged chronologically, yet occasionally include nonsequential discussions

of people, places, and events in order to accomplish a specific, intended purpose, Luke obviously wrote certain portions of his inspired account of the gospel in more of a thematic or climatic order.

WHEN DID JESUS GO TO EGYPT?

Matthew 2:13-15; Luke 2:39

Most people familiar with the few details given in Scripture about the early life of Jesus are aware of the fact that following the visit from the wise men, Matthew indicates that Joseph and Mary took Jesus and fled **to Egypt** at the command of God (Matthew 2:13-14). Later, after Herod's death, Jesus' family departed Egypt for Nazareth where they made their home (Matthew 2:19-23). According to some, however, Luke's account of the early life of Jesus contradicts Matthew's.¹³ Luke indicates that after Jesus' birth, and once Mary's days of "purification according to the law of Moses were completed" (2:22), which would have been about six weeks after Jesus was born (Leviticus 12:3-4), Joseph and Mary took Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem (Luke 2:22-38). The inspired physician then writes: "So when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned **to Galilee**, to their own city, Nazareth" (Luke 2:39). Since Luke mentions nothing about Egypt, and Matthew says nothing about a trip to Nazareth soon after Jesus' birth, allegedly either Matthew or Luke is mistaken.

The allegation that Matthew's and Luke's accounts are contradictory is actually based on an assumption: the skeptic **assumes** that Matthew and Luke each included **all** of the whereabouts of Jesus' family during

His early life. The fact is, however, such a conjecture cannot logically be upheld unless both of the inspired writers claimed to write exhaustive, chronological accounts of everything Jesus did. Neither writer made such a declaration (cf. John 21:25).

Could it be that Joseph, Mary, and Jesus “returned to Galilee, to their own city, Nazareth” (Luke 2:39) **before going to Egypt**, and then after traveling to and from Egypt they returned to Nazareth again (Matthew 2:23)? The Holy Spirit certainly could have inspired Matthew to write his truthful account of some of the life of Christ without mentioning a brief “return” to Galilee. However, it is also very possible, and perhaps more likely, that Luke simply omitted Joseph, Mary, and Jesus’ trip to Egypt, which sequentially could be placed between Luke 2:38 and 2:39. Bible writers frequently moved from one subject to the next without intending to give the actual time or the exact order in which something was done or taught (cf. Luke 4:1-13; Matthew 4:1-11). As we noted earlier, in chapter 24, Luke omitted the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus in Galilee, which both Matthew and John mentioned. The events that Luke recorded in the first 43 verses of chapter 24 all took place on the very day of Jesus’ resurrection. The final four verses of Luke 24 (vss. 50-53), however, took place more than five weeks later (see Acts 1:1-12). Yet Luke simply recorded the various events in chapter 24 (vss. 1-43, 44-49, 50-53) and connected them with the Greek conjunction *de* (“but” or “and”), **which has no specific chronological implications**. The same is true with the Greek conjunction *kai*, which Luke used in 2:39.

Consider also an example from Luke's account of **some** of the acts of **some** of the apostles (in the book we call Acts). In chapter 9, Luke mentions that Paul went to Jerusalem after becoming a Christian (Acts 9:26). But, according to Galatians 1:17-18, Paul actually went to Arabia, back to Damascus, and then **after three years** he went up to Jerusalem. Once again, Luke, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Timothy 5:18), omitted a part of someone's life from his narrative. But such an omission is in no way proof of dishonesty—any more than if, at the funeral of a 90-year-old man, someone gives a synopsis of his life, and omits the two years he spent in Warner, Oklahoma in junior college.

Keep in mind that the Bible is a book that covers approximately 4,000 years—from Creation to the end of the first century A.D. God's purpose in giving us His Word was not to tell us about everything that every person ever did up to that point in time. In fact, even the one Person, Who is the main theme of Scripture—Jesus—has relatively little recorded about Him in comparison to every place He ever went and everything He ever did or said. As the apostle John proclaimed, **“Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book;** but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name” (20:30-31). In truth, “there are also **many** other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written” (21:25).

Simply because Matthew or Luke or any other Bible writer does not mention everything that every other

Bible writer mentions about the same general time or event, does not mean that someone has erred. Rather, just as we oftentimes tell stories today and include certain details that others omit, so did the inspired writers of Scripture. Honest truth-seekers (Proverbs 8:17) will come to the logical conclusion that the Bible writers supplemented (not contradicted) each other's accounts of biblical events.

TO THE WILDERNESS— OR A WEDDING?

Mark 1:12; John 1:19-2:1

Those people who have done much study from the synoptic gospel accounts generally are aware that following the baptism of Jesus, He “then” (Matthew 4:1; Luke 4:1) “immediately” (Mark 1:12) was sent out by the Spirit into the wilderness where He fasted for 40 days while being tempted by the devil. Skeptics likewise are “well informed” of this story. In fact, some skeptics presume to know about this time in Jesus’ life so well, they have argued that the apostle John contradicted the synoptic writers.¹⁴ Allegedly, John placed Jesus at the wedding in Cana of Galilee just three days following His baptism (John 1:19-2:1), whereas Mark indicated that Jesus went into the desert for 40 days “immediately” following His baptism. Is this a real chronological contradiction, as some suppose?

Like so many of the other occasions when skeptics contend that two or more passages of Scripture are at odds with one another, this is just another example of where a particular text has been misunderstood. John

1 does not teach (as has been alleged) that “three days after the events where Jesus and John the Baptist meet [and when Jesus was baptized–EL]... Jesus was attending a wedding in Cana.”¹⁵ Notice that the first chapter of John’s gospel account actually teaches the following:

- Verses 19-25 contain John the baptizer’s testimony regarding who he is. (“Now this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, ‘Who are you?’”–vs. 19.)
- In verses 26-27, John explains to the priests and Levites that there is One Who is greater than him–Jesus.
- “The next day,” John sees Jesus and proclaims, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (vs. 29). John then explains to those around him that this Man is the One about Whom he was speaking the previous day (vs. 30).
- In verse 31, John the baptizer explains to his listeners how Jesus was “revealed to Israel” at His baptism. Then, in the following three verses, John bears witness about that baptism, saying,

I **saw** the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He **remained** upon Him. I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, “Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.” And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God (vss. 32-34).

- Verses 35-37 indicate that the day after John revealed the above facts to his listeners, he saw Jesus again, and two of John’s disciples began following Jesus that very day.
- The next day, Philip and Nathanael began following the Lord (vss. 43-51).

- Then, “on the third day” following John’s testimony of Jesus’ baptism and the Spirit Who descended upon Him, Jesus and His disciples are said to be at a wedding in Cana of Galilee (John 2:1ff.)

Nowhere in John 1 does a person learn that Jesus and His disciples are in Galilee at a wedding three days **after His baptism**. The gospel of John does not even contain the actual account of Jesus’ baptism. The apostle John recorded only what John the baptizer testified about the baptism of Jesus, which occurred some time in the past (exactly when, we are not told). While John and the others looked at Jesus, he related to them (in the past tense) the event of Jesus’ baptism and its significance. It is erroneous to assume that His baptism actually was taking place at the very time John the baptizer was speaking the words recorded in John 1:29-34. Thus, the apostle John, in writing his gospel account, did not deny what the other gospel writers wrote concerning the days immediately following Jesus’ baptism. He merely supplemented the synoptic gospels by revealing to his readers that sometime after Jesus’ baptism and wilderness temptations, He saw John the baptizer again—and three days later went to a wedding in Cana of Galilee.

IN WHAT ORDER DID SATAN TEMPT JESUS?

Matthew 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13

If you have ever compared Matthew’s account of Satan tempting Jesus in the wilderness with Luke’s account, you quickly noticed that there is a difference in the sequence of the recorded events (Matthew 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13). Both Matthew and Luke record first

that Satan tested Jesus by challenging Him to turn stones to bread. However, while the two disciples of Jesus agree on the content of the next two tests, the second and third temptations recorded by Matthew are “flip-flopped” in Luke’s account. Matthew recorded that Satan’s second temptation involved him trying to persuade Jesus to throw Himself down off the pinnacle of the temple. The third temptation listed by Matthew was Satan’s attempt to get Jesus to worship him. Even though Luke mentioned the same two events, he listed them in the reverse order—Satan first desired adoration from Jesus, and then he challenged Him to throw Himself down off the pinnacle of the temple. Based upon this difference, skeptics claim we have a clear-cut discrepancy.

The problem with this allegation is that it is based upon an assumption. Those who claim that the “disorder” of temptations is a contradiction, presuppose that history always is written (or spoken) chronologically. However, common sense tells us otherwise. Open almost any world history textbook and you will see that even though most events are recorded chronologically, some are arranged topically. For example, in one chapter you may read about the European civilization in the late Middle Ages (A.D. 1000-1300). Yet, in the very next chapter you might learn about Medieval India (150 B.C.-A.D. 1400). Authors arrange textbooks thematically in order to reduce the confusion that would arise if every event in world history textbooks was arranged chronologically. Even when we rehearse life experiences to friends and family, oftentimes we speak climactically rather than chronologically. A teenager

may return home from an amusement park and tell his father about all of the roller coasters he rode at Six Flags. Likely, rather than mentioning all of them in the order he rode them, he will start with the most exciting ones and end with the boring ones (if there is such a thing as a “boring” roller coaster).

Had Matthew and Luke claimed to arrange the temptations of Jesus chronologically, skeptics would have a legitimate case. But, the fact of the matter is, neither Matthew nor Luke ever claimed such. Either one of the two gospel writers recorded these events in the order they happened, or both of them wrote topically. Most biblical scholars believe that Matthew was concerned more with the order of events in this story because of his use of words like “afterward” (4:2, Greek *husteron*), “then” (4:5, Greek *tote*) and “again” (4:8, Greek *palin*). These three adverbs strongly suggest that Matthew recorded the precise order of the temptations. Luke merely links the events in 4:1-13 by using the Greek words *kai* and *de* (which are often translated as merely “and”). [NOTE: The NKJV’s translation of *kai* as “then” in Luke 4:5 is unfortunate. It should be translated simply “and” (cf. KJV, ASV, NASB, and RSV)]. Similar to the English word “and” not having specific chronological implications, neither do the Greek words *kai* and *de*.¹⁶ In short, the evidence suggests that Matthew’s account of the temptations of Jesus is arranged chronologically, whereas Luke’s account is arranged in some other orderly fashion—perhaps thematically, or possibly climactically.

WHEN DID JESUS CLEANSE THE TEMPLE?

John 2:13-22; Matthew 21:12-13;
Mark 11:15-17; Luke 19:45-46

One of the most popular alleged Bible discrepancies pertaining to chronology—and one that skeptics are fond of citing in almost any discussion on the inerrancy of Scripture—is whether or not Jesus cleansed the temple **early** in His ministry, or near the **end**. According to Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Jesus cleansed the temple during the final week leading up to His death on the cross (Matthew 21:12-13; Mark 11:15-17; Luke 19:45-46). John, however, places his record of the temple cleansing in chapter 2 of his gospel account, between Jesus' first miracle (2:1-12) and His conversation with Nicodemus (3:1-21). How should John's gospel account be understood in light of the other three writers placing the event near the end of Jesus' ministry? Skeptics question, "Did Jesus enter the temple and drive out the money changers early in His ministry, or near the end?"

Most often, it seems, the explanation heard regarding this difficulty is that there was only one temple cleansing—near the end of Jesus' life—and John's placement of this event at an earlier time is the result of his "theological," rather than "chronological," approach to writing his account of the life and teachings of Jesus. The problem with this explanation is that, although overall John may have been a little less concerned with chronology than were the other writers, a straightforward reading of the text favors the position that this particular clearing of the temple was not something that occurred near

the end of Jesus' life. The record of Jesus' first miracle, beginning in John 2:1, begins with the phrase, "On the third day...." This section ends with John writing the words, "After this..." (2:12, Greek *meta touto*). Following verse 12, John then begins his account of the temple cleansing saying, "Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand..." (2:13). It certainly would appear to be "out of the ordinary" for John to jump ahead nearly three years in the life of Jesus to an event that occurred in Jerusalem during the last week of His life, only then to backtrack to a time prior to "the second sign Jesus did when He had come out of Judea into Galilee" (John 4:54). Admittedly, John would not have erred in writing about the temple cleansing early on in his gospel account if the Holy Spirit saw fit to mention the event at that time. (Perhaps this would have been to show from the outset of Jesus' ministry that He "repudiated what was central to the Temple cults, and further that his death and resurrection were critically important."¹⁷) A better explanation of this alleged contradiction exists, however: There were two temple cleansings.

Why not? Who is to say that Jesus could not have cleansed the temple of money-hungry, hypocritical Jews on two separate occasions—once earlier in His ministry, and again near the end of His life as He entered Jerusalem for the last time? Are we so naïve as to think that the temple could not have been corrupted at two different times during the three years of Jesus' ministry? Jesus likely visited the temple several times during the last few years of His life on Earth (especially when celebrating the Passover—cf. John 2:13,23; 6:4; 11:55), likely finding inappropriate things going on there more

than once. Do churches in the 21st century sometimes have problems that recur within a three-year span? Have church leaders ever dealt with these problems in a public manner multiple times and in similar ways? Of course. As Albert Barnes expressed: “How soon men forget the most solemn reproofs, and return to evil practices.”¹⁸

What evidence does a person possess, which would lead him to conclude that Jesus cleansed the temple only once? There is none. While Matthew, Mark, and Luke recorded a temple cleansing late in Jesus’ ministry, much evidence exists to indicate that John recorded an earlier clearing of the temple. It is logical to conclude that the extra details recorded in John 2 are not simply supplemental facts (even though the writers of the gospels did supplement each others’ writings fairly frequently). Rather, the different details recorded by John likely are due to the fact that we are dealing with two different temple cleansings. Only John mentioned (1) the oxen and sheep, (2) the whip of cords, (3) the scattering of the money, (4) Jesus’ command, “Take these things away,” and (5) the disciples’ remembrance of Psalm 69:9: “Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up” (2:17). Furthermore, John did not include Jesus’ quotation of Isaiah 56:7, which is found in all three of the other accounts, and stands as a prominent part of their accounts of the temple cleansing.

In view of the major differences in wording, in setting, and in time, as well as the fact that, apart from the work of John the baptizer, nothing in the first five chapters of John’s gospel account is found in Matthew, Mark, or Luke, “we will require more evidence than a facile assumption that the two similar narratives must

refer to the same event.”¹⁹ There is no chronological contradiction here.

WHEN DID SATAN ENTER JUDAS?

John 13:27; Luke 22:1-7

On the evening before His crucifixion, Jesus met with His disciples in Jerusalem to eat the Passover meal. According to John’s gospel account, **after** Jesus washed the disciples’ feet and gave a piece of bread to Judas, “Satan entered him” (13:27). Luke, however, recorded the fact that Satan entered Judas **prior** to the Passover meal. He wrote:

Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread drew near, which is called Passover.... **Then Satan entered Judas**, surnamed Iscariot, who was numbered among the twelve. So he went his way and conferred with the chief priests and captains, how he might betray Him to them. And they were glad, and agreed to give him money. So he promised and sought opportunity to betray Him to them in the absence of the multitude. **Then came the Day of Unleavened Bread**, when the Passover must be killed” (22:1-7).

According to skeptics, John’s and Luke’s accounts are incompatible. Whereas Luke has Satan entering Judas **before** supper, John mentions it as taking place **during** the meal. How should one respond to this alleged discrepancy?

If the Bible writers had indicated that Satan only entered Judas once during his lifetime, and that occasion was mentioned in the Bible as being at two different times, then skeptics would have a reasonable argument.

The truth is, however, Satan easily could have entered Judas more than once, just as evil spirits and demons entered people in the past multiple times. [NOTE: We are not informed exactly what is meant by Satan “entering” Judas. It could simply mean that Satan had a strong influence on Judas and filled his heart with evil passions, similar to how he “filled” Ananias’s heart to lie to the Holy Spirit—Acts 5:3.]

The Old Testament reveals that King Saul was overcome with an “evil spirit” at various times throughout his reign. After Samuel anointed David to be the future king of Israel, “the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord terrorized him” (1 Samuel 16:14, NASB). Then, following David’s battle with Goliath, “an evil spirit from God came mightily upon Saul, and he raved in the midst of the house” (1 Samuel 18:10, NASB; cf. 19:9). Also, “**whenever** the evil spirit from God came to Saul, David would take the harp and play it with his hand; and Saul would be refreshed and be well, and **the evil spirit would depart from him**” (1 Samuel 16:23, NASB).

If an evil spirit could “come upon Saul” and “depart from him” at various times throughout his reign, and, if, as Jesus indicated in the first century, unclean spirits or demons could go in and out of someone (Luke 11:24-26), then it is logical to conclude that Satan could have “entered” and “departed” from Judas on more than one occasion. In fact, that is exactly what happened. Judas already had given in to temptation to steal from Jesus and the disciples’ money bag (John 12:6). The devil also had “already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray Him [Jesus]” (John 13:2). Luke

explained how, **prior** to the Passover meal, Judas met with Jesus' enemies and made an agreement with them to betray Jesus at some secluded location (22:1-7). **Later**, during the Passover meal, "Satan entered" Judas **again** (John 13:27).

Judas had led a hypocritical life and had given in to Satan's temptations previously. Satan did not have to dwell continually in Judas for him to betray the Lord. Rather, similar to how Saul's evil spirit "came upon" him and "departed from" him, "Satan entered Judas" at various times during Jesus' ministry. Satan entered him once prior to his meeting with the enemies to work out the betrayal agreement (Luke 22:1-7; cf. John 13:2). Later, during the Passover meal, Satan again excited Judas' evil passions and tempted him to finish what he had started and complete the plan by leading the arresting party to Jesus (John 13:27). There is no contradiction here, just accounts of two different occasions when Satan entered Judas.

WHEN DID THE TEMPLE VEIL TEAR?

Matthew 27:50-51; Luke 23:44-46

A few years ago, a journal dedicated to revealing (alleged) Bible errors petitioned its readers to submit their "best" biblical questions and arguments that "they have found through actual experience to be exceptionally effective vis-à-vis biblicists...and they will probably be published for all to see and use."²⁰ The first response printed in this journal (two months later) was from a man who listed among his top five "Bible contradictions" a question of whether or not the veil of the temple was torn in two "before" (Luke 23:44-46) or

“after” (Matthew 27:50-51) Jesus died on the cross. The skeptic stated that this question was one of his favorites to ask because it elicited “such ludicrous rebuttals from Christian apologists.”²¹

Before taking the skeptic’s word at face value as to what these scriptures actually say (or do not say), compare the passages for yourself.

And Jesus cried again with a loud voice, and yielded up his spirit. And behold, the veil of the temple was rent in two from the top to the bottom (Matthew 27:50-51, ASV; cf. Mark 15:37-38).

And it was now about the sixth hour, and a darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour, the sun’s light failing: and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst. And Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit”: and having said this, he gave up the ghost (Luke 23:44-46, ASV).

Do you read anything in either Matthew’s or Luke’s account that says the veil was torn “before” or “after” Jesus died (to use the skeptic’s own words)? Granted, Luke did mention the rending of the veil before he recorded that Jesus died, and Matthew mentioned it after recording His death, but neither made any direct statements that would indicate exactly when the rending took place. Simply because one Bible writer recorded something before, or after, another writer does not mean that either writer is attempting to establish a chronological timeline. Unless the skeptic can point to a verse by both writers that says these events occurred in the precise order in which they are recorded, then no case can be made for these two passages being incompatible.

Consider for a moment the “to do list” that many of us make either daily or weekly. If someone peeked at your list and saw where you crossed off the first four things, but the things that you had marked off were not in the same order in which you accomplished them, would you be guilty of lying (to yourself or to a colleague)? No. Imagine also that you returned home after work one day, and told your children some of the things you had accomplished at the office. Then, you told your spouse the same things you told your children, only in a somewhat different order. Would your children have any right to call you a liar if they overheard this second conversation between you and your spouse? Of course not. The only way your children would be justified in calling you a liar is if you had told both them and your spouse that every event you rehearsed happened in the precise order in which you mentioned them.

The only way a skeptic could prove that Matthew 27:50-51 and Luke 23:44-46 are contradictory is if he or she could establish that both writers claimed to be writing all of these events in precisely the same order in which they occurred. Since, however, the critic cannot prove such intended chronology, he is left with another **alleged** and **unproven** “contradiction.” Interesting, is it not, that this fairly simple “problem” was listed as a “top-five” question with which to “stump” a Christian? Truly, using a little common sense proves helpful when studying the Bible.

Chapter 6



ALLEGED ETHICAL CONTRADICTIONS

INCONSISTENCIES ABOUT INCEST?

Genesis 20:12; Exodus 6:20; Leviticus 18:6-30;
20:11-12; Deuteronomy 27:20-23

On more than one list of “Bible discrepancies” is the allegation that Bible writers erred in their teachings about incest. In Leviticus 18:6-30, 20:11-12, and Deuteronomy 27:20-23, one learns that sexual relations between close family members is sinful and punishable by death: “None of you shall approach anyone who is near of kin to him, to uncover his nakedness” (Leviticus 18:6). Other passages, however, indicate that God tolerated incest among His people, and even blessed those involved in such relationships. Abraham married Sarah, his half-sister (Genesis 20:12; cf. Genesis 17:15-16; 22:17), while Abraham’s son, Isaac,

married Rebekah, his second cousin (Genesis 22:20-23; 24:4,15), and Jacob, Abraham's grandson, married his first cousins, Rachel and Leah (Genesis 24:29; 29:15-30). Even Moses' father, Amram, "took for himself Jochebed, **his father's sister, as wife**" (Exodus 6:20; cf. Leviticus 20:19). Critics claim that such passages are contradictory. Were Bible writers really inconsistent when they addressed the subject of incest?

First, one must recognize that simply because Scripture mentions godly men such as Abraham or one of his righteous descendants doing something God forbade elsewhere, does not mean the Bible writers contradicted themselves. Christ was the only perfect man ever to live (2 Corinthians 5:21). Though Noah, Abraham, Moses, etc. were counted faithful to God (Hebrews 11:7-29), they occasionally disobeyed His will (e.g., Numbers 20:1-12). God never blessed their disobedience, only their faithfulness. Consider the harlot Rahab. Whereas God did not condone her harlotry, she was "justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way" (James 2:25). "By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace" (Hebrews 11:31). Simply because God graciously saved Rahab from the destruction of Jericho, does not mean that God condoned her past sexual sins. Similarly, just because the Bible writers mention a particular event (e.g., Amram marrying his aunt) without condemning it, does not necessarily mean the Bible writers condoned it.

Second, for one to identify a legitimate contradiction, he must be considering the same time frame. To condemn Thomas Jefferson for not paying Federal

income tax would be inappropriate because there was no Federal income tax in the United States during his lifetime. Likewise, to accuse certain righteous men of breaking God's law prior to the establishment of that law is equally erroneous. The first indication of God forbidding incestuous marriages is not until **after** the Israelites departed Egypt (when Moses was already 80 years old—Exodus 7:7). Prior to Mosaic Law, men **could lawfully marry** close family members. Indeed, God blessed Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3) while he was married to Sarah, his half-sister. What's more, implied in the creation of Adam, the first man (1 Corinthians 15:45), and Eve, "the mother of all living" (Genesis 3:20), is that their immediate offspring married each other and had children. Furthermore, following the great Flood, the entire Earth was repopulated by Noah, his three sons, and their wives (Genesis 9:1). Thus, in the beginning God allowed incest.

There was no need for strict laws on marriage partners in the early Patriarchal Age (apart from the divine "one man, one woman, for life" institution), and for at least one good reason: during this time, man was in a relatively pure state, at least physically, having left not long before the perfect condition in which he was created and the Garden that had sustained his life.... [N]o harmful genetic traits had emerged at this point that could have been expressed in the children of closely related partners. However, after many generations, and especially after the Noahic Flood (Genesis 6-9), solar and cosmic radiation, chemical and viral mutagens, and DNA replication errors, led to the multiplication of genetic disorders. God protected

His people by instituting strict laws against incestuous marriages in the eighteenth chapter of Leviticus.¹

Laws regarding incest were given only during the Mosaic dispensation. Those living prior to this period or since this age ended (Colossians 2:14) have not been bound by its laws on incest any more than we are bound by other Mosaic mandates (e.g., refraining from eating pork—Leviticus 11:7). That said, since “more genetic disorders have arisen in the world population since the time of Moses,...it is even more important to avoid marrying a close relative. Christianity thus far has insured that such rules have been carried forward into modern laws in the western world.”² Though it may not be sinful for you to marry your first cousin, you may need to think twice before saying, “I do.”

ISRAELITE PLUNDERING, AND A MISSING DONKEY

Exodus 3:21-22; 12:35-36; 20:15; Matthew 21:1-7

Numerous passages of Scripture teach—either explicitly or implicitly—about the sinfulness of thievery. One of the Ten Commandments that God gave to Israel was: “You shall not steal” (Exodus 20:15). In the book of Leviticus, one can read where “the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say to them... You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another... You shall not cheat your neighbor, nor rob him’” (19:1-2,11,13). If a thief was found breaking into a house at night and was struck so that he died, the old law stated that there would be “no guilt for his bloodshed” (Exodus 22:2).

Under the new covenant, the apostle Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus, saying, “Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need” (Ephesians 4:28). And to the Christians at Corinth, Paul wrote that thieves will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). Thus, God obviously considers stealing to be a transgression of His law.

Skeptics, however, question the consistency of the above Bible verses when compared to other passages of Scripture, which they feel often are overlooked in a discussion on the biblical view of thievery. One of these alleged inconsistencies is found in the book of Exodus, and centers on how the Israelites “plundered” the Egyptians during the Exodus. When God spoke to Moses at the burning bush about the Exodus from Egypt, He said: “[I]t shall be, when you go, that you shall not go empty-handed. But every woman shall ask of her neighbor, namely, of her who dwells near her house, articles of silver, articles of gold, and clothing; and you shall put them on your sons and on your daughters. **So you shall plunder the Egyptians**” (Exodus 3:21-22). Then, as the Exodus became a reality, the Bible tells how “the children of Israel had done according to the word of Moses” and “**plundered the Egyptians**” (Exodus 12:35-36). According to skeptic Steve Wells, “God tells the Hebrew women to break the eighth commandment...and encourages the Israelites to steal from the Egyptians.”³

A second Bible story frequently used by skeptics in defense of their belief in the errancy of Scripture is that of Jesus’ disciples allegedly “stealing” a donkey and a colt. According to the gospel of Matthew, before

entering Jerusalem during the final week of His life, Jesus instructed His disciples, saying, “Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Loose them and bring them to Me. And if anyone says anything to you, you shall say, ‘The Lord has need of them,’ and immediately he will send them” (Matthew 21:1-3). Luke added: “So those who were sent went their way and found it just as He had said to them. But as they were loosing the colt, the owners of it said to them, ‘Why are you loosing the colt?’ And they said, ‘The Lord has need of him.’ Then they brought him to Jesus” (Luke 19:32-35). Regarding this story, Dennis McKinsey asked: “Are we to believe this isn’t theft? Imagine seeing a stranger driving your car away while claiming the lord needed it.”⁴ Dan Barker commented on this passage in his book, *Losing Faith in Faith: From Preacher to Atheist*, saying, “I was taught as a child that when you take something without asking for it, that is stealing.”⁵ Did Jesus really encourage His disciples to **steal** a donkey and a colt? And what about the Israelites plundering the Egyptians? Can these passages be explained logically in light of the numerous statements throughout Scripture that clearly condemn thievery?

A Proper Plundering, or an Unholy Heist?

Concerning the Israelites’ plundering of the Egyptians, the Bible student first needs to recognize that Exodus 3:22 is a reconfirmation of a prophecy made centuries earlier when God spoke to Abraham, saying, “[Y]our descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four

hundred years. And also the nation [Egypt] whom they serve I will judge; **afterward they shall come out with great possessions**" (Genesis 15:13-14).

Next, the honest Bible reader must concede that the Israelites' "plundering" was not comparable to the forceful plundering that an armed thief might undertake. The kind of plundering done by the Israelites is described within the text. God told Moses, "I will give this people [the Israelites] **favor** in the sight of the Egyptians.... But every woman shall **ask** of her neighbor, namely, of her who dwells near her house, articles of silver, articles of gold, and clothing; and you shall put them on your sons and on your daughters" (Exodus 3:21-22). When it finally came time for the Exodus, the texts states:

Now the children of Israel had done according to the word of Moses, and they had **asked** from the Egyptians articles of silver, articles of gold, and clothing. And the Lord had given the people **favor** in the sight of the Egyptians, so that **they granted them what they requested**. Thus they plundered the Egyptians (Exodus 12:35-36).

Who but a biased skeptic would call this stealing? The actual circumstances were such that the Israelites merely **requested** various articles, which were then granted by the Egyptians. The "plundering" described in the book of Exodus was nothing more than receiving that for which the Israelites asked. [NOTE: The word "plundered" in these two passages is not the normal Hebrew term used for what soldiers do to the enemy at the conclusion of a battle. In Exodus, the word "plundered" (from the Hebrew word *natsal*) is used figuratively to mean that the Israelites accomplished

the same thing as if they had taken them in battle—due to the extenuating circumstances of the plagues motivating the Egyptians to fear the Israelites and their God.^{6]}

But suppose for a moment that the Israelites **had** “plundered” the Egyptians (**at the Lord’s command**), in the sense that they took various possessions **by force**. Would this have been unjust? Surely not, since Jehovah recognized that the Israelites had provided slave labor for the Egyptians for many years (the descendants of Jacob [Israel] had been in Egypt for more than 200 years). During this time, the Egyptians afflicted them with “burdens” and made them “serve with rigor” (Exodus 1:11,13). Pharaoh “made their lives bitter with hard bondage” (1:14), and, upon seeing the tremendous growth of the Israelites, even commanded that every son born of the Israelites be killed (1:22). In reality, the “plundering” that took place at the end of Israel’s stay in Egypt (even had it been by force at the command of God) was a rather small compensation for the many years of agonizing slave labor they provided for the Egyptians.

Were Jesus’ Disciples “Colt Crooks”?

Even if the skeptic is somewhat pacified by the above explanation of the Israelites’ plundering, he likely will still want to know about the case in the New Testament of Jesus instructing two of His disciples to go into a village, locate a donkey and a colt, and to bring them back to Him. “Are we to believe this isn’t theft?” asked Dennis McKinsey.⁷ Allegedly, “Jesus told people to take a colt...without the owners’ permission.” And that, says McKinsey, is “commonly known as stealing.”⁸

Question: If I e-mailed my wife and asked her to walk to a neighbor's house and pick up his truck so that I could use it to haul an old furnace to the junkyard, would someone who read this same e-mail (perhaps finding a hard copy of it crumpled up in the trash) be justified in concluding that I asked my wife to steal the truck? Certainly not. Since the e-mail had no other information in it than the request to my wife concerning a neighbor's truck, a person reading the note would have to have access to additional information in order to come to the conclusion that my wife and I were guilty of theft. This person may be ignorant of the fact that I had prearranged such a pick-up with my neighbor the previous day. Or, perhaps my neighbor had told me at some earlier time that I could use his truck whenever I needed it.

What Mr. McKinsey and other skeptics never seem to take into consideration in their interpretation of Scripture is that the Bible does not record every single detail of every event it mentions (cf. John 21:25). The Bible was not intended to be an exhaustive chronological timeline citing every detail about the lives of all of the men and women mentioned within it. The New Testament book of Acts covers a period of about thirty years, but it actually is only about **some** of the acts of some of the early Christians. There were many more things that Paul, Peter, Silas, Luke, and other first-century Christians did that are not recorded therein. For example, Paul spent three years in Arabia and Damascus after his conversion (Galatians 1:16-18), yet Luke did not mention this detail, nor the many things Paul accomplished during these three years.

The case of Jesus telling His disciples to go locate

the donkey and colt does not prove thievery, any more than Jesus' disciples inquiring about and occupying an "upper room" makes them trespassers (cf. Mark 14:13-15). When sending His two disciples to get the requested animals, Jesus told them exactly where to go and what to say, as if He already knew the circumstances (which He did!) under which the donkey and colt were available. Jesus may very well have prearranged for the use of the donkeys. Neither Mr. McKinsey nor any other skeptic can prove otherwise. Similar to how I am not obligated to go home from work every night and rehearse to my wife everything I did each hour at work, the Bible is not obligated to fill in every detail of every event, including the one regarding the attainment of two donkeys.

Furthermore, the innocence of Jesus and His disciples is reinforced by the fact that the disciples were able to leave with the donkeys. Had the disciples really been stealing the animals, one would think that the owners would not have allowed such to happen. Also, nothing is said in the text about what happened to the animals after Jesus rode them into Jerusalem. For all we know, Jesus' disciples could have immediately taken the animals back to their owners. [NOTE: For a rebuttal to the charge that Matthew and Mark contradict each other in regard to the **number** of donkeys Jesus rode into Jerusalem, see chapter 10.]

Skeptics who charge that the Bible contains contradictory teachings concerning the act of stealing have no firm ground on which to stand. The Israelites did not "steal" the Egyptians' clothing and jewels, they "asked" for them, and the Egyptians "granted them what they requested" (Exodus 12:35-36). And until it

can be proven that Jesus' disciples took the donkeys by force (and without prior permission), justice demands that the accusations of guilt must be withdrawn. There are no justifiable contradictions here.

GOD'S JUST DESTRUCTION OF THE CANAANITES

Exodus 23:23; Deuteronomy 7:1-2; Joshua 9:24

In the 1930s and 40s, the Nazi regime committed state-sponsored genocide of so-called "inferior races." Of the approximately nine million Jews who lived in Europe at the beginning of the 1930s, some six million of them were exterminated. The Nazis murdered approximately one million Jewish children, two million Jewish women, and three million Jewish men. The Jews were starved, gassed, and experimented on like animals. In addition, Adolf Hitler's Nazi regime slaughtered another three million Poles, Soviets, gypsies, and people with disabilities.⁹ Most sane people, including Christians and many atheists (e.g., Antony Flew, Wallace Matson), have interpreted the Nazis' actions for what they were—cruel, callous, and nefarious.

Some 3,400 years before the Holocaust, the God of the Bible commanded the Israelites to "destroy all the inhabitants of the land" of Canaan (Joshua 9:24). They were to conquer, kill, and cast out the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites (Exodus 23:23; Deuteronomy 7:1-2; Joshua 3:10). After crossing the Jordan River, we learn in the book of Joshua that the Israelites "utterly destroyed all that was in the city [of Jericho], both man and woman, young and old,

ox and sheep and donkey, with the edge of the sword... [T]hey burned the city and all that was in it with fire” (Joshua 6:21,24). They also “utterly destroyed all the inhabitants of Ai” (Joshua 8:26), killing 12,000 men and women and hanging their king (8:25,29). In Makkedah and Libnah, the Israelites “let none remain” (Joshua 10:28,30). They struck Lachish “and all the people who were in it with the edge of the sword” (10:32). The Israelites then conquered Gezer, Eglon, Hebron, Debir, and Hazor (10:33-39; 11:1-15). “So all the cities of those kings, and all their kings, Joshua took and struck with the edge of the sword. He utterly destroyed them, as Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded” (Joshua 11:12).

God had the Israelites kill countless thousands, perhaps millions, of people throughout the land of Canaan. It was genocide in the sense that it was a **planned, systematic**, limited **extermination** of a number of **nation** states from a relatively small area in the Middle East.¹⁰ But, it was not a war against a particular race (from the Greek *genos*) or ethnic group. Nor were the Israelites commanded to pursue and kill the Canaanite nations if they fled from Israel’s Promised Land. The Israelites were to drive out and dispossess the nations of their land (killing all who resisted the dispossession), but they were not instructed to annihilate a particular race or ethnic group from the face of the Earth.

Still, many find God’s commands to conquer and destroy the Canaanite nation states problematic. How could a loving God instruct one group of people to kill and conquer another group? America’s most well-known critic of Christianity in the late 1700s and early 1800s, Thomas Paine (one of only a handful of America’s

Founding Fathers who did not claim to be a Christian), called the God of the Old Testament “the Mars of the Jews, the fighting God of Israel,” Who was “boisterous, contemptible, and vulgar.”¹¹ Two centuries later, Richard Dawkins (arguably the most famous atheist in the world today), published his book *The God Delusion*, which soon became a *New York Times* bestseller. One of the most oft-quoted phrases from this work comes from page 31, where Dawkins called God, a “racist, infanticidal, genocidal...capriciously malevolent bully.”¹² According to one search engine, this quote (in part or in whole) is found online approximately one million times. The fact is, critics of the God of the Bible are fond of repeating the allegation that, because of His instruction to the Israelites to kill millions of people in their conquest of Canaan, the God of the Bible has (allegedly) shown Himself to be an unruly, shameful, offensive, genocidal, “evil monster.”¹³

Was God’s Campaign Against Canaan Immoral?

How could a supremely good (Mark 10:18), all-loving (1 John 4:8), perfectly holy God (Leviticus 11:44-45) order the Israelites to slay with swords myriads of human beings, letting “none remain” in Canaan? Is such a planned, systematic extermination of nations not equivalent to the murderous actions of the Nazis in the 1930s and 40s, as atheists and other critics of Christianity would have us believe? In truth, God’s actions in Israel’s conquest of Canaan were in perfect harmony with His supremely loving, merciful, righteous, just, and holy nature.

Punishing Evildoers Is Not Unloving

Similar to how **merciful** parents, principals, policemen, and judges can **justly** administer punishment to rule-breakers and evildoers, so, too, can the all-knowing, all-loving Creator of the Universe. Loving parents and principals have administered corporal punishment appropriately to children for years (cf. Proverbs 13:24). Merciful policemen, who are constantly saving the lives of the innocent, have the authority (both from God and the government—Romans 13:1-4) to kill a wicked person who is murdering others. Just judges have the authority to sentence a depraved child rapist to death. Loving-kindness and corporal or capital punishment are not antithetical. Prior to conquering Canaan, God commanded the Israelites, saying,

You shall not hate your brother in your heart....
You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge
against the children of your people, but you shall
love your neighbor as yourself.... And if a stranger
dwells with you in your land, you shall not mistreat
him. The stranger who dwells among you shall
be to you as one born among you, and you shall
love him as yourself (Leviticus 19:17-18,33-34; cf.
Romans 13:9).

The faithful Jew was expected, as are Christians, “not to resist an evil person” (Matthew 5:39) but rather go the extra mile (Matthew 5:41) and “turn the other” cheek (Matthew 5:39). “Love,” after all, “is the fulfillment of the law” (Romans 13:10; cf. Matthew 22:36-40). Interestingly, however, the Israelite was commanded to punish (even kill) lawbreakers. Just five chapters after commanding the individual Israelite to “not

take vengeance,” but “love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18), God twice said that murderers would receive the death penalty (Leviticus 24:21,17).

The Wickedness of the Inhabitants of Canaan

The Canaanite nations were punished because of their extreme wickedness. God did not cast out the Canaanites for being a particular race or ethnic group. God did not send the Israelites into the land of Canaan to destroy a number of **righteous** nations. On the contrary, the Canaanite nations were horribly depraved. They practiced “abominable customs” (Leviticus 18:30) and did “detestable things” (Deuteronomy 18:9, NASB). They practiced idolatry, witchcraft, soothsaying, and sorcery. They attempted to cast spells upon people and call up the dead (Deuteronomy 18:10-11).

Their “cultic practice was barbarous and thoroughly licentious.”¹⁴ Their “deities...had no moral character whatever,” which “must have brought out the worst traits in their devotees and entailed many of the most demoralizing practices of the time,” including sensuous nudity, orgiastic nature-worship, snake worship, and even child sacrifice.¹⁵ As Moses wrote, the inhabitants of Canaan would “burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods” (Deuteronomy 12:31). The Canaanite nations were anything but “innocent.” In truth, “[t]hese Canaanite cults were utterly immoral, decadent, and corrupt, dangerously contaminating and thoroughly justifying the divine command to destroy their devotees.”¹⁶ They were so nefarious that God said they defiled the land and the land could stomach them no longer—“the land vomit[ed] out its

inhabitants” (Leviticus 18:25). [NOTE: Israel was an imperfect nation (as all nations are), but God still used them to punish the Canaanites. God warned Israel before ever entering Canaan, however, that if they forsook His law, they, too, would be severely punished (Deuteronomy 28:15ff). In fact, similar to how God used the Israelites to bring judgment upon the inhabitants of Canaan in the time of Joshua, He used the pagan nations of Babylon and Assyria to judge and conquer Israel hundreds of years later.]

The Longsuffering of God

Unlike the foolish, impulsive, quick-tempered reactions of many men (Proverbs 14:29), the Lord is “slow to anger and great in mercy” (Psalm 145:8). He is “longsuffering..., not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). Immediately following a reminder to the Christians in Rome that the Old Testament was “written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope,” the apostle Paul referred to God as “the God of patience” (Romans 15:4-5). Throughout the Old Testament, the Bible writers portrayed God as longsuffering.

Though in Noah’s day, “the wickedness of man was great in the earth” and “every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5), “the Divine longsuffering waited” (1 Peter 3:20). (It seems as though God delayed flooding Earth for 120 years as His Spirit’s message of righteousness was preached to a wicked world—Genesis 6:3; 2 Peter 2:5.) In the days of Abraham, God ultimately decided to spare the

iniquitous city of Sodom, not if 50 righteous people were found living therein, but only **10** righteous individuals.

And what about prior to God's destruction of the Canaanite nations? Did God quickly decide to cast them out of the land? Did He respond to the peoples' wickedness like an impulsive, reckless mad-man? Or was He, as the Bible repeatedly states and exemplifies, longsuffering? Indeed, God waited. He waited more than four centuries to bring judgment upon the inhabitants of Canaan. Although the Amorites were already a sinful people in Abraham's day, God delayed in giving the descendants of the patriarch the Promised Land. He would wait until the Israelites had been in Egypt for hundreds of years, because at the time that God spoke with Abraham "the iniquity of the Amorites" was "not yet complete" (Genesis 15:16). [NOTE: "The Amorites were so numerous and powerful a tribe in Canaan that they are sometimes named for the whole of the ancient inhabitants, as they are here."¹⁷] In Abraham's day, the inhabitants of Canaan were not so degenerate that God would bring judgment upon them. However, by the time of Joshua (more than 400 years later), the Canaanites' iniquity was full, and God used the army of Israel to destroy them.

Yes, God is longsuffering, but His **long**suffering is **not** an "eternal" suffering. His patience with impenitent sinners eventually ends. It ended for a wicked world in the days of Noah. It ended for Sodom and Gomorrah in the days of Abraham. And it eventually ended for the inhabitants of Canaan, whom God justly destroyed.

What About the Innocent Children?

The children of Canaan were not guilty of their parents' sins (cf. Ezekiel 18:20); they were sinless, innocent, precious human beings (cf. Matthew 18:3-5).¹⁸ So how could God justly take the lives of children, any children, who "have no knowledge of good and evil" (Deuteronomy 1:39)? The fact is, as Dave Miller properly noted, "Including the children in the destruction of such populations actually spared them from a worse condition—that of being reared to be as wicked as their parents and thus face eternal punishment. All persons who die in childhood, according to the Bible, are ushered to Paradise and will ultimately reside in Heaven. Children who have parents who are evil must naturally suffer innocently while on Earth (e.g., Numbers 14:33)."¹⁹ God, the Giver of life (Acts 17:25; Ecclesiastes 12:7), and only God has the right to take the life of His creation whenever He chooses (for the righteous purposes that He has). At times in history, God took the life of men out of righteous judgment. At other times (as in the case of children), it was taken for merciful reasons. [NOTE: For an extensive discussion on the relationship between (1) the goodness of God, (2) the contradictory hideousness of atheism, and (3) God bringing about the death of various infants throughout history, see Kyle Butt's article, "Is God Immoral for Killing Innocent Children?"²⁰]

Conclusion

Though the enemies of the God of the Bible are frequently heard criticizing Israel's conquest of Canaan, the fact is, such a conquest was in complete harmony with God's perfectly loving, holy, and righteous nature. After

patiently waiting for hundreds of years, God eventually used the Israelites to bring judgment upon myriads of wicked Canaanites. Simultaneously, He spared their children a fate much worse than physical death—the horror of growing up in a reprehensible culture and becoming like their hedonistic parents—and immediately ushered them into a pain-free, marvelous place called Paradise (Luke 16:19-31; 23:43).

DID GOD APPROVE OF RAHAB'S LIE?

Joshua 2:1-21; Hebrews 11:31; James 2:25

Whereas many Bible passages in both the Old and the New Testaments indicate that lying is sinful,²¹ critics of the inspiration of the Bible contend that the biblical teaching on this subject is contradictory. The most frequently cited example revolves around Rahab's lie in the book of Joshua and two separate, favorable comments about Rahab in the New Testament (Hebrews 11:31; James 2:25).

Although some well-meaning Christians may creatively contend that Rahab did not lie in Joshua 2, a simple, straightforward reading of the biblical text indicates that she did. After Rahab hid the Israelite spies on her roof among the stalks of flax (Joshua 2:6), she told the messengers of the King of Jericho (who were pursuing the Israelites) that the men in question had already left, and exactly where they went she did not know (2:4-5). However, (1) the Israelites had not left, and (2) she knew exactly where they were. In fact, after speaking to the king's men, she went back up to the roof to speak with them and to help them safely escape (2:8-21).

According to Bible critics, God is inconsistent in His condemnation of dishonesty. How can “lying lips” be “an abomination to the Lord” (Proverbs 12:22), while at the same time God spared Rahab from the destruction of Jericho (Joshua 2:9-21; 6:22-25). How is it that “all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone” (Revelation 21:8), and yet Rahab be commended twice by New Testament writers?

By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace (Hebrews 11:31).

[W]as not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way (James 2:25)?

Is the Bible inconsistent on this subject? And do these verses not prove that lying is approved in some situations?

First, simply because the Bible commends an individual for a righteous act does not mean that God condones everything the person ever did. Just as husbands and wives can be faithful to each other **despite** their shortcomings, and just as children can be submissive to their parents and yet have fallen short of their parents' expectations many times while growing up, every accountable soul has the potential to be faithful notwithstanding their regretful sins and imperfections.

Keep in mind that Jesus was the only accountable Person ever to live Who never sinned.²² Though Noah, Abraham, Moses, and many others were counted **faithful** (Hebrews 11:7-29), they occasionally disobeyed God's will (Numbers 20:1-12) and acted foolishly or cowardly (cf. Genesis 9:21; 12:12-20; 20:1-18). The apostle

Peter, who also served as an elder in the early church (1 Peter 5:1), was guilty at one time or another of having a lack of faith (Matthew 14:31), denying that he knew the Lord (Matthew 26:69-75), and hypocritically withdrawing himself from Gentiles (Galatians 2:11-14). Yet God chose Peter to be a preacher of the Gospel and to pen two of the New Testament epistles. He was **not** chosen **because** of his sins; he was chosen **in spite** of them (and because he repented of his sins and sought to walk in the light rather than wander habitually and rebelliously in the darkness—cf. 1 John 1:5-10). Every saved soul is a former coward, murderer, blasphemer, adulterer, thief, or liar, etc. Every faithful Christian who is walking in the light is tempted to sin, and sometimes (or far more often than we might like to admit) we think, say, or do unchristlike things. “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He [God] is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:8-9). All faithful followers of God still make mistakes, have moments of weakness, and struggle in a variety of ways, yet they can still “do justly,” “love mercy,” “walk humbly” (Micah 6:8), and “persevere” faithfully (Revelation 3:10).

Second, keep in mind that Rahab was a **Canaanite harlot**. As we noted in the previous section, the people of Canaan were (generally) extremely wicked. Recall that they practiced “abominable customs” (Leviticus 18:30) and did “detestable things” (Deuteronomy 18:9, NASB). They would “burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods” (Deuteronomy 12:31). They were so nefarious that God said they defiled the

land and the land could stomach them no longer—“the land vomit[ed] out its inhabitants” (Leviticus 18:25). This statement summarizes the level of depravity in Canaan (of which Jericho was a part). Whether Rahab had fully embraced her culture’s debauchery or whether she was more of a victim of her circumstances (as many women have been throughout history), she nevertheless is described in Scripture as a “harlot” who lied (Joshua 2:1-8; 6:17,25). Such sinfulness in the life of a Canaanite woman should come as no surprise. But thankfully, the life of Rahab does not continue to parallel her pagan culture. She wanted out, and the Lord provided a way—which leads us to a third point to consider.

Rahab’s recorded words and actions in Joshua 2 reveal a woman in transition—from living like a pagan harlot to embracing the One true God and His ways. Notice her statements to the Israelite spies:

I know that the Lord has given you the land, that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land are fainthearted because of you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea...and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites.... And as soon as we heard these things, our hearts melted...for the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and on Earth beneath (Joshua 2:9-11).

Rahab then coupled her confessed belief in the existence of Jehovah and His mighty works **with action** (Joshua 2:6-21). She courageously hid the two Israelite spies from the King of Jericho. She treated the spies kindly. She helped them escape the city. She gave them specific instructions on what to do after they made it out of the

city (so that they would not be caught by the king's men). Rahab and her family kept secret the Israelite plan to destroy Jericho. And, as directed, Rahab bound the scarlet cord in her window, and gathered her parents and other family members in her house (according to the spies' commands) in order to be spared from Jericho's destruction. Indeed, as the New Testament rightly recognizes, Rahab actively demonstrated her faith in Jehovah (however so uninformed, inexperienced, and flawed her faith still was).

Fourth, **Rahab's dishonesty is never condoned in Scripture.** She was no more commended in the Old Testament or the New Testament for lying than she was for her harlotry. She was commended and graciously spared from the destruction of Jericho because of her **overall** faith and works at the time—despite the fact that her newly found, courageous faith (which was quickly emerging out of a heavily pagan culture) was **still a work in progress**. Yes, she lied to the king's men, but she also (1) confessed belief in Jehovah, (2) appealed to Him for help, (3) showed kindness to the Israelite spies, and (4) courageously hid them and helped them escape, etc. There is no logical or biblical reason either to deny Rahab's lie or to criticize her overall, emerging faith in God. If we would rightly commend a newly recovering alcoholic, pornography addict, or covetous individual who has a temporary set-back in a moment of trying temptation in the midst of a grueling attempt to repent and live a righteous life, could the merciful and gracious God of the Bible not rightly commend Rahab for her overall faith and works in her newfound walk with the Lord?

In short, the story of Rahab should not be used as a license to lie. Instead, we should retell Rahab's story to show the greatness of Jehovah over the false gods of this world and to inspire God's people to courageous acts—similar to many of those works demonstrated by a woman from the pagan city of Jericho some 3,500 years ago.

WHAT ABOUT ELISHA'S "LIE" AND SAMUEL'S DECEPTION?

2 Kings 6:19; 1 Samuel 16:2-4

As Ben-Hadad, the king of Syria, made war with Israel, the prophet Elisha warned Israel's king (Joram) time and again how to avoid the Syrians. Ben-Hadad eventually learned that Elisha was the one who kept the king of Israel informed, so he commissioned "a great army" to go arrest the prophet of God (2 Kings 6:13-14). When Elisha saw the Syrian army, he prayed that the Lord would strike them with blindness, which He did. The prophet then told the blinded Syrians, "This is not the way, nor is this the city. Follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom you seek" (2 Kings 6:19). Elisha proceeded to lead them to Samaria, the capital of Israel. Only after the Syrians were inside Samaria did God return to them their sight. Undoubtedly, it was here that Elisha revealed himself to the Syrians.

Rather than reveal himself to the Syrians when he first met them, he said, "'This is not the way, and this is not the city. Follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom you seek.' And he led them to Samaria" (6:19, ESV). Did Elisha, a prophet of God, lie to the Syrian army?

Bible students must keep in mind that every person who has ever lived, except Christ, has sinned (Romans 3:10,23; 1 Peter 2:22). All of the godly people mentioned in the Bible sinned at various times in their lives. Even inspired penmen, including Moses, David, and Peter, sinned at times.²³ No doubt, at various times in his life, Elisha also sinned against God. Thus, whether Elisha lied on this occasion or not, he definitely fell short at some point in his life.²⁴

Is All Deception Lying?

In any discussion, it is very important to consider the meaning of words, the sense in which they are used, and how some words can have broader meanings than other (similar) words. For example, the Bible condemns murder (Exodus 20:13; Romans 1:29), but condones certain killings. In fact, just one chapter after giving the Sixth Commandment (“Thou shalt not **kill/murder**—ASV/NKJV; Hebrew *ratsach*), God commanded that the Israelites were to put to death various lawbreakers, including those guilty of kidnapping, cursing their parents, or premeditated murder (Exodus 21:12-17). In the New Testament, in the very chapter that Paul reminded the Romans, “You shall not murder” (Romans 13:9), he noted that governing authorities do “not bear the sword in vain; for he is God’s minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil” (13:1-4).²⁵ When the entirety of Scripture is considered, the Bible student learns that all murder is killing, and is sinful, but not all killing is murder. In truth, throughout history God has authorized some killing in certain situations.²⁶

Similarly, though all lying is a form of deception, not all deception is equivalent to the sin of lying. The Greek noun “lie” is *pseudos*²⁷—a “conscious and intentional falsehood.”²⁸ The English word “lie” may be defined as “to make an untrue statement with the intent to deceive.”²⁹ A fake handoff in football is deceptive, but it’s not lying. A no-look pass in basketball is tricky, but not dishonest. Wearing a disguise or camouflage fatigues in war so as not to be seen (or seen as easily) by the enemy is deceptive, but not untruthful. A woman may color her hair to “cover up” her gray so as not to appear as old as she is. That’s not lying, but it is a form of deception. The same thing can be said about a man’s toupee. A “lie” would be for the man to say something like, “This is my actual hair. I am not wearing a toupee.”

What’s more, aren’t many “knock-off” brands a form of honest deception? When I was a child, I wore fake “Air Jordan” shoes. They looked kind of cool (to me anyway), and were only a fraction of the cost of real Jordans, but they weren’t actual Jordans. If people mistakenly thought I had on Jordans, I didn’t mind, nor did I have an obligation to correct every person who may have thought they were real Jordans. But, if I ever actually said, “I have a pair of Jordans,” then I would have been lying.

Back to Elisha

When the Syrians invaded Israel in order to find and arrest the prophet of God, Elisha appeared to them without first revealing himself to his blind enemies. Instead, he said to follow him and he would bring them to the one they sought. He eventually revealed himself

to them, but only after he had led them to Samaria and their sight was returned to them. Did Elisha trick his pursuers? Yes. But misleading enemy soldiers, intruders, or others who might want to do us harm is not necessarily the equivalent to lying.

The Scriptures do not clearly indicate whether Elisha lied to the Syrians or not. (Of all the communication that likely took place between them, **only one line** is recorded in Scripture; 2 Kings 6:19). If Elisha did lie, such a sin would neither reflect poorly on God or the Bible—“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Still, we must be careful not to over-react to what Elisha did. In a time of war, he strategically led his God-given “captives” to “the city” of his choosing, where he would reveal “Elisha” to them.³⁰

Must We Reveal Everything We Know?

Consider the very nature of God: in addition to being 100% truthful and by His very nature unable to lie (Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18), He’s also omniscient (Psalm 139:1-4; 1 Chronicles 28:9). Are there innumerable things that our Creator and Savior knows that we do not know? Certainly. Does His perfectly honest moral character compel Him to tell us everything He knows, even when we ask? Absolutely not. One lesson to learn from our most upright, moral Maker is that telling the truth is not equivalent to “revealing everything” we know.

When God sent the prophet Samuel to Bethlehem for the purpose of anointing David as the next king of Israel, Samuel mentioned that Saul would kill him if he heard of it. God’s response: “Take a heifer with you, and say, **‘I have come to sacrifice to the Lord.’** Then

invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; you shall anoint for Me the one I name to you. So Samuel did what the Lord said” (1 Samuel 16:2-4). When the elders of Bethlehem asked Samuel if he came peaceably, the prophet said, “Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the Lord” (16:5). Was the sacrifice the primary purpose of Samuel’s visit to Bethlehem? No. But **Samuel was under no obligation to tell his questioners the central reason for his visit.** He simply revealed to them **one** reason (a secondary reason) for his arrival into town.

Can We Distract and Divert Attention?

How many truthful, though blatantly elusive, things can a passionate husband and wife say to their child who finds a way into their room in the middle of the night? What do conscientious parents say to a young child who asks somewhat blunt questions about sensitive matters—answers for which innocent children are not yet prepared? The fact is, there may be many wise, truthful (though admittedly somewhat elusive) ways to respond. A dad may use the “distracting technique” and try to divert attention away from the sensitive topic. A mother may use the “Samuel technique” (1 Samuel 16:1-5) and tell the child only a part (or parts) of the fuller answer—the few part(s) that are prudent for the child to know. Parents may also use the “generalize technique” and simply speak in very broad, vague, but truthful generalities. Though parents are not authorized to lie to their children, we may righteously use various creative ways to respond to sensitive questions.

Can We Deceptively Outwit Enemies and Those Who Want to Harm Us?

In Judges 7, God said to Gideon, “By the three hundred men...I will save you, and deliver the Midianites into your hand.... Arise, go down against the camp, for I have delivered it into your hand” (7:7,9). How did God use Gideon’s 300 men to help bring down an enemy with 135,000 soldiers (cf. Judges 8:10)? In the middle of the night, they surrounded the enemy’s camp, blew trumpets, shouted, made loud noises by breaking pitchers, and held up torches (7:16-22). And what did the enemy no doubt think as they were suddenly awakened from a deep sleep? That they were under attack by a great army. But was there really a great army? No, just a great God, Who authorized Gideon to use a tiny army to outwit the enemy. No lie was told, but approved deception was used.

In the often-used, extreme example of someone breaking into our house and asking questions for the purpose of harming ourselves and family members, what can we do?³¹ Many seem to ask this question as if it somehow proves that lying is permissible, yet nowhere in Scripture does God authorize lying. God’s command to tell the truth and not lie, however, does not mean we cannot act cleverly and courageously. The intruder has no lawful right to be in the house, so we are under no obligation to do anything he instructs us to do. We may simply remain quiet and pray that the same God Who providentially delivered many thousands of Jews out of the hands of the Persians some 2,500 years ago will providentially provide a remedy to our situation (Esther 3:1-9:17). We may try to escape. (On more than one occasion, Jesus

hid and escaped from His murderous enemies—Luke 4:30; John 8:59; 10:39.) We may (like Samuel) only tell the criminal secondary truths. We may (like Gideon) have a way to outwit the intruder. Or (as odd as this may sound to some), we may attempt to talk to the intruder about the Gospel. (Who knows how God could use such a terrible, frightening situation to His glory? After all, was the greatest missionary the world has ever known not a former violent man, who previously “made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison”—Acts 8:3?)

Although human life is an extremely valuable gift from God (Genesis 1:26-27), the most important thing in this life is not merely to live, but to be faithful to God, regardless of the situation. Jesus could have lied and worked things out to spare His own life, but He died (and rose) for a higher purpose. He submissively fulfilled His Father’s will. Jesus and His inspired spokesmen could have instructed the early church to avoid persecution and death by lying for each other or by denying their own faith in Christ, but they didn’t. In fact, to those first-century Christians who were suffering (or were about to face great tribulation), even to the point of death, Jesus declared, “Be faithful until death [“even to the point of death”—NIV], and I will give you the crown of life” (Revelation 2:10). Whatever course of action the Christian takes, it should be done honestly and wisely (Matthew 10:16).

Motivations Matter

Lest anyone think that we are suggesting sinful deception, or “lawful deception” for sinful reasons, we must remember that our **motivations matter**—in

everything we do. Jesus spent a great deal of time exposing the “righteous” Pharisees for their sinful hypocrisy. Although they “outwardly appear[ed] righteous to men” (Matthew 23:28)—praying, fasting, doing charitable deeds, etc.—many of their “lawful” actions were negated by their sinful motives. If we pridefully pray “truthful” words, but for the wrong reasons, we sin (Luke 18:9-14; Matthew 6:5-6). If we do the “right” works, but for the wrong reasons, we will have “no reward” from our Father in heaven (Matthew 6:1). Paul wrote, “And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor...but have not love, it profits me nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:3). God has made it abundantly clear in Scripture—“technically” we may look and sound like we are doing what God authorizes, yet if such things are done without proper, godly motives, then our actions are tragically wrong.

Thus, otherwise lawful deception (such as not telling the “whole story” for righteous reasons—cf. 1 Samuel 16:1-5) may very well be sinful for the teenager who does not reveal to his questioning parents who he’s been hanging out with. If he mentions everyone except the one person whom his parents have forbidden, has he lied? Not necessarily. But did his unrighteous motives make his deception sinful? Certainly. Children are to submit to their parents (Ephesians 6:1-3). If they say the “right” things for the wrong reasons, they are no more submitting to their parents’ authority than any improperly motivated child of God is submitting to the Father in heaven.

Similarly, if an adulterous husband tells his wife “truthful” things, but just not everything, is he lying to his

wife? He may not be outright lying in various “carefully worded” (“I-don’t-want-to-get-caught”) specific statements, but is he sinfully deceiving and cheating on his God-given spouse? Certainly! He’s being immorally deceptive by not keeping his original oath and commitment that he made to his wife when they exchanged vows at their wedding ceremony. He’s being untrue in his actions. He’s being altogether unloving to the precious bride that God commands him to love “just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her” (Ephesians 5:25). The man’s unrighteous motivations and “lying life” expose his deception as terribly sinful and destructive.

Conclusion

I may have misstated something in this section (or somewhere else in the book), but that would not necessarily be a lie, unless I **intended** to be dishonest. After all, “to err is human.” Everyone occasionally says things that are wrong, and yet those **honest mistakes** are not lies. In addition to the actual **act** of stating an untruth is the **motivation** behind it. How many times has an honest, conscientious preacher unintentionally cited the wrong Bible verse in a sermon? Or how many times has an honest husband forgotten to get milk on the way home from work after having told his wife, “I will get milk on the way home”? Indeed, lying is a “**conscious** and **intentional** falsehood.”³² What’s more, when we look at the entirety of Scripture (Psalm 119:160), and “rightly divid[e] the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15), we find that, while God never condones the sin of lying, He does authorize righteously motivated, honest deception.³³

The purpose of acknowledging certain examples of authorized deception must **never** be to rationalize the sin of lying—any more than giving scriptural justification for capital punishment should ever cause us to rationalize murder. The fact is, lying is a terrible sin. It is the first sin that we read about in the Bible (Genesis 3:4). It is of the devil (John 8:44). It is abominable and hated by God (Proverbs 12:22; 6:17,19). It is damnable (Revelation 21:8). And it is very, very tempting at times.

There is never a justifiable reason to be untruthful. Christians must be resolved to “be imitators of God as dear children” in all things at all times (Ephesians 5:1). As we follow the example of Jesus, “the truth” (John 14:6), we must be resolved to put away lying (Ephesians 4:25) and to be fair and honest all day, every day.

Chapter 7



ALLEGED CONTRADICTIONS PERTAINING TO SALVATION

“CALLING ON THE NAME OF THE LORD”

Matthew 7:21; Acts 2:21; Romans 10:13

Considering how many people within Christendom teach that an individual can be saved merely by professing a belief in Christ, it is not surprising that skeptics claim that the Bible contradicts itself in this regard. Although Peter and Paul declared, “[W]hoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:21; Romans 10:13; cf. Joel 2:32), skeptics quickly remind their readers that Jesus once stated: “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he

who does the will of My Father in heaven” (Matthew 7:21; cf. Luke 6:46). Allegedly, Matthew 7:21 clashes with such passages as Acts 2:21 and Romans 10:13.¹ Since many professed Christians seem to equate “calling on the name of the Lord” with the idea of saying to Jesus, “Lord, save me,” Bible critics feel even more justified in their pronouncement of “conflicting testimonies.” How can certain professed followers of Christ claim that they were saved by simply “calling out to Christ,” when Christ Himself proclaimed that a mere calling upon Him would not save a person?

The key to correctly understanding the phrase “calling on the name of the Lord,” is to recognize that more is involved in this action than a mere verbal petition directed toward God. The “call” mentioned in Acts 2:21, Romans 10:13, and Acts 22:16 (where Paul was “calling on the name of the Lord”), is not equated with the “call” (“Lord, Lord”) of which Jesus spoke in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 7:21).

First, it is appropriate to mention that even in modern times, to “call on” someone frequently means more than simply making a request for something. When a doctor goes to the hospital to “call on” some of his patients, he does not merely walk into the room and say, “I just wanted to come by and say, ‘Hello.’ I wish you the best. Now pay me.” On the contrary, he involves himself in a service. He examines the patient, listens to the patient’s concerns, gives further instructions regarding the patient’s hopeful recovery, and then oftentimes prescribes medication. All of these elements may be involved in a doctor “calling upon” a patient. In the mid-20th century, it was common for young men to “call on”

young ladies. Again, this expression meant something different than just “making a request.”²

Second, when an individual takes the time to study how the expression “calling on God” is used throughout Scripture, the only reasonable conclusion to draw is that, just as similar phrases sometimes have a deeper meaning in modern America, the expression “calling on God” often had a deeper meaning in Bible times. Take, for instance, Paul’s statement recorded in Acts 25:11: “I appeal to Caesar.” The word “appeal” (*epikaloumai*) is the same word translated “call” (or “calling”) in Acts 2:21, 22:16, and Romans 10:13. But, Paul was not simply saying, “I’m calling on Caesar to save me.” As James Bales noted:

Paul, in appealing to Caesar, was claiming the right of a Roman citizen to have his case judged by Caesar. He was asking that his case be transferred to Caesar’s court and that Caesar hear and pass judgment on his case. In so doing, he indicated that he was resting his case on Caesar’s judgment. **In order for this to be done Paul had to submit to whatever was necessary in order for his case to be brought before Caesar.** He had to submit to the Roman soldiers who conveyed him to Rome. He had to submit to whatever formalities or procedure Caesar demanded of those who came before him. All of this was involved in his appeal to Caesar.³

Paul’s “calling” to Caesar involved his submission to him. “That, in a nutshell,” wrote T. Pierce Brown, “is what ‘calling on the Lord’ involves”—obedience.⁴ It is not a mere verbal recognition of God, or a verbal petition to Him. Those whom Paul (before his conversion

to Christ) sought to bind in Damascus—Christians who were described as people “who call on Your [the Lord’s] name” (Acts 9:14)—were not people who only prayed to God, but those who were serving the Lord, and who, by their obedience, were submitting themselves to His authority (cf. Matthew 28:18). Interestingly, Zephaniah 3:9 links one’s “calling” with his “service”: “For then I will restore to the peoples a pure language, **that they all may call on the name of the Lord, to serve Him with one accord.**” When a person submits to the will of God, he accurately can be described as “calling on the Lord.” Acts 2:21 and Romans 10:13 (among other passages) do not contradict Matthew 7:21, because to “call on the Lord” entails more than just pleading for salvation; it involves submitting to God’s will. According to Colossians 3:17, every single act a Christian performs (in word or deed) should be carried out by Christ’s authority. For a non-Christian receiving salvation, this is no different. In order to obtain salvation, a person must submit to the Lord’s authority. This is what the passages in Acts 2:21 and Romans 10:13 are teaching; it is up to us to go elsewhere in the New Testament to learn **how** to call upon the name of the Lord.

After Peter quoted the prophecy of Joel, and told those in Jerusalem on Pentecost that “whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:21), he told them how to go about “calling on the name of the Lord.” The people in the audience in Acts 2 did not understand Peter’s quotation of Joel to mean that an alien sinner must pray to God for salvation. [Their question in Acts 2:37 (“Men and brethren, what shall we do?”) indicates such.] Furthermore, when Peter responded to

their question, and told them what to do to be saved, he did not say, “I’ve already told you what to do. You can be saved by petitioning God for salvation through prayer. Just call on His name.” On the contrary, Peter had to explain to them what it meant to “call on the name of the Lord.” Instead of repeating this statement when the crowd sought further guidance from the apostles, Peter commanded them, saying, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (2:38). Notice the parallel between Acts 2:21 and 2:38:

Acts 2:21	Whoever	Calls	On the name of the Lord	Shall be saved
Acts 2:38	Everyone of you	Repent and be baptized	In the name of Jesus Christ	For the remission of sins

Peter’s non-Christian listeners learned that “calling on the name of the Lord for salvation” was equal to obeying the Gospel, which approximately 3,000 did that very day by repenting of their sins and being baptized into Christ (2:38,41).

But what about Romans 10:13? What is the “call” mentioned in this verse? Notice Romans 10:11-15:

For the Scripture says, “Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.” For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For **“whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”** How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have

not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!”

Although this passage does not define precisely what is meant by one “calling on the name of the Lord,” it does indicate that an alien sinner cannot “call” until after he has heard the Word of God and believed it. Such was meant by Paul’s rhetorical questions: “How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?” Paul’s statements in this passage are consistent with Peter’s proclamations in Acts 2. It was only **after** the crowd on Pentecost believed in the resurrected Christ Whom Peter preached (as is evident by their being “cut to the heart,” and their subsequent question, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?”) that Peter told them how to call on the name of the Lord and be saved (2:38).

Perhaps the clearest description of what it means for an alien sinner to “call on the name of the Lord” is found in Acts 22. As the apostle Paul addressed the mob in Jerusalem, he spoke of his encounter with the Lord, Whom he asked, “What shall I do?” (22:10; cf. 9:6). The answer Jesus gave Him at that time was not “call on the name of the Lord.” Instead, Jesus instructed him to “[a]rise and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all things which are appointed for you to do” (22:10). Paul (or Saul—Acts 13:9) revealed his belief in Jesus as he went into the city and waited for further instructions. In Acts 9, we learn that during the next three days, while

waiting to meet with Ananias, Paul fasted and prayed (vss. 9,11). Although some today might consider what Paul was doing at this point as “calling on the name of the Lord,” Ananias, God’s chosen messenger to Paul, did not think so. He did not tell Paul, “I see you have already called on God. Your sins are forgiven.” After three days of fasting and praying, Paul was still **lost in his sins**. Even though he obviously **believed** at this point, and had prayed to God, he had yet to “call on the name of the Lord” for salvation. When Ananias finally came to Paul, he told him: “Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, **calling on the name of the Lord**” (22:16). Ananias knew that Paul had not yet “called on the name of the Lord,” just as Peter knew that those on Pentecost had not done so before his command to “[r]epent, and be baptized” (KJV). Thus, Ananias instructed Paul to “be baptized, and wash away your sins.” The participial phrase, “calling on the name of the Lord,” describes what Paul was doing when he was baptized for the remission of his sins. Every non-Christian who desires to “call on the name of the Lord” to be saved, does so, not simply by crying out, saying, “Lord, Lord” (cf. Matthew 7:21), or just by wording a prayer to God (e.g., Paul–Acts 9; 22; cf. Romans 10:13-14), but by obeying God’s instructions to “[r]epent, and be baptized...in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins” (Acts 2:38, KJV).

This is not to say that repentance and baptism have always been (or are always today) synonymous with “calling on the name of the Lord.” Abraham was not baptized when he “called on the name of the Lord” (Genesis 12:8; cf. 4:26), because baptism was not

demanding of God before New Testament times. And, as mentioned earlier, when the New Testament describes people who are already Christians as “calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 9:14,21; 1 Corinthians 1:2), it certainly does not mean that Christians continually were being baptized for the remission of their sins after having been baptized to become a Christian (cf. 1 John 1:5-10). Depending on when and where the phrase is used, “calling on the name of the Lord” includes: (1) obedience to the Gospel plan of salvation; (2) worshiping God; and (3) faithful service to the Lord.⁵ However, it is never used in the sense that all the alien sinner must do in order to be saved is to cry out and say, “Lord, Lord, save me.”

Thus, the skeptic’s allegation that Matthew 7:21 contradicts Acts 2:21 and Romans 10:13 is unsubstantiated. And, the professed Christian who teaches that all one must do to be saved is just say the sinner’s prayer, is in error.

THE BIBLE’S TEACHING ON BAPTISM: CONTRADICTIONARY OR COMPLEMENTARY?

1 Corinthians 1:14,16,17; John 4:2;
Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16

According to numerous skeptics, the Bible contradicts itself regarding whether or not water baptism is essential for salvation. In Dennis McKinsey’s book, *Biblical Errancy*, he lists several verses that teach the need for one to be baptized in order to be saved (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 1 Peter 3:21; etc.), but then he lists four

verses (John 4:2; 1 Corinthians 1:14,16,17) which allegedly teach that baptism “is not a necessity.”⁶ Supposedly, Jesus, Paul, and others were confused regarding the purpose of baptism: was it necessary or not?

There is no doubt that Jesus and His apostles taught the essentiality of being immersed in water for salvation. After Jesus commissioned His apostles to “[g]o into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature,” He stated that “[h]e who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:15-16; cf. Matthew 28:19). The Jews who had murdered Christ, and to whom Peter spoke on the Day of Pentecost when he ushered in the Christian age, were told: “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38). Before becoming a Christian, Saul of Tarsus was commanded to “[a]rise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16). The biblical solution to the problem of soul-damning sin is that the person who has heard the Gospel, who has believed its message, who has repented of past sins, and who has confessed Christ as Lord must then—in order to receive remission (forgiveness) of sins—be baptized. [The English word “baptize” is a transliteration of the Greek word *baptidzo*, meaning to immerse, dip, plunge beneath, or submerge.⁷] According to Peter, “baptism,” corresponding to Noah’s deliverance through water, “now saves us...(not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 3:21). Although baptism is no less, nor more, important than any other of God’s commands regarding what to

do to be saved, the New Testament clearly teaches that **water immersion is the point at which a person is saved by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.**

If it is the case then that baptism is essential for salvation, then why did the apostle John write: “Therefore, when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John (**though Jesus Himself did not baptize**, but His disciples), He left Judea and departed again to Galilee” (John 4:1-3)? And why did the apostle Paul write to the church at Corinth: “**I thank God that I baptized none of you** except Crispus and Gaius, lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name.... **For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel**” (1 Corinthians 1:14,15,17)? Do these statements indicate that baptism is not necessary for a person to be saved, as skeptics allege? No, they do not.

First, John did not indicate that Jesus thought baptism was unnecessary; he merely stated the fact that Jesus did not personally do the baptizing; rather, His disciples did (John 4:2). The phrase in 4:1 regarding Jesus “baptizing” more disciples than John is simply a figure of speech where a person is represented as doing something when, in fact, he merely supplies the means for doing it. For example, Joseph indicated on one occasion that his brothers sold him into Egypt (Genesis 45:4-5; cf. Acts 7:9), when actually they sold him to the Ishmaelites (who then sold him into Egypt). This is a well-known principle in law—a person who acts through another to break the law (e.g., paying someone to commit murder) is deemed by authorities to be guilty of breaking the law himself. Similarly,

Jesus did not **personally** baptize anyone. But, **His teaching and influence** caused it to be done. Jesus, the subject, is mentioned, but it is the circumstance of His influence that is intended. His teaching was responsible for people being baptized. Thus, this passage actually implies that Jesus commanded that His listeners be baptized. It in no way contradicts teachings found elsewhere in the Bible.

Second, Paul's statements in his letter to the church at Corinth must be taken in their proper context in order to understand their true meaning. In 1 Corinthians 1:10-17, Paul was dealing with the division that was plaguing the Corinthian Christians. He had heard of the controversy in Corinth, and begged them to stand united, and to resolve their differences.

Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you. Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ." Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name. Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas. Besides, I do not know whether I baptized any other. For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel,

not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect (1 Corinthians 1:10-17).

Later, Paul added:

For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? For when one says, “I am of Paul,” and another, “I am of Apollos,” are you not carnal? Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase (1 Corinthians 3:3-7).

When a person reads 1 Corinthians 1:14-17 in view of the problem of division in Corinth that Paul was addressing in chapter one and throughout this letter, he or she has a better understanding of Paul’s statements regarding baptism. He was not indicating that baptism was unnecessary, but that people should not glory in the one who baptizes them. Some of the Corinthians were putting more emphasis on **who** baptized them, than on the **one body of Christ to which a person is added when he or she is baptized** (cf. Acts 2:41,47; Ephesians 4:4). Paul was thankful that he did not personally baptize any more Corinthians than he did, lest they boast in **his** name, rather than in the name of **Christ** (1:15). Likely, this is the same reason why “Jesus Himself did not baptize, but His disciples” (John 4:2). As Albert Barnes surmised: “[I]f **he** [Jesus—EL] had baptized, it might have made unhappy divisions among his followers: those might have considered themselves most worthy or honoured who had been baptized by

him."⁸ Paul understood that the fewer people he personally baptized, the less likely they were to rejoice in his name. [NOTE: In 1 Corinthians 1:13, Paul implied that the only way to be saved is to be baptized into the name of Christ, saying, "Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?"] Paul's desire was for converts to tie themselves to the Savior, and not to himself. He knew that "there is salvation in no one else" but Jesus; "for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12, NASB). Paul concerned himself with preaching, and, like Jesus, left others to do the baptizing.

When Paul stated: "Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel," he meant that preaching was his main work, and that others could immerse the converts. He did not mean by this statement that **baptism** is unimportant, but that the **baptizer** is inconsequential. Consider this: If Paul did not baptize, but preached, and, if others baptized those who heard Paul's teachings, what can we infer about the **content** of Paul's teachings? The truth is, at some point, he must have instructed the unsaved to be baptized (which is exactly what occurred in Corinth—read Acts 18:1-11; 1 Corinthians 6:11). Similar to how we logically infer from the Ethiopian eunuch's baptism (Acts 8:36-39), that when Philip "preached Jesus to him" (8:35), he informed the eunuch of the essentiality of baptism, we can truthfully affirm that Paul taught that baptism is essential for salvation. The allegation that Paul and Jesus ever considered baptism non-essential, simply is unfounded.

BIBLICAL SALVATION AND THE PRINCIPLE OF SUPPLEMENTATION

If Matthew 1:1 was the only Bible verse a person ever read about the family and genealogy of Christ, then one might think that Jesus was the immediate son of David, rather than a descendant of David separated in time from the second king of Israel by 1,000 years. If Matthew chapter two was the only passage a person ever considered regarding the birth and early childhood of Jesus' life, then one would never know that shepherds visited Jesus shortly after His birth. According to Romans 3:23, "[A]ll have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." If this sentence was the only inspired statement that a person ever read regarding sin, and disregarded both the context of Romans 3 as well as the rest of the New Testament, then one would think that Jesus was a sinner. But Jesus, of course, was "without sin" (Hebrews 4:15).

Are football referees supposed to know **only** a few of the rules in order to officiate a game correctly? Is a baker content in knowing **only** one of the ten ingredients that go into a pineapple upside-down cake? Would you be pleased if the **only** traffic law that truck drivers knew was the law regarding on what side of the road to drive? The answer to all of these questions is obvious. People generally understand the need to learn the **entire** rulebook, driver's manual, or recipe. Knowing just part of these things will result in chaos and negative consequences. Likewise, taking only a part of God's Word, to the neglect of the rest of His Word, is a recipe for confusion and disaster. Since the "entirety" of Scripture is truth (Psalm 119:160), **all** of God's Word on any subject must be considered.

Most Bible students seem to understand the importance of the **holistic** approach to Bible interpretation when considering any number of topics, including the aforementioned genealogy of Christ and His perfect, sinless nature. Sadly, however, when it comes to the question regarding what a person must do to be saved, this rational approach to Bible interpretation is discarded by most Bible critics and many professed Christians.

Consider, for example, John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” Many people have the idea that this one sentence is all they need to know to be saved. I once had a conversation with a man who said that the only part of the Bible that he needed was John 3:16. It did not matter what any other verse says. As long as he knew John 3:16 and believed what it said, he believed he was saved.⁹

Notice, however, one problem (among many) that such a shallow, unfair interpretation of the Bible causes. If every reader of Scripture picked a different verse and lifted that one verse above all others as “God’s little recipe for salvation,” then the end result will be the unnecessary and illogical manufacturing of utter confusion. Someone could say that nothing else matters except baptism because 1 Peter 3:21 says that “**baptism now saves you**—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (NASB). Does 1 Peter 3:21 teach that a person must be immersed to be saved? Yes. But anyone who claims that immersion in water is **all** a person must

do to be saved would be **wrong**. Likewise, anyone who claims that a mere mental assent that Jesus is the Son of God is the **only** thing necessary for salvation would be equally **wrong** (cf. James 2:19).

The fact is, the Bible teaches that a person must believe **and** be baptized to be saved (Mark 16:16). A person must believe in Jesus **and** confess His name to receive salvation (Romans 10:9-10). A person must repent **and** be baptized to have his sins forgiven (Acts 2:38). Additionally, a person must remain faithful until death in order to receive the crown of life (Revelation 2:10).

Neither Bible critics nor professed Christians will ever properly understand Scripture if they adopt an interpretation method that intentionally pits one inspired passage against another. They will never understand what to do to be saved if they elevate one verse to the exclusion of all others. The truth is, the Bible (as a whole) is in perfect harmony with itself. The thousands of statements in Scripture supplement each other in a perfect complementary manner. John 3:16 is a wonderful, truthful passage of Scripture. But, so is 1 Peter 3:20-21. And so is Mark 16:16, as well as the rest of Scripture. So, “[b]e diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, **handling accurately the word of truth**” (2 Timothy 2:15, NASB).

TAKING POSSESSION OF WHAT GOD GIVES

Relatively few within Christendom would deny that eternal salvation is a free gift from God. The New Testament is replete with statements stressing this point.

The most oft-quoted verse in all of Scripture teaches this very fact: “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son...” (John 3:16). God did not offer the gift of eternal life to the world because of some great accomplishment on the part of mankind. Rather, as Paul wrote to the church at Rome, “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). Later, in that same chapter in Romans, Paul spoke of the “**free gift**” of spiritual life through Christ (5:15-21). He wrote to the church at Corinth, indicating that it is God “who **gives us** the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:57). And earlier in this epistle, Paul expressed gratitude for the Corinthians and their salvation, saying, “I thank my God always concerning you for **the grace of God** which was **given** to you by Christ Jesus” (1:4). Truly, God gives His grace away to anyone who will humbly accept it (James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5; cf. Revelation 22:17). It is, as so many have noted, **unmerited** favor.

A Case Study in “Receiving” What God “Gives”

Unfortunately, much misunderstanding exists in the religious world today concerning how mankind freely receives salvation from God. This subject is also a favorite of many skeptics. To better understand the relationship between God’s gifts and man’s reception of those gifts, it is helpful to study one particular gift from God—one that is mentioned in the Old Testament more times than any other thing God is ever said to have given. If a person were to open a concordance and look up the word “give” or one of its derivatives (i.e.,

gave, given, giving, etc.), he would find that whenever this word is found in conjunction with something God does, or has done, it is used more in reference to the land of Canaan (which God **gave** to the descendants of Abraham) than with any other subject. Although the Old Testament mentions numerous things that God gave the Israelites (e.g., manna, quail, water, rest, etc.), the gift of God cited most frequently (especially in Genesis through Joshua) is that of God giving the Israelites the land of Canaan. He promised to **give** this land to Abraham almost 500 years before his descendants finally “received” it (Genesis 12:7; cf. 13:15,17; 15:7; 17:8). While the Israelites were still in Egyptian bondage, God spoke to Moses, and said: “I will bring you into the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and **I will give it to you** as a heritage: I am the Lord” (Exodus 6:8). After the Exodus from Egypt, God instructed Moses to send twelve men “to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am **giving** to the children of Israel” (Numbers 13:2). In the book of Leviticus, one can read where Jehovah gave the Israelites laws concerning leprosy—laws that He introduced by saying, “When you have come into the land of Canaan, **which I give you as a possession...**” (Leviticus 14:33-34). During the years of wilderness wanderings, God reminded Israel of this gift numerous times—and it **always** was spoken of as a gift, never an earned possession.

Notice, however, some of the things that the Israelites still had to do in order to “take possession” (Numbers 13:30; Joshua 1:15) of this gift. They had to prepare provisions (Joshua 1:11), cross the Jordan River (Joshua 3), march around the city of Jericho once a day for six

days, and seven times on the seventh day (Joshua 6:1-4), blow trumpets and shout (Joshua 6:5), and then utterly destroy all that was in Jericho (Joshua 6:21). They also proceeded to do battle with the inhabitants of Ai (Joshua 8). Joshua 10 records how the Israelites “chased” and “struck” the inhabitants of the southern part of Canaan (Joshua 10:10). They then battled their way up to the northern part of Canaan, and took possession of it, too (Joshua 11). Finally, after the land on both sides of the Jordan had been divided among the Israelites, the Bible records how Caleb courageously drove out the giant descendants of Anak from Hebron. He **seized** the land given to him by God (Joshua 14:6-15; 15:13-19; Judges 1:9-20). Such is an overriding theme throughout the first six books of the Bible—“**[T]he Lord gave to Israel all the land of which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they [Israel] took possession of it**” (Joshua 21:43).

Perhaps the truth that God **gave** this land to the Israelites was never made clearer than when Moses spoke to them just prior to their entrance into Canaan.

So it shall be, when the Lord your God brings you into the land of which He swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give you large and beautiful cities which you did not build, houses full of all good things, which you did not fill, hewn-out wells which you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant—when you have eaten and are full—then beware, lest you forget the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.... He brought us out from there, that He might bring us in, to give us the land of which He swore to our fathers (Deuteronomy 6:10-12,23).

God did not award this land to the Israelites because of some mighty work on their part. This land, which flowed “with milk and honey” (Numbers 13:27), was not a prize handed out to them because of some great achievement by the Israelites (cf. Deuteronomy 7:7). They did not deserve it. The Israelites did not purchase it from God with any kind of earned income. They did not earn the right to be there. God, Who owns everything (Psalm 24:1; 89:11), **gave** it to them as a gift. **It was free**. God described it as a gift when He first promised it to Abraham (Genesis 12:7), and He described it as a gift after Israel inhabited it hundreds of years later (Joshua 21:43). It was unmerited. The Israelites’ acceptance of God’s gift, however, did not exclude **effort** on their part.

When it comes to the **spiritual** Promised Land that God has freely offered to anyone who will “take” it (Revelation 22:17; Titus 2:11; cf. Matthew 11:28-30), some have a difficult time accepting the idea that man must **put forth effort** in order to receive it. Many today have come to the conclusion that effort **cannot** be part of the equation when the Bible speaks of God’s gracious gifts. The idea is: “Since God’s grace cannot be earned or merited, then anyone who claims that human effort is involved in its acceptance is in error.” Clearly, though, many scriptures indicate that man’s efforts are not always categorized as works of merit. God **gave** the Israelites freedom from Egyptian bondage, but they still had to put forth some effort by walking from Egypt, across the Red Sea, and into the Wilderness of Shur (Exodus 15:22; cf. Exodus 16:32; Joshua 24:5). Israel did not “earn” Canaan, but they still exerted much effort (i.e., they **worked**) in possessing it. God **gave** the Israelites the city of Jericho

(Joshua 6:2). But, He gave it to them only **after** they followed His instructions and encircled the city for seven days (Hebrews 11:30). Furthermore, Israel did not deserve manna from heaven; it was a free gift from God. Nevertheless, if they wanted to eat it, they were required to put forth effort in gathering it (Exodus 16; Numbers 11). These Old Testament examples clearly teach that something can be a gift from God, even though conditions must be met in order for that gift to be received.

This point can also be understood effectively by noting our attitude toward physical gifts today. If a friend wanted to give you a new house valued at over \$1,000,000, but said that in order to receive the house you had to go to the courthouse, sign all of the necessary paperwork, pick up the keys, and then put forth the effort to actually move into and inhabit the house, would any rational person conclude that this gift (a new house!) was earned? Of course not. Even though some effort was exerted to receive the gift, the effort was not a work of merit. Similarly, consider the young boy who is on the verge of drowning in the middle of a small lake. If a man heard his cries, and then proceeded to save the boy by running to the edge of the lake, inflating an inner tube, tying some rope around it, and throwing it out to the young boy who was struggling to stay afloat, would any witness to this event describe the young boy as “saving himself” (or earning his rescue) because he had to exert the energy to grab the inner tube and hold on while being pulled onto the bank by the passerby? No. Physically and spiritually speaking, **a gift is still a gift even when the one receiving it must exert a certain amount of effort in order to possess it.**

“Taking Possession” of Salvation

The New Testament leaves no doubt that the grandest of all gifts (salvation through Christ—a spiritual gift that was in God’s mind “before the foundation of the world”—Ephesians 1:4; 3:11) is not the result of any kind of meritorious work on the part of man. The apostle Paul stressed this point several times in his writings. To the Christians who made up the church at Ephesus, he wrote: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9).¹⁰ In his epistle to Titus, Paul emphasized that we are saved, “not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy” (3:5). Then, again, while writing to young Timothy, Paul highlighted the fact that we are saved by the “power of God,” and “not according to our works” (2 Timothy 1:8-9). This truth cannot be overly stressed; however, it can be, and has been, perverted and misrepresented.

Unfortunately, some have come to the conclusion that man plays no part in his being saved from sin by God. They say: “Salvation is a gift of God that is from nothing we do ourselves.”¹¹ Or, “Salvation is a gift from God—we do nothing to get it.”¹² “[W]e do nothing to become righteous...God did all that was necessary in His Son.”¹³ The truth is, however, when it comes to the gift of salvation that God extends to the whole world (John 3:16), there are requirements that must be met on the part of man in order for him to receive the gift. Contrary to what some teach, there is something that a person must **do** in order to be saved. The Jews on Pentecost understood this point,

as is evident by their question: “Men and brethren, what shall we **do**?” (Acts 2:37). Saul, later called Paul (Acts 13:9), believed that there was something else he needed to do besides experience a personal encounter with the resurrected Lord on his way to Damascus, for he asked Jesus, “What shall I **do**?” (Acts 22:10; cf. 9:6). And the jailer at Philippi, after observing the righteousness of Paul and Silas and being awakened by the earthquake to see the prison doors opened (Acts 16:20-28), “fell down trembling before Paul and Silas... and said, ‘Sirs, what must I **do** to be saved?’” (Acts 16:29-30). If those who responded to these questions (Peter in Acts 2, Jesus in Acts 9 and 22, and Paul and Silas in Acts 16) had the mindset of some today, they should have answered by saying, “There is nothing for you to do. Just wait, and salvation will come to you.” But their responses were quite different from this. All three times the question was asked, a command to **do** something was given. Peter told those on Pentecost to “[r]epent, and be baptized” (Acts 2:38, KJV); Paul and Silas instructed the Philippian jailer and his household to “[b]elieve on the Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 16:31); and Jesus commanded Saul to “[a]rise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do” (Acts 9:6). Notice that none of them gave the impression that salvation involves us “doing **nothing**.” Jesus told Saul that he “**must do**” something. When Saul arrived in Damascus as Jesus had directed him, he did exactly what God’s spokesman, Ananias, commanded him to do (Acts 22:12-16; 9:17-18). Similar to how the land of Canaan was “received” by an active Israel, so the free gift of eternal life is received by man taking action.

Much controversy within Christendom is caused by disagreement on how much action an alien sinner should take. Since God has extended to mankind an indescribable (2 Corinthians 9:15), undeserved gift, we are told that the acceptance of such a gift can involve only the smallest amount of effort, else one might be accused of salvation by “works of righteousness.” Usually, this action is said to involve nothing more than confessing faith in Jesus as the Son of God, and praying that He will forgive sins and come into a person’s heart.¹⁴ This, we are told, is man’s way of taking possession of God’s grace. Allegedly, all one must do in order to lay hold on the eternal life that God freely gives to all is to

[a]ccept Christ into your heart through prayer and he’ll receive you. It doesn’t matter what church you belong to or if you ever do good works. You’ll be born again at the moment you receive Christ. He’s at the door knocking.... Just trust Christ as Savior. God loves you and forgives you unconditionally. Anyone out there can be saved if they accept Christ, now! Let’s pray for Christ to now come into your heart.¹⁵

The prayer that the alien sinner is urged to pray frequently goes something like this:

Lord Jesus, I need You. Thank You for dying on the cross for my sins. I open the door of my life and receive You as my Savior and Lord. Thank You for forgiving my sins and giving me eternal life. Take control of my life. Make me the kind of person You want me to be.¹⁶

According to *The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association* website, in an article titled, “How to Become a Christian,”

“[w]hen you receive Christ into your heart you become a child of God, and have the privilege of talking to Him in prayer at any time about anything.”¹⁷ This is what many within Christendom believe one must do to “take possession” of God’s grace. The overriding thought seems to be, “There can’t be much involved in getting saved, because God saves, not man. We have to make it as easy and painless as possible so that no one will accuse us of ‘salvation by works.’”

Contrary to the above statements, the New Testament gives specific prerequisites that must be followed before one can receive the atoning benefit of Christ’s blood (Revelation 1:5; 1 John 1:7). These conditions are neither vague nor difficult to understand. A person must confess faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God (John 8:24; Romans 10:9-10; cf. 1 Timothy 6:12), and he must repent of his past sins (Acts 26:20; Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38). Although these prerequisites are slightly different from those espoused by many modern-day denominational preachers, they are generally accepted among the Protestant world. By meeting these conditions, most people understand that a person is merely receiving God’s grace (by following God’s plan). Few, if any, would accuse a man who emphasizes these prerequisites of teaching “salvation by works of merit.”

However, the Bible discusses yet another step that precedes salvation—a step that has become extremely controversial within Christendom—water baptism. It is mentioned numerous times throughout the New Testament, and both Jesus and His disciples taught that it **precedes** salvation (Mark 16:16; Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 2:38). The apostle Paul’s sins were washed away

only **after** he was immersed in water (Acts 22:16; cf. Acts 9:18). [NOTE: Even though it was on the road to Damascus that Paul heard the Lord, spoke to Him, and believed on Him (Acts 9), Paul did not receive salvation until he went into Damascus and was baptized.] The book of Acts is replete with examples of those who did not receive the gift of salvation until after they professed faith in Christ, repented of their sins, and were **baptized** (Acts 2:38-41; 8:12; 8:26-40; 10:34-48; 16:14-15; 16:30-34; 18:8). Furthermore, the epistles of Peter and Paul also call attention to the necessity of baptism (1 Peter 3:21; Colossians 2:12; Romans 6:1-4). If a person wants the multitude of spiritual blessings found “in Christ” (e.g., salvation—2 Timothy 2:10; forgiveness—Ephesians 1:7; cf. Ephesians 2:12; etc.), he must not stop after confessing faith in the Lord Jesus, or after resolving within himself to turn from a sinful lifestyle. He also must be “baptized into Christ” (Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3) “for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38).

So why, one might ask, if so many passages of Scripture teach the necessity of baptism, is there so much controversy about baptism being a condition of salvation? Several reasons could be mentioned here,¹⁸ but one that is extremely popular (and has been for some time) is the idea that baptism is a “work.” And, since we are not saved by “works” (Ephesians 2:8-9), then, allegedly, baptism cannot be required in order to receive (or “take possession of”—cf. Revelation 22:17) salvation. Notice how some religionists have articulated these sentiments.

- In Part three of a series of articles on baptism, called the “FUD Series” (FUD standing for Fear, Uncertainty, and

Doubt), Darrin Yeager wrote: “The act of baptism is a work (or ritual). Paul makes clear the point works do not (and cannot) save us. Even the faith we have is a gift of God. Since works cannot save us, baptism plays no part in the salvation of the believer.”¹⁹ Yeager concluded this article by saying: “Its [sic] tragic baptism has become such a point of contention in the church. Considering the whole counsel of God several points become clear.” Among those points was: “Baptism is a work, and the Bible is clear works to [sic] not save us.... [B]aptism is absolutely, positively **not** required for salvation.”²⁰

- In an article titled, “What Saves? Baptism or Jesus Christ?,” Buddy Bryant cited Titus 3:5, and then wrote: “Baptism is a work of righteousness and we are not saved by works of righteousness which we have done.”²¹
- Under the heading, “Water Baptism is Not for Salvation,” one church website exclaimed: “Water baptism **is** a ‘work of righteousness’.... Our sins were not washed away by water, but by the Lord Jesus Christ....”²² Similarly, another church website ran an article titled, “Does Water Baptism Save?,” declaring: “Water baptism is a **work** (something that man does to please God), and yet the Bible teaches again and again that a person is not saved by works.”²³

These statements summarize the feelings of many within Christendom concerning baptism: “It is a work, and thus not necessary for the person who wants to be saved.” The truth of the matter is, however, when careful consideration is given to what the Bible teaches on this subject, one will find no discrepancy between the idea that man is saved “by grace...through faith” (Ephesians 2:8-9) and not by works, and at the same time is saved following baptism.

Part of the confusion concerning baptism and works is the result of being uninformed about the biblical teaching of works. The New Testament mentions at least four kinds of works: (1) works of the Law of Moses (Galatians 2:16; Romans 3:20); (2) works of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21); (3) works of merit (Titus 3:4-7); and (4) works resulting from obedience of faith (James 2:14-26; Luke 17:10; cf. Galatians 5:6). The first three works mentioned here certainly do not lead to eternal life. The last category often is referred to as “works of God.” This phrase does not mean works **performed by** God; rather, the intent is “works **required and approved by** God.”²⁴ Consider the following example from Jesus’ statements in John 6:27-29:

Work not for the food which perisheth, but for the food which abideth unto eternal life.... They said therefore unto him, What must we do, that we may work the **works of God**? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the **work of God**, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent (ASV).

Within this context, Christ made it clear that there are works that humans must do to receive eternal life. Moreover, the passage affirms that **believing itself is a work** (“This is the **work** of God, that ye **believe** on him whom he hath sent”). It therefore follows that if one is saved **without any type of works**, then he is saved **without faith**, because **faith is a work**. Such a conclusion would throw the Bible into hopeless confusion!

Will anyone step forward and espouse the idea that faith is a meritorious work? Can a person “earn salvation” by believing in Christ? To this day, I have never heard anyone assert that belief is a work of merit.

Although it is described in the Bible as being a “work,” we correctly understand it to be a condition upon which one receives salvation. Salvation is still a free gift from God; it is the result of His grace and Jesus’ work on the cross, not our efforts.

But what about baptism? The New Testament **specifically excludes** baptism from the class of human meritorious works unrelated to redemption. In fact, the two books (Romans and Galatians) where the apostle Paul condemns salvation by works the most, are the very books that relate the fact that water baptism places a person “into Christ” (Romans 6:3; Galatians 3:27). Also, the fact that baptism is not a work of merit is emphasized in Titus 3:3-7.

For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

This passage reveals at least three things. First, we **are not saved** by works of righteousness that we do by ourselves (i.e., according to any plan or course of action that we devised).²⁵ Second, we **are saved** by the “washing of regeneration” (i.e., baptism), exactly as 1 Peter 3:21 states (see also Ephesians 5:26). [NOTE:

Even Baptist theologian A.T. Robertson believed that the phrase “washing of regeneration” refers specifically to water baptism.^{26]} Thus, in the third place, baptism is excluded from all works of human righteousness that men contrive, but is itself a “work of God” (i.e., required and approved by God) necessary for salvation.

When one is raised from the watery grave of baptism, it is according to the “working of God” (Colossians 2:12), and not any manmade plan. Although many have tried, no one can suggest (justifiably) that baptism is a meritorious work of human design, anymore than he can logically conclude that Naaman “earned” his physical cleansing of leprosy by dipping in the Jordan River seven times (see 2 Kings 5:1-19). When we are baptized, we are completely passive. If you really think about it, baptism is something that is done **to** a person, not **by** a person (thus, one hardly can have performed any kind of meritorious “work”). [NOTE: For much more information on biblical grace, faith, and works, and the evidence of perfect harmony among all three, see *The Anvil Rings*, volume 3, chapter 5.]

ONE QUESTION, THREE DIFFERENT ANSWERS

Acts 2:37-38; 16:31; 22:10

Three times in the book of Acts, Luke the physician recorded non-Christians asking what they needed to do to be saved, and three times a different answer was given. The heathen jailer from Philippi asked Paul and Silas, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” and was told: **“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will**

be saved” (16:30-31). The Jews on Pentecost asked the apostles, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?,” and were instructed to “[r]epent, and be baptized” (2:37-38, KJV). A few years later, Saul (later called Paul—Acts 13:9) asked Jesus, Who appeared to Saul on his way to Damascus, “Lord, what do you want me to do?” (9:6; 22:10). After being told to go into Damascus to find out what he “must do” to be saved, Ananias, the Lord’s servant, commanded Saul to “[a]rise and **be baptized**, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (22:16). The question that many ask is: “Why are three different answers given to the same question?” Are these answers contradictory, or is there a logical explanation for their differences?

The reason that three different answers were given to the question of salvation is because on each occasion the questioners were at different “locations” on the road to salvation. The rationality of such answers can be illustrated by considering what a person is told in reference to his physical distance from a certain city. If a friend calls me to ask how far it is from his house in Jackson, Tennessee, to my relatives in Neosho, Missouri, I would inform him that he is **475 miles** from Neosho. If he calls me back the next day, notifying me that he is now in Little Rock, Arkansas, and asks about the distance to Neosho, I would give him a different answer. He now would be **260 miles** from Neosho. If, later that evening, he called me one last time and asked how far Fort Smith is from Neosho, again I would give him a different answer—**130 miles**. No rational person would accuse me of contradicting myself, since each question was asked from a different reference point.

Three different answers were given, but all three were correct. Likewise, the New Testament records three different answers given to the question, “What must I do to be saved,” because the sinners who asked these questions were at different stages of understanding on the road to salvation.

The Philippian jailer was commanded to believe in Christ, because he had not yet heard and believed the saving message of Jesus (Acts 16:31-32; Romans 10:17). It would have been pointless for Paul and Silas to command the jailer to repent and/or be baptized when he had not yet even heard the Gospel. If today, a Muslim, Hindu, or Buddhist, asked a Christian the same question the Philippian jailer asked Paul and Silas, the same answer would need to be given. Before ever teaching a Muslim about the essentiality of repentance and baptism, he first must express belief in Jesus as the Son of God. If this step (i.e., believing) is never taken on the road to salvation, the other steps are meaningless. [NOTE: The Bible reveals that after Paul and Silas “spoke the word of the Lord” to the jailer and his household (Acts 16:32), they believed and “immediately” were baptized (Acts 16:33). By implication, Paul and Silas must have taught the jailer and his family about the essentiality of baptism after stressing the need to “believe on the Lord Jesus Christ” (cf. Acts 8:35-36,38). Question: If water baptism has nothing to do with salvation, then why were the jailer and his household immersed in water not long after midnight (cf. Acts 16:25,33)?]

The Jews on Pentecost had already heard Peter’s sermon when they asked their question about salvation

(Acts 2:37). Peter knew that they already believed, and that such belief came from hearing the message he preached (cf. Romans 10:17). The Jews had passed the point of belief (being “pricked in their heart,” KJV), and were told to “[r]epent, and be baptized” (KJV) in order to receive salvation (cf. Mark 16:16).

Still, someone might wonder why Ananias neglected to tell Saul to believe or repent when he informed him about how to have his sins washed away. The reason: Saul already was a penitent believer in Christ by the time he came in contact with Ananias. Saul did not need to be told to believe or repent, since he had already done so. He knew the Lord existed, having spoken directly with Him on the road to Damascus, and he expressed a penitent attitude by praying to God and fasting for three days (Acts 9:9,11). At this point, Saul lacked only one thing: he needed to be baptized (Acts 22:16).

The reason these sinners were told three different things regarding salvation was because they were at different starting points when given the various answers. It is as if the jailer was in Jackson, Tennessee, the Jews on Pentecost in Little Rock, Arkansas, and Saul in Fort Smith. All wanted to go to the same place, but were at different starting points when they asked the question, “What must I do to be saved?” The unbeliever was told to believe. The believers were told to repent. And the penitent believer was told to be baptized. The three statements may be different, but they are not contradictory. For a person to become a child of God, he or she must do all three (see John 8:24; Luke 13:3,5; Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:16).

TWO DIFFERENT QUESTIONS: WHAT AND WHEN?

“Do you believe that baptism is essential for salvation?” “Yes.” “So you believe in water regeneration?” “No.” “But you believe that you must be immersed in water before your sins are washed away?” “Yes.” “So you believe that the power to wash away your sins is in the water?” “No.” “How can you say you do not believe in water baptismal regeneration if you think that a sinner is not saved until after he is baptized?” “Because **when** one is saved and **what** saves a person are two different questions.”

The Bible makes clear that Jesus saves. “[A]ccording to His mercy He saved us” (Titus 3:5). It is by His grace that we have hope of eternal life (Ephesians 2:5,8-9). We are “justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him” (Romans 5:9). We are “redeemed...with the precious blood of Christ” (1 Peter 1:18-19). “Jesus Christ...loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood” (Revelation 1:5). As Jesus ate with His disciples the night before His crucifixion, He said, “For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matthew 26:28). **What** is it that saves a sinner from eternal separation from God? **What** is the remedy for sin? Without any doubt, “the blood of Christ” is **what** saves us (Hebrews 9:14). The idea of water having some kind of spiritual regenerative power is never taught in Scripture, nor have I ever met a member of the Lord’s church who believed such.

Another question altogether is **when** something happens. Naaman was healed of his leprosy (by the power of

God!) **when** he washed in the Jordan River seven times (2 Kings 5:1-19). The blind man of John chapter nine was healed of his blindness (by Jesus!) **when** he washed in the pool of Siloam. And what about a sinner? **When** does the blood of Christ save one who is separated from God spiritually? The answer to that question is found in such passages as Acts 22:16 and Acts 2:38 (among others), which discuss water baptism. Once Saul (later called Paul) came to believe and confess that Jesus was indeed the Son of God, and expressed sorrow for his sins (cf. Acts 9:5-11), Ananias, whom God had sent to Saul, instructed him to “[a]rise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16). A sinner has his sins washed away **when** he is “baptized.” Sadly, many have read Acts 22:16 and rejected the necessity of baptism because they approach their study of this verse with the wrong question in mind. This verse does not tell us **what** saves, but rather when a person is saved, i.e., has his sins washed away. Passages of Scripture such as those previously noted (e.g., Matthew 26:28, 1 Peter 1:18-19, Revelation 1:5) answer **what** saves, but in order to find out **when** a person is saved, one must consult passages such as Acts 22:16 and Acts 2:38.

In short, the blood of Christ is **what** saves a sinner. But the blood of Christ washes away sins **when** a sinner confesses faith in Christ, repents, and is baptized “for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; Acts 22:16). May God help us to understand the difference between **what** and **when**, especially in regard to salvation.

IS IT POSSIBLE TO FALL FROM GRACE?

Galatians 5:4; John 10:28; Romans 8:38-39

“Contradiction” #442 in Steve Wells’ rather thorough list of alleged Bible discrepancies is the Bible’s teaching on the possibility of falling from grace. According to Wells, passages such as Galatians 5:4 and others teach that it **is** possible to fall from grace, while John 10:28 and Romans 8:38-39 teach that it is **not** possible.²⁷ What’s the truth of the matter?

The overall message of the Bible is the freely offered gift of salvation to all mankind through the Heaven-sent, sacrificial, resurrected Son of God. **Knowing** that one is saved by the loving Creator and Savior (1 John 5:13)—that one is a member of the blood-bought body of Christ that Jesus will one day take home with Him for eternity (1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11)—is the greatest knowledge imaginable. Though sin separates man from God (Isaiah 59:1-2), (a) knowing that Jesus paid the debt for sin (Acts 20:28), (b) knowing that one has become a recipient of the gift of salvation (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38), and (c) knowing that no outside forces, not even Satan, are strong enough to separate a Christian from the love of God (Romans 8:35-39), Christians should be the happiest people on Earth. No one can force a saved person from the spiritual safety found in Christ Jesus (John 10:28). No one is strong enough to take away the Christian’s gift of salvation. No one can make a saved man live in sin. No one can separate a follower of Christ from the love of Christ! By the grace of God, **anyone** can **be** saved and **stay** saved!

But, do not mistake Christ’s love (1 John 4:8), the power

of His soul-cleansing blood (1 Peter 1:18-19), or the promise of spiritual safety (Romans 8:35-39) for a free pass to become disloyal to the Master without suffering eternal consequences (cf. Romans 6:1). Although many have bought into the false doctrine of “once saved, always saved” (i.e., a Christian can never fall out of favor with God), Scripture repeatedly and consistently denies such a claim.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said: “For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matthew 6:14-15). What will happen to a forgiven Christian who becomes unforgiving? God will not forgive him of his sins. What happened to the servant who was previously forgiven an enormous debt but later failed to forgive the small debt of another? “[H]is master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers” (Matthew 18:34). “So,” Jesus said, “My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses” (18:35). When a person receives the gift of salvation (through confessed faith, repentance, and immersion in water—Acts 2:38; 8:26-40; 16:30-34) and becomes a Christian, God forgives him of his debt. If, however, he becomes hardened and unforgiving, God will “delive[r] him to the torturers” (Matthew 18:34; 25:31-46).

The Bible nowhere teaches that Christians who, for example, lose their first love or who become lukewarm are still in a right relationship with God. Jesus never said that one-time faithful followers who become frauds are still saved. In fact, He taught the very opposite. To **Christians** in Ephesus **who had lost their first love,**

Jesus said, “Remember therefore from where you have **fallen; repent** and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—**unless you repent**” (Revelation 2:5). Christians who become lukewarm cannot remain in that state and expect to receive “the crown of righteousness” on Judgment Day. Lukewarm Christians must “repent,” or, Jesus said, “I will vomit you out of My mouth” (Revelation 3:19,15-16, KJV). Unlike imperfect, yet saved, Christians who are striving to “walk in the light” (1 John 1:5-10), impenitent Christians defiantly living in sin are in a lost state and must repent in order to begin walking in the light again. A Christian should not expect to inherit heaven if he does not remain loyal to Christ. Jesus taught: “Be faithful **until death**, and I will give you the crown of life” (Revelation 2:10).

Christians should rejoice that no one can forcibly take the gift of salvation away from them. But, it is possible for Christians to lose hold of their own salvation (i.e., “fall from grace,” Galatians 5:4) by willfully becoming disobedient and disloyal to the Master, Jesus Christ. Christians may choose to walk in darkness (becoming unforgiving, unmerciful, lukewarm, sexually immoral, etc.), and thus forfeit their eternal life with God in Whom there “is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). Or, Christians can choose to “walk in the light as He is in the light” and forever remain in a saved state, having the blood of Jesus Christ continually cleanse all sin (1 John 1:7-9). These facts are the harmonious truths of Scripture regarding God’s love, Christian perseverance, and the reality of the possibility of apostasy.

Chapter 8



QUESTIONS INVOLVING THE TWO TESTAMENTS

WRONGLY DIVIDING THE TRUTH?

Exodus 20:8; Colossians 2:16

A glaring weakness in the skeptic's effort to discredit the Bible is the failure to understand that Old Testament laws no longer are binding upon men today unless they are reiterated under the new law of Christ. It is a common tactic among skeptics today to point to certain commands in the Old Testament, and then insist that they contradict various commands in the New Testament. For example, on page 166 of Dan Barker's book, *Losing Faith in Faith*, he poses the question, "Shall we keep the Sabbath?" He then cites Exodus 20:8 (among other Old Testament passages), which reads: "Remember the

Sabbath day, to keep it holy.” In supposed contradiction to this verse, he quotes Colossians 2:16: “Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days” (KJV). According to Barker’s logic, the Bible says in one place that people should keep the Sabbath, but it says in another place that the Sabbath does not necessarily have to be kept, therefore the Bible contradicts itself.

It is easy to see, however, that Barker refuses to recognize one of the central tenets of the New Testament: The old law (Old Testament) was specifically for the Jewish nation, it was done away with at the death of Christ, and the new law (the New Testament) replaced it. The New Testament books of Hebrews and Galatians were written specifically to confirm that very fact. Hebrews 8:13 explains that the Old Testament laws had become obsolete at the time of the writing of the book of Hebrews. If Dan Barker would have read just a few verses before Colossians 2:16, he would have encountered the fact that the old law had been “nailed” to the cross (2:14). Also, Ephesians 2:14-17 explains that in His death, Jesus Christ abolished the old law and brought in a new law. Under that new law, people no longer are required to keep the Sabbath, offer bulls and goats for sin sacrifices, or make yearly trips to the temple. Although we still can learn numerous valuable lessons and principles about how to live godly lives from the old law (cf. Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:11), we are bound by it no longer.

Any person who accuses the Bible of a contradiction in this instance (and others similar to it) is guilty of misunderstanding two crucial issues: (1) the difference between the Old Testament and New Testament in the

Bible; and (2) the law of contradiction. The law of contradiction states that two opposing statements cannot be both true and not true in the same respect at the **same time**. Barker's supposed contradiction about the Sabbath does not take into account that the statements were written nearly 1,500 years apart, that the old law already had been abolished, and that the new law contains no commandment to keep the Sabbath. If skeptics would concern themselves more with learning how to rightly divide the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15) than with seeing how many alleged contradictions they can rattle off on one printed page, assumed Bible contradictions like this one would become a thing of the past.

Sadly, a great deal of confusion exists even in the religious world concerning what spiritual law man is living under today. Some say the old law still is binding—all of it. Others say that most of it has been abolished, but that some of it still is in effect. Many simply pick and choose laws out of both testaments, and abide only by those that are appealing to them. Much of the confusion today about the old law and the new law is a result of the false teachings of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church. This intensely evangelistic group teaches that the Ten Commandments still are binding in the present age. Although most Christians readily agree that nine of the Ten Commandments either are stated explicitly or are implied in the New Testament (and thus are binding today because they are part of the new law), Seventh-Day Adventists actively teach that the Ten Commandments (including especially the command to observe the Sabbath day—Exodus 20:8) are part of “God’s unchangeable law.”¹ Whereas certain parts of the

Old Testament have been abolished, they insist that God intended for the Ten Commandments to be an eternal covenant that all of His children must follow.

The Seventh-Day Adventists teach that God gave two laws on Mt. Sinai. They differentiate between the Ten Commandments and the ceremonial laws, saying that one (the Ten Commandments) is the “Law of God,” while the other (the ceremonial laws) is the “Law of Moses.” Moreover, they assert that all of the passages in the Bible that refer to the old law being abolished are speaking of the ceremonial laws and not the Ten Commandments, which (they stress) were written with the very finger of God (Exodus 31:18).

Those who separate the “Law of God” and the “Law of Moses” (in an attempt to find approval for continuing to follow portions of the old law, like keeping the Sabbath) fail to realize that the Bible does not make such a distinction. Ezra read from “the Book of the Law of Moses,” which also was called “the Book of the Law of God” (Nehemiah 8:1,18). Luke recorded that after Mary gave birth to Jesus “when the days of her purification according to **the law of Moses** were completed, they brought Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord (as it is written in **the law of the Lord**, ‘Every male who opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord’), and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in **the law of the Lord**, ‘A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons’” (Luke 2:22-24). The Law of Moses and the Law of the Lord were the same thing. When writing to the brethren in Rome, the apostle Paul quoted from the Ten Commandments, and taught that it was part of the

old law to which they had “become dead...through the body of Christ” (Romans 7:4,7). In his second epistle to the Corinthians, Paul wrote:

[C]learly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart.... But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which glory was passing away, how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious.... For even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels. For **if what is passing away was glorious, what remains is much more glorious** (2 Corinthians 3:3-11).

What was “passing away”? The law written on the “tablets of stone.” What was the law “engraved on stones” that was given to Moses on Mt. Sinai? The Ten Commandments (Exodus 20). In this passage, Paul teaches the very opposite of what Seventh-Day Adventists teach—the Ten Commandments are **not** an eternal covenant.

The New Testament explicitly teaches that the old law has been abolished. Whether one is talking about the Ten Commandments or the ceremonial laws, the Law of Moses or the Law of God, all are considered the old law that no longer is in effect. Jesus Christ fulfilled that law, and nailed it to the cross forever (Matthew 5:17-18; Colossians 2:13-17).

SALVATION PRINCIPLES AND RELEVANT NEW TESTAMENT COMMANDS

We can learn much in Scripture about how to please the Creator. God has not left man to wander aimlessly through life, never knowing what he must do to be saved. Instead, Scripture repeatedly records how different people at different times in history were saved from their sins. From these accounts one can glean important principles of salvation. What's more, the Bible includes specific commands so that sinners can know precisely what to do to be saved. It is the Bible student's responsibility, however, to distinguish between the application of salvation principles and the necessary obedience to specific, relevant commands, which must be followed in order to receive salvation.

As we discussed in chapter seven, essential to the salvation of all men is God's grace. Without it, we would have "no hope" of being saved (Ephesians 2:12). Jesus taught this principle in parables (cf. Matthew 18:27; Luke 15:20-23), while Paul specifically reminded Christians, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). Salvation is "not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His [God's] mercy" (Titus 3:5).

Another scriptural salvation principle is that God saves only those who understand they are lost. The Lord did not "put away" King David's sin until he confessed, "I have sinned against the Lord" (2 Samuel 12:13). In Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and tax collector (Luke

18:9-14), the tax collector, rather than the self-righteous Pharisee, ultimately “went down to his house justified” (vs. 14), because he “would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner’” (vs. 13). The tax collector recognized his lost state and humbly appealed to the only One Who could save Him—God. The penitent thief on the cross provides another noble example of one who owned up to his sinful ways and turned to God for help (Luke 23:40-43). The thief admitted that the brutal crucifixion was his just and “due reward,” while professing that “this Man [Jesus] has done nothing wrong” (vs. 41). He then appealed to Christ for salvation, saying, “Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom” (vs. 42).

Can Bible students learn principles of salvation from King David’s repentance, the tax collector’s humility, and the thief’s sincere appeal to Christ? Most certainly. However, one must be careful not to confuse learning **principles** of salvation revealed prior to the death and resurrection of Christ with learning the **specific** things non-Christians must do today in order to receive the gift of salvation.

An immigrant who aspires to become a law-abiding, American citizen can learn a great deal by studying the lives of 19th-century immigrants. Understanding the obstacles they went through to get to America and eventually become legal U.S. citizens can inspire 21st-century immigrants to do the same. One can learn about the need for patience, persistence, and perseverance. Yet, for a 21st-century immigrant to become a U.S. citizen, he **must** familiarize himself with the **current** laws of naturalization, and then obey those laws. Knowledge of

19th-century citizenship laws may help in the naturalization process, but ultimately, a person living today must abide by 21st-century rules and regulations.

Similarly, Bible students can learn a great deal from the humble, contrite, determined individuals who lived prior to Jesus' death on the cross. Bible readers do themselves a disservice if they fail to consider David's contrite heart (read Psalm 51), the rich young ruler's proper question ("[W]hat shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?"—Mark 10:17), and the thief's sincere plea to Christ for salvation (Luke 23:42; cf. Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:11). Throughout Scripture we can glean godly principles relating to man's salvation. Bible students, however, must not confuse the application of biblical principles with the obedience to relevant, New Testament commands. All people living this side of the cross of Christ are saved under a different law than that under which David, the thief on the cross, the rich young ruler, and even Jesus lived. God's New Testament came into effect **after** Christ's death, and this testament reveals the explicit instructions that non-Christians must obey in order to become Christians. "For where there is a testament, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is in force **after** men are dead, since it has no power at all while the testator lives" (Hebrews 9:16-17).

After Jesus' death and subsequent resurrection, He and His apostles taught that non-Christians come into a right relationship with God only after they confess faith in Christ (Romans 10:9-10), repent of their sins (Acts 2:38; 3:19), and are immersed in water for the forgiveness of sins (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16). These

are specific prerequisites for receiving salvation. They must be followed by all of those who live on this side of the cross of Christ (cf. Colossians 2:14; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9).

Appealing to the thief on the cross (Luke 23:39-43), the paralytic of Galilee (Matthew 9:1-7), or the sinful woman whom Jesus forgave (Luke 7:36-50) in order to learn specifically what God wants non-Christians today to do to be saved, is to **wrongly** divide the word of truth. A person is “rightly dividing” or “handling accurately the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15, NASB) when he understands that the relevant commands for salvation are found **after** Jesus’ death. Making the distinction between **learning** from the righteous ways of those **before** the cross (cf. Romans 15:4) and **obeying** the specific commands given **after** the cross, is vital to a proper understanding of God’s will and a right relationship with Him.

“THIS IS THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS”

Matthew 5-7

Most people who are familiar with the Bible would agree that Matthew chapters 5-7, often referred to as the Sermon on the Mount, contain some of the most memorable sayings in the world. Jesus’ list of beatitudes (5:3-12), His instruction to “do to others what you would have them do to you” (7:12, NIV), and His parable of the wise man and the foolish man (7:24-27) often are recalled even by those who rarely (if ever) read the Bible. When people implement these principles and rules that

Jesus taught nearly 2,000 years ago, individuals grow stronger, families become more united, and society becomes a better place in which to live.

Sadly, however, the most famous “sermon” in the world also has become one of the most misunderstood and most abused sermons ever delivered. “Judge not, that you be not judged” (7:1) is quoted to “prove” that we never can judge anyone at any time (cf. John 7:24). The narrow and difficult way to heaven that **few** will find often is discounted by the idea that nearly **everyone** will have eternal life (7:13-14). And millions of people have changed Jesus’ statement, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven” (7:21), to “Just accept Jesus into your heart and you will be saved.”

Another misconception of the Sermon on the Mount revolves around some of the contrasts Jesus made. Six times in Matthew 5 it is recorded that Jesus contrasted what “**was** said” to what “**I** say.” Many believe that Jesus was contrasting the old law of Moses (what “was said”) with the new law of Christ (what “I say”). Whereas Jesus taught that it was wrong to be angry with a brother without a cause (5:22-26), many contend that the old law taught only murder as being wrong, and not the emotions (such as anger) that lead to murder (5:21). Supposedly, the law of Christ went a step farther than the Law of Moses. According to this line of thinking, the old law taught individuals to take personal retribution on those who wronged them (5:38) and to hate their enemies (5:43), while the new law taught to resist retaliation (5:39-42) and to love your enemies (5:44). In contrasting the Law of Moses and the righteousness of the kingdom

that Jesus would require, the point frequently is made that the old law was concerned only with the **actions** of man, whereas the new law is concerned about the **heart** of man.

The first problem with this line of thinking is that Jesus never said He was contrasting His teachings with the old law. Instead, Jesus made statements such as: (1) “you have heard that it was said to those of old” (5:21,27); (2) “furthermore it has been said” (5:31); (3) “again you have heard that it was said to those of old” (5:33); and (4) “you have heard that it was said” (5:38,43). If Jesus was referring to what Moses had commanded in the old law itself, likely a different wording would have been used. For example, at other times, when Jesus definitely was referring to what the law actually said, He made such statements as “it is written” (Matthew 4:4,7,10) and “Moses commanded” (Matthew 8:4). [Notice that these phrases occur in the chapters immediately before and after the Sermon on the Mount.] Instead of using phrases like these to show that He was referring to the Law of Moses, Jesus repeatedly spoke about what “was said.” He never mentioned who said it, only that it had been said.

Another dilemma that arises when one teaches that Jesus merely was contrasting the old law with the new law, is that Jesus referred to some statements that simply are not to be found in the Old Testament. For instance, in Matthew 5:21 He said, “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder,’ and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.” The phrase “and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment” is found nowhere in the Old Testament.

Likewise, when Jesus stated, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy’” (Mathew 5:43), He could not have been quoting from the old law because the old law never said to “hate your enemy.”

So what was Jesus doing if He was not contrasting the old law with the new law? The answer to this question is found in the immediate context of this passage where Jesus stated: “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.... I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:17,20). The comparisons Jesus made throughout the rest of the chapter were between the **traditional/oral interpretation and application of the Law of Moses** (not the **revealed written Law of Moses**) and the righteousness of the kingdom that Jesus would require of His disciples (under the new law). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus expounded the **real** meaning of the original law as it was intended. He applied it correctly, and “the people were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes” (Matthew 7:28-29). The scribes and Pharisees had failed in their attempts to explain the law correctly, whereas Jesus explained and applied its real meaning and exposed the error of the “learned.” This point is illustrated perfectly by one of Jesus’ statements recorded in chapter 7: “Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for **this is the Law and the prophets**” (vs.12). Jesus was not instituting a new commandment; rather, He

was explaining that doing “to others what you would have them do to you” is a summary expression of all that the Old Testament required.²

Although many people in the religious world teach that in His oft-quoted sermon Jesus simply was contrasting the old law with the new law, the context indicates that Jesus actually was reacting, not to the law itself, but to the way the law had been misinterpreted and abused. The Old Testament did not encourage or allow a person to be angry with his brother without a cause or to covet another’s wife (cf. Proverbs 6:18; Exodus 20:17), but, sadly, many of the Jews had interpreted the law in such a way. In His masterful explanation of the law, Jesus exposed the error of the scribes and Pharisees, and preached the righteousness demanded of those who wish to enter the kingdom of heaven. Even though we no longer are under the old law today (Hebrews 8:7-13; Colossians 2:14; etc.), what a blessing it is to read it (cf. Romans 15:4) and to learn from the Master’s perfect interpretation of it. Like Ezra and others from long ago, Jesus “gave the sense [of the law], and helped them to understand the reading” (Nehemiah 8:8).

IS THE NEW TESTAMENT “GIVEN BY INSPIRATION OF GOD”?

2 Timothy 3:16-17

In attempts to discredit the divine origin of the New Testament, some critics have accused Christian apologists of mishandling 2 Timothy 3:16-17. The argument goes something like this: “When the apostle Paul wrote, ‘All Scripture is given by inspiration of God,’ he was

referring to the Old Testament, not the New Testament.” As “proof,” these individuals cite 2 Timothy 3:15 wherein Paul told Timothy, “[F]rom childhood you have known **the Holy Scriptures**, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” Since the “Scriptures” (ASV, “writings”; Greek *grámmata*) of which Paul spoke in this verse obviously referred to the Old Testament (since the New Testament writings would not have been around when Timothy was a child), then we are told that the “Scripture” (Greek, *grafeê*) mentioned in verse 16 also must refer only to the Old Testament. Furthermore, it is alleged, since “the New Testament was not written at the time Paul wrote 2 Timothy 3:16,” supposedly “he could only be claiming inspiration for the Old Testament.” Such statements are made by some in hopes to prove that the New Testament documents do not claim divine inspiration for themselves, but only for the Old Testament. And, skeptics assert, “if the New Testament does not claim inspiration for itself, then neither should we.”

Primarily, when the term “Scripture(s)” is found in the New Testament, it is used in reference to the Old Testament. In fact, 52 times one can read the word “Scripture(s)” in the King James translation of New Testament, and nearly every time it is referring only to the Old Testament. However, at least two times this term is used when referring to both the Old Testament and the writings that eventually would become the New Testament. For example, Paul quoted Luke 10:7 as “Scripture” in his first epistle to Timothy (5:18). And in 2 Peter 3:16, Peter placed Paul’s letters on a par with the Old Testament Scriptures when he compared them

to “the rest of the Scriptures.” Thus, it is incorrect to say that the New Testament does not claim inspiration for itself.

But what about 2 Timothy 3:16-17? Does it claim divine inspiration for the Old Testament alone? Is it inappropriate to quote this verse when defending the inspiration of the **whole** Bible, including the New Testament? All agree that 2 Timothy 3:16 applies to the Old Testament. Some scholars, however, teach that it applies **only** to the Old Testament. Adam Clarke stated in his commentary on 2 Timothy:

The apostle is here [3:16–EL], beyond all controversy, speaking of the writings of the Old Testament, which, because they came by divine inspiration, he terms the Holy Scriptures, 2 Tim. 3:15; and it is of them **alone** that this passage is to be understood; and although all the New Testament came by as direct an inspiration as the Old, yet, as it was not collected at that time, not indeed complete, **the apostle could have no reference to it.**³

Albert Barnes also accepted this understanding to some extent when he stated that 2 Timothy 3:16 “properly refers to the Old Testament, and should **not** be applied to **any** part of the New Testament, **unless** it can be shown that that part was then written, and was included under the general name of ‘the Scriptures.’”⁴ Was a part of the New Testament written by the time Paul penned this letter to Timothy? Yes. As commentator Burton Coffman noted: “A **great deal** of the NT had indeed already been written.”⁵ In fact, scholars believe that one of Paul’s earliest epistles (1 Thessalonians)

was written approximately 15 years prior to this epistle to Timothy. Interestingly, in his first letter to the Thessalonian brethren, he claimed the words he wrote were “by the word of the Lord” (4:15). Thus, the notion that Paul did not consider his own writings as Scripture is false.

Perhaps the Holy Spirit guided Paul to write “[a]ll Scripture is” (in verse 16), rather than the “**Holy** Scriptures...are” (as in verse 15) “given by inspiration of God,” because He wanted to differentiate between the Old Testament alone (that Timothy learned as a child), and the Old Testament combined with the New Testament writings—some of which had been in circulation for almost 15 years. One may never know for sure. However, considering all of the aforementioned information, it seems certain that: (1) Paul had earlier quoted Luke 10:7 as Scripture; (2) Peter referred to Paul’s writings as “Scripture;” (3) Paul indicated prior to his writing of 2 Timothy that he wrote “by the word of the Lord” (2 Thessalonians 4:15; cf. Galatians 1:12); and (4) much of the New Testament already had been written, including 1 Timothy. Thus, 2 Timothy 3:16-17 “can be interpreted as covering the NT as well as the Old.”⁶

The critics’ efforts to discredit the reliability of the New Testament by alleging it does not even claim to be given by divine inspiration are to no avail. The fact is, it claims inspiration numerous times (cf. 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Corinthians 2:10-13)—one example of which certainly seems to be 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

Chapter 9



A DEFENSE OF THE MIRACLES OF CHRIST

Atheists, agnostics, and skeptics often ridicule Christians who believe in the various miracles of Jesus. We are said to believe in superstition rather than science and in fairy tales rather than real facts. In reality, Christ was not crazy, and pure, New Testament Christianity is not kooky. The Bible is absolutely believable. The whole matter of miracles is really quite simple, and yet profound.

Admittedly, if no supernatural God exists, then (1) the miracles of the Bible are make-believe,¹ (2) the Bible itself is merely a work of fiction, and (3) Christians are very naïve. **However**, if an omniscient, omnipotent, supernatural Being does exist,² then He could work any number of supernatural miracles (which are in harmony with His divine will). If there was no Universe, and He chose to create one, He could speak it into existence (Psalm

33:6-9). If He wanted to put on human flesh and dwell among mankind for a time, the all-powerful Creator could choose to interact with His creation “human”-to-human, face-to-face (John 1:1-3,14). Furthermore, if there is a God, and if He ever decided to put on flesh and reveal himself as God, it is logical that He would perform supernatural miracles for the purpose of offering proof to His Human creation that He is Who He is claiming to be.

Centuries before the birth of Christ, the prophet Isaiah foretold of a time when “the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped.... [T]he lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb sing” (Isaiah 35:5-6). Although this language has a figurative element to it, it literally is true of the coming of the Messiah. When John the baptizer heard about the works of Christ, He sent two of His disciples to Jesus asking if He was “the Coming One” of Whom the prophets spoke. Jesus responded to John’s disciples by pointing to the people whom He had miraculously healed (thus fulfilling Isaiah’s Messianic prophecy), saying, “Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: the blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them” (Matthew 11:3-5; cf. Mark 7:37). Jesus wanted them to know that He was doing exactly what “the Coming One” was supposed to do (cf. Isaiah 53:4; Matthew 8:17), and what the Jews expected Him to do—perform miracles (John 7:31; cf. John 4:48; 1 Corinthians 1:22).

In response to a group of Jews who inquired about whether or not He was the Christ, Jesus replied,

I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father's name, they bear witness of Me.... I and My Father are one.... If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me, and I in Him (John 10:25,30,37-38).

Similarly, on another occasion Jesus defended His deity, saying, “[T]he works which the Father has given Me to finish—the very works that I do—bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me” (John 5:36). As would be expected from the One Who claimed to be God incarnate (cf. John 1:1-3,14; 10:30), Scripture records that Jesus performed miracles throughout His ministry in an effort to provide sufficient proof of His divine message and nature.

Sadly, regardless of how much credible evidence one is able to set forth in a discussion on the miracles of Christ, certain individuals will never be convinced that Jesus is the Son of God. The Bible makes clear that even a number of those in the first century who saw the miraculous works of Jesus firsthand were not persuaded that He was the promised Messiah (cf. Mark 6:6). Rather than fall at His feet and call him “Lord” (as did the blind man whose sight was miraculously restored by Jesus—John 9:38), countless Jews refused to believe His claims of divinity. Instead, they attributed His works to Satan, and said things like, “He has Beelzebub,” or “By the ruler of the demons He casts out demons” (Mark 3:22). In light of such reactions to Jesus’ miracles by some of those who actually walked the Earth with Him 2,000 years ago, it should not be surprising that many alive

today also reject Him as Lord and God. Still, both theists and atheists should consider several of the following reasons as to **why the miracles of Jesus are credible testimonies of His divine nature and teachings and not the unbelievable actions of a conman.**

#1—COUNTLESS THOUSANDS WITNESSED HIS MIRACLES

Aside from the fact that Jesus' miracles are recorded in the most historically documented ancient book in all of the world,³ which time and again has proven itself to be a reliable witness to history,⁴ it also is significant that Jesus' miracles were not done in some remote place on Earth with only a few witnesses. Instead, the miracles of Jesus were attested by **multitudes** of people all across Palestine throughout His ministry.

Jesus began His miracles in Cana of Galilee by turning water into wine at a wedding feast in the presence of His disciples and other guests (John 2:1-11). [Considering how much wine was made after the hosts had already run out (approximately 120 gallons—2:6), it would appear there were many guests at the feast. Exactly how many witnessed the amazing feat, we are not told. But, the apostle John did record that “the servants who had drawn the water knew” of the miracle (2:9), as well as Jesus' disciples (2:11).] On more than one Sabbath day, Jesus performed miracles in Jewish synagogues where countless contemporaries gathered to study Scripture on their holy day (Mark 1:23-28; Mark 3:1-6). Jesus once healed a sick man at the Pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem where “**a great multitude**” of sick people had congregated (John 5:3), and He healed a paralytic in a Capernaum house **full** of

“Pharisees and teachers of the law...who had come out of every town of Galilee, Judea, and Jerusalem” (Luke 5:17). The house was so crowded with people, in fact, that those who brought the paralytic could not even enter the house through the door. Instead, they uncovered part of the roof, and lowered him through the tiling. Matthew recorded how Jesus “saw a **great multitude**; and He was moved with compassion for them, and healed their sick” (14:14). Then, later, He took five loaves of bread and two fish and miraculously fed **5,000 men, plus their women and children**, while afterwards taking up twelve baskets full of leftovers (Matthew 14:15-21; Mark 6:33-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-14). On another occasion, Jesus took “a few little fish...and seven loaves” of bread and fed **4,000 men, besides women and children** (Matthew 15:32-39).

Truly, countless thousands of Jesus’ contemporaries witnessed His miracles on various occasions throughout His ministry. They were not hidden or performed in inaccessible locations incapable of being tested by potential followers. Rather, they were subjected to analysis by Jews and Gentiles, believers and unbelievers, friends and foes. They were evaluated in the physical realm by physical senses. When Peter preached to those who had put Jesus to death, he reminded them that Christ’s identity had been proved “by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, **as you yourselves also know**” (Acts 2:22). The Jews had witnessed Christ’s miracles occurring among them while He was on the Earth. In the presence of many eyewitnesses, Jesus gave sight to the blind, healed lepers, fed thousands with a handful of food, and made the lame to walk.

#2—THE ENEMIES OF CHRIST ATTESTED TO HIS WORKS

Interestingly, although many of Jesus' enemies who witnessed His miracles rejected Him as the Messiah and attempted to undermine His ministry, even they did not deny the miracles that He worked. After Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead in the presence of many Jews, "the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered a council and said, "What shall we do? For **this Man works many signs**" (John 11:47). According to Luke, even King Herod had heard enough reports about Jesus to believe that He could perform "some miracle" in his presence (Luke 23:8). Once, after Jesus healed a blind, mute, demon-possessed man in the midst of multitudes of people, the Pharisees responded, saying, "This fellow does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons" (Matthew 12:24). While many of Jesus' enemies did not confess belief in Him as being the heaven-sent, virgin-born, Son of God, but attributed His works as being from Satan, it is important to notice that they did not deny the supernatural wonders that He worked. In fact, they confessed that He worked a miracle by casting a demon from a man, while on another occasion they scolded him for healing on the Sabbath (cf. Luke 13:10-17).

Even when Jesus' enemies diligently searched into the miracles that He performed in hopes of discrediting Him, they still failed in their endeavors. The apostle John recorded an occasion when Jesus gave sight to a man born blind (John 9:7). After receiving his sight, neighbors and others examined him, inquiring how he was now able to see. Later he was brought to the

Pharisees, and they scrutinized him. They questioned him about the One who caused him to see, and then argued among themselves about the character of Jesus. They called for the parents of the man who was blind, and questioned them about their son's blindness. Then they called upon the man born blind again, and a second time questioned him about how Jesus opened his eyes. Finally, when they realized the man would not cave in to their intimidating interrogation and say some negative thing about Jesus, "they cast him out" (9:34). They rejected him, and the One Who made him well. Yet, they were unable to deny the miracle that Jesus performed. It was known by countless witnesses that this man was born blind, but, after coming in contact with Jesus, his eyes were opened. The entire case was scrutinized thoroughly by Jesus' enemies, yet even they had to admit that Jesus caused the blind man to see (John 9:16,17,24,26). **It was a fact, accepted, not by credulous youths, but by hardened, veteran enemies of Christ.**

Furthermore, there were some of those among Jesus' strongest critics who eventually did come to believe, not simply in His miracles, but that the wonders He worked really were from Heaven. John hinted of this belief when he wrote about how there was a division among the Pharisees concerning whether Jesus was from God. One group asked, "How can a man who is a sinner" (as some among the Pharisees alleged) "do such signs?" (John 9:16). Nicodemus, who was a Pharisee and a ruler of the Jews, came to Jesus by night and confessed, saying, "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is

with him” (John 3:2). Years later, after the establishment of the church, Luke recorded how “a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:7). Truly, even many of those who were numbered among Jesus’ enemies at one time eventually confessed to His being the Son of God. Considering that positive testimony from hostile witnesses is the weightiest kind of testimony in a court of law, such reactions from Jesus’ enemies are extremely noteworthy in a discussion on the miracles of Christ.

#3—MULTIPLE ATTESTATION OF WRITERS

The case built for the authenticity of Jesus’ miracles is further strengthened by the fact that His supernatural works were recorded, not by one person, but by multiple independent writers. Even unbelievers admit that various miracles in Jesus’ life (including His resurrection) were recorded by more than one writer.⁵ If scholars of ancient history generally rendered facts “unimpeachable” when two or three sources are in agreement,⁶ then the multiple attestation of Jesus’ miracles by Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Paul (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:1-8) is extremely impressive. Unlike Islam and Mormonism, each of which relies upon the accounts/writings of one allegedly inspired man (Muhammad and Joseph Smith, respectively), Christianity rests upon the foundation of multiple writers. Consider also that certain miracles Jesus performed, specifically the feeding of the 5,000 and His resurrection, are recorded in all four gospel accounts. Furthermore, the writers’ attestation of Jesus’ life and

miracles is similar enough so as not be contradictory, but varied enough so that one cannot reasonably conclude that they participated in collusion in order to perpetrate a hoax. Truly, the fact that multiple writers attest to the factuality of Jesus' miracles should not be taken lightly and dismissed with a wave of the hand.

Interestingly, Bible writers were not alone in their attestation of the wonders that Jesus worked. The first-century Jewish historian, Josephus, mentioned Jesus as being One Who “was a doer of wonderful **works** (*paradoxa*)” and Who “drew over to him many of the Jews, and many of the Gentiles.”⁷ Josephus used this same Greek word (*paradoxa*) earlier when referring to Elijah and his “wonderful and surprising works by prophecy.”⁸ The only instance of this word in the New Testament is found in Luke's gospel account where those who had just witnessed Jesus heal a paralytic “were all seized with astonishment and began glorifying God; and they were filled with fear, saying, ‘We have seen **remarkable things** (*paradoxa*) today’” (5:26, NASB). A reference to Jesus' amazing works was also described in one section of the Babylonian Talmud (known as the Sanhedrin Tractate) where Jewish leaders wrote, “On the eve of the Passover Yeshu [Jesus] was hanged. For forty days before the execution took place, a herald went forth and cried, ‘He is going forth to be stoned because **he has practiced sorcery** and enticed Israel to apostacy...’ But since nothing was brought forward in his favour he was hanged on the eve of Passover.”⁹ Even though the Talmud describes Jesus' amazing deeds as “sorcery,” and although we may never know for certain whether Josephus truly believed

Jesus could work legitimate miracles, both acknowledge that Jesus' life was characterized by remarkable wonders—testimony that would be expected from certain unbelievers who were attempting to explain away the supernatural acts of Christ.

#4—BIBLE WRITERS REPORTED FACTS, NOT FAIRY TALES

It also is important to understand that the Bible writers insisted that their writings were not based on imaginary, nonverifiable people and events, but instead were grounded on solid historical facts (as has been confirmed time and again by the science of archaeology). The apostle Peter, in his second epistle to the Christians in the first century, wrote: “For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty” (1:16). In a similar statement, the apostle John insisted: “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life...that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us” (1 John 1:1,3). When Luke wrote his account of the gospel of Christ, he specifically and intentionally crafted his introduction to ensure that his readers understood that his account was historical and factual:

Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of

the word delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed (Luke 1:1-4).

In a similar line of reasoning, Luke included in his introduction to the book of Acts the idea that Jesus, “presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3). In addition, when the apostle Paul was arguing the case that Jesus Christ had truly been raised from the dead, he wrote that the resurrected Jesus

was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time (1 Corinthians 15:5-8).

This handful of verses by Peter, Paul, John, and Luke, reveals that the Bible writers insisted with conviction that their writings were not mythical, but were based on factual events. Furthermore, they specifically documented many of the eye-witnesses who could testify to the accuracy of their statements. As Henry S. Curr remarked,

We are not asked to believe in myths and legends of the kind associated with paganism, classical and otherwise, nor in cunningly devised fables or old wives’ tales. We are besought to accept sober

stories of incidents which cannot be accounted for in any other way save that God was directly and intimately at work in the matter.¹⁰

The claim that the Bible is filled with miracle myths can be made, but it cannot be reasonably maintained. The evidence is overwhelming that the Bible writers understood and insisted that their information about Jesus and His miracles was accurate and factual, just as were all other details in their narratives and letters. Furthermore, their claim of factual accuracy has been verified time and again by the discipline of archaeology as well as by refutations of alleged discrepancies between the various writings and history.

#5—JESUS' SIGNS WERE MANY AND VARIOUS

Another characteristic of Jesus' miracles is that more than a few are recorded in Scripture. One is not asked to believe that Jesus is the Son of God because He performed one or two marvelous deeds during His lifetime. On the contrary, genuine "miracles cluster around the Lord Jesus Christ like steel shavings to a magnet."¹¹ The gospel accounts are saturated with a variety of miracles that Christ performed, not for wealth or political power, but that the world may be convinced that He was sent by the Father to bring salvation to mankind (cf. John 5:36; 10:37-38). As Isaiah prophesied, Jesus performed **miracles of healing** (Isaiah 53:4; Matthew 8:16-17). He cleansed a leper with the touch of His hand (Matthew 8:1-4), and healed all manner of sickness and disease with word of His mouth (cf. John 4:46-54). One woman who had a hemorrhage for twelve years was

healed immediately simply by touching the fringe of His garment (Luke 8:43-48). Similarly, on one occasion after Jesus came into the land of Gennesaret, **all** who were sick in **all** of the surrounding region came to Him, “and begged Him that they might only touch the hem of His garment. And as many as touched it were made perfectly well” (Matthew 14:34-36; Mark 3:10). Generally speaking, “**great multitudes** came to Him, having with them the lame, blind, mute, maimed, and many others; and they laid them down at Jesus’ feet, and He healed them” (Matthew 15:30). “He cured **many** of infirmities, afflictions...and to many blind He gave sight” (Luke 7:21). Even Jesus’ enemies confessed to His “**many** signs” (John 11:47).

Jesus not only exhibited power over the sick and diseased, He also showed His **superiority over nature** more than once. Whereas God’s prophet Moses turned water into blood by striking water with his rod (Exodus 7:20), Jesus simply willed water into wine at a wedding feast (John 2:1-11). He further exercised His power over the natural world by calming the Sea of Galilee during a turbulent storm (Matthew 8:23-27), by walking on water for a considerable distance to reach His disciples (Matthew 14:25-33), and by causing a fig tree to wither away at His command (Mark 11:12-21). In truth, Jesus’ supernatural superiority over the physical world (which He created—Colossians 1:16) is exactly what we would expect from One Who claimed to be the Son of God.

Jesus’ miracles were not limited to the natural world, however. As further proof of His deity, He also

revealed His **power over the spiritual world** by casting out demons. “[T]hey brought to Him **many** who were demon-possessed. And He cast out the spirits with a word” (Matthew 8:16). Luke also recorded that “He cured **many** of...evil spirits” (Luke 7:21). Mark recorded where Jesus once exhibited power over a man overwhelmed with unclean spirits, which no one had been able to bind not even with chains and shackles; neither could anyone tame the demon-infested man (Mark 5:1-20). Jesus, however, cured him. Afterwards, witnesses saw the man with the unclean spirits “sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind” (Luke 8:35-36). On several occasions, Jesus healed individuals who were tortured by evil spirits. And, they were “all amazed and spoke among themselves, saying, ‘What a word this is! For with authority and power He commands the unclean spirits, and they come out’” (Luke 4:36).

Finally, Jesus even performed miracles that demonstrated His **power over death**. Recall that when John the baptizer’s disciples came to Jesus inquiring about His identity, Jesus instructed them to tell John that “the dead are raised” (Matthew 11:5). The widow of Nain’s son had already been declared dead and placed in a casket when Jesus touched the open coffin and told him to “arise.” Immediately, “he who was dead sat up and began to speak” (Luke 7:14-15). Lazarus had already been dead and buried for four days by the time Jesus raised him from the dead (John 11:1-44). Such a great demonstration of power over death caused “many of the Jews who had come to Mary, and had seen the things Jesus did” to believe in Him (John 11:45). What’s

more, Jesus' own resurrection from the dead was the climax of all of His miracles, and serves as perhaps the most convincing miracle of all.¹²

Power over Affliction	Cited In
Royal official's son	John 4:46-54
Peter's mother-in-law	Matthew 8:14-18; Mark 1:29-34; Luke 4:38-41
Leper	Matthew 8:1-4; Mark 1:40-45; Luke 5:12-14
Paralytic	Matthew 9:1-8; Mark 2:3-12; Luke 5:18-26
Lame man at the Pool of Bethesda	John 5:1-16
Man with withered hand	Matthew 12:9-14; Mark 3:1-6; Luke 6:6-11
Paralyzed centurion's servant	Matthew 8:5-13; Luke 7:1-10
Hemorrhaging woman	Matthew 9:20-22; Mark 5:25-34; Luke 8:43-48
Two blind men	Matthew 9:27-31
Deaf and mute man	Matthew 15:29-31; Mark 7:31-37
Blind man outside of Bethesda	Mark 8:22-26
Ten lepers	Luke 17:11-19
Man born blind	John 9
Crippled woman	Luke 13:10-17
Man with dropsy	Luke 14:1-6
Two blind men near Jericho	Matthew 20:29-34; Mark 10:46-52
Malchus' ear	Luke 22:50-51

Power over Nature	Cited In
Water changed into wine	John 2:1-11
First catch of fish	Luke 5:1-7
Calming a turbulent storm	Matthew 8:23-27; Mark 4:36-41; Luke 8:22-25
Feeding 5,000	Matthew 14:15-21; Mark 6:30-34; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-14
Walking on water	Matthew 14:22-32; Mark 6:45-46; John 6:15-21
Feeding 4,000	Matthew 15:32-39; Mark 8:1-9
Money in the fish's mouth	Matthew 17:24-27
Fig tree withers	Matthew 21:18-22; Mark 11:12-14,20-24
Second catch of fish	John 21:1-11

Power over Demons	Cited In
Man in synagogue at Capernaum	Mark 1:23-28; Luke 4:33-37
Mute, demon-possessed man	Matthew 9:32-34
Mary Magdalene	Luke 8:2
Two men at Gadara	Matthew 8:28-34; Mark 5:1-21; Luke 8:26-40
Blind, mute, demon-possessed man	Matthew 12:22-30; Mark 3:22-30; Luke 11:14-23
Syro-Phoenician's daughter	Matthew 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30
Epileptic, demon-possessed child	Matthew 17:14-21; Mark 9:14-29; Luke 9:37-43

Power over Death	Cited In
Widow of Nain's son	Luke 7:11-18
Jairus' daughter	Matthew 9:18-19,23-26; Mark 5:21-24,35-43; Luke 8:40-42,49-56
Lazarus	John 11
Jesus' own resurrection	Matthew 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20

In all, the Gospel records contain some 37 specific supernatural acts that Jesus performed. If that number were to include such miracles as His virgin birth and transfiguration, and the multiple times He exemplified the ability to “read minds” and to know the past or future without having to learn of them through ordinary means (cf. John 4:15-19; 13:21-30; 2:25), etc., the number would reach upwards to fifty. Indeed, the miracles of Christ were varied and numerous. He healed the blind, lame, sick, and leprous, as well as demonstrated power over nature, demons, and death.

#6—THE MIRACLES OF JESUS WERE NOT SILLY AND OVERBOARD

Admittedly, for some, a number of the miracles that Jesus performed are more easily accepted than others. The fact that a group of fisherman let their nets down into the sea and caught so many fish that the netting began to break (Luke 5:1-11) is not difficult for critics to accept (although not as a miracle). The idea of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead after already being in the tomb for four days, however, is much harder for skeptics to believe. But, neither this miracle nor any

other that Jesus worked is unworthy of our consideration because it is silly or overboard. People may reject the miracles of Christ because of their disbelief in the supernatural altogether, or because of their inability to attach naturalistic explanations to various miracles, but they cannot be denied because they are characterized by the absurd and ridiculous—that they are not. As Furman Kearley once stated, “The gospel records are marked by restraint and sublimity in the description of miracles.”¹³

The miracles of Christ certainly were **extraordinary** (otherwise they wouldn’t be miracles), yet they were performed (and recorded) with all sanity and sobriety—exactly what one would expect if they really were signs from God. After all, He

is the author and finisher of that unspeakable machine which we call the universe, ever working in accordance with its constitution on the strictest principles of law and order, and thus proclaiming that its Architect is no capricious being but one whose mental attributes are as marvelous as His moral and spiritual qualities. In these circumstances, it would be very strange if the Biblical miracles represented the contradiction of orderly things.¹⁴

Since the omnipotent God has chosen to **control** His infinite power, and to use it in **orderly** and **rational** ways, one would expect that when God put on flesh (John 1:1-3,14) and exerted His supernatural power on Earth, it likewise would be characterized as power under control—miracles performed with infinite sobriety and rationality.

Unlike the stories of many alleged miracle workers from the past (or present), Jesus' miracles are characterized by restraint and dignity. Consider the miracle that Jesus performed on Malchus, a man who was about to arrest Jesus. Instead of doing something like commanding the left ear of Malchus to wither or fall off (after Peter severed his right one with a sword), Jesus simply touched the detached ear "and healed him" (Luke 22:51). A man who was about to turn Jesus over to His enemies has his ear cut off with a sword, and Jesus simply (yet miraculously) puts his ear back in place. What's more, that is all any Bible writer wrote about the matter. An amazing miracle was worked the night before Jesus' death, and the only thing revealed is that Jesus "touched his ear and healed him." As with all of Jesus' miracles

[t]here is no attempt to magnify the supernatural features of the incident. The happening is left to speak for itself. If truth be best unadorned, then there are no more effective illustrations of that doctrine than the Biblical records of signs and wonders. The writers do not dwell upon them. They rather take the marvels in their stride. They tell the story as succinctly as they can, and then pass on to deal with something else. That is exemplified very clearly in the Synoptic Gospels. We are told of the moral and physical miracle wrought in a house at Capernaum when four men bore a sick friend to the feet of Jesus, having removed part of the roof and lowered the pallet through the aperture. The man's sins were forgiven. This was a sign from heaven if there ever was one. His infirmity was also removed and that was another demonstration of our Lord's claims to be God manifest in the flesh. Matthew then proceeds to recount his call to discipleship

and what followed. Procedure like that is repeated again and again. The writers do not linger over the supernatural as a modern novelist might do. The miracle is mentioned at greater or less length, and then the narrative goes on its way. It is true that reference is often made to the amazement created in the crowds which witnessed these mighty works of God; but even that is not emphasized inordinately.¹⁵

Furthermore, unlike those in other writings, Jesus' miracles were not characterized by the sorcerer's hocus pocus. In fact, there are few parallels to Jesus and the magicians of the ancient world. Even Rudolf Bultmann, the 20th-century German writer who sought to explain away the miracles of Jesus, admitted that "the New Testament miracle stories are extremely reserved in this respect, since they hesitate to attribute to the person of Jesus the magical traits which were often characteristic of the Hellenistic miracle worker."¹⁶ Jesus could have performed any miracle that He wanted. He could have pulled rabbits from hats for the sole purpose of amusing people. He could have turned His Jewish enemies into stones, or given a person three eyes. He could have turned boys into men. He could have lit the robes of the Pharisees on fire and told them that hell would be ten times as hot. He could have formed a dozen sparrows out of clay as a child, and then, in the midst of a group of boys, turned the clay birds into live ones at the clap of His hands, as is alleged in the non-inspired Apocryphal book, the *Gospel of Thomas* (1:4-9).¹⁷ Certainly, Jesus **could** have done any number of silly, outlandish miracles. But, He didn't. In contrast to the miracles recorded in any number of non-inspired sources, Jesus' miracles were not characterized by

endless tales of wonders with which literature and folklore of the world abounds. There is no suggestion of magic or legerdemain about the mighty works of God described in the Bible. On the contrary, they are invariably characterized by a sanity and sobriety and reasonableness.... There is nothing extravagant or bizarre about them.... When the miracles of our Lord which are described in the four Gospels are compared with those derived from other sources, the difference is like that of chalk and cheese.¹⁸

#7—JESUS WORKED WONDERS THAT ARE NOT BEING DUPLICATED TODAY

Finally, neither the modern alleged “faith healer” nor the 21st-century scientist is duplicating the miracles that Jesus worked while on Earth 2,000 years ago. Pseudo-wonder workers today stage seemingly endless events where willing participants with supposed sicknesses appear and act as if they are being healed of their diseases by the laying on of hands. Nebulous aches and pains and dubious illnesses that defy medical substantiation are supposedly cured by prominent “faith healers” who simultaneously are building financial empires with the funds they receive from gullible followers. Frauds like Oral Roberts, Benny Hinn, and a host of others have made many millions of dollars off of viewers who have naively sent them money without stopping to consider the real differences between the miracles that Jesus worked and what they have observed men doing in modern times.

Jesus went about “healing **every** sickness and **every** disease” (Matthew 9:35). His miraculous wonders

knew no limitations. He could cure anything. Luke, the learned physician (Colossians 4:14), recorded how He could restore a shriveled hand in the midst of His enemies (Luke 6:6-10), and heal a severed ear with the touch of His hand (Luke 22:51). He healed “many” of their blindness (Luke 7:21), including one man who had been born blind (John 9:1-7)! What’s more, He even raised the dead simply by calling out to them (John 11:43). What modern-day “spiritualist,” magician, or scientist has come close to doing these sorts of things that defy natural explanations? Who is going into schools for the blind and giving children their sight? Who is going to funerals or graveyards to raise the dead? These are the kinds of miracles that Jesus worked—supernatural feats that testify to His identity as the Heaven-sent Savior of the world.

CONCLUSION

As should be expected from the One Who claimed to be God incarnate (cf. John 1:1-3,14; 10:30), Scripture records that Jesus performed miracles throughout His ministry in order to provide sufficient proof of His divine message and nature. According to the Bible, countless thousands witnessed His miracles. He performed many of them throughout His ministry—miracles that in countless ways are unlike the alleged wonders worked by sorcerers, scientists, or “spiritualists” of the past or present. Even Jesus’ enemies attested to the wonders that He worked, which later were recorded, not by one person, but by multiple independent writers who were dedicated to reporting facts rather than fairy tales.

Jesus worked miracles, not for the sake of entertaining individuals or in order to make a profit off of His audiences, but that the world may know for a fact Who He is—their Creator and Savior. Indeed, skeptics should consider the reasons why the miracles of Jesus are credible testimonies of His divine nature and teachings, and not the unbelievable actions of a charlatan.

Chapter 10



MISCELLANEOUS ALLEGED CONTRADICTIONS

OH BROTHER...OR IS IT NEPHEW?

Genesis 14:12,14,16

I am constantly amazed at what “Bible contradiction” the skeptic will come up with next. A person would like to think that critics of the Bible’s inerrancy might have some limits to their allegations, but, apparently they do not. Instead of taking a few moments with the Bible (and a concordance or a Bible dictionary) in order to learn how a particular word is used throughout Scripture, some skeptics simply look at a particular English word in one place, and if that particular word is used elsewhere in the Bible in a different sense, then they claim that there is an obvious “contradiction.”

Such is the case with the skeptic's treatment of Lot in the book of Genesis. Allegedly, Lot cannot logically be described as Abraham's "nephew" and his "brother" at the same time. Because Genesis 14:12 states that Lot was "Abram's brother's son" (NKJV; "nephew"—NIV), and Genesis 14:14 and 14:16 say that Lot was Abram's (or Abraham's—Genesis 17:5) "brother," skeptics allege that the writer of Genesis erred. Dennis McKinsey listed this alleged discrepancy three different times between 1983-1998 in his publication *Biblical Errancy*.¹ In one section of one issue titled simply "Contradictions," he wrote:

If there is any area in which the Bible's imperfections and errancy is most apparent, it is that of inconsistencies and contradictions.... As incredible as it may seem, there are some individuals who still say, "The Bible is perfect and inerrant. There are no inaccuracies." So, for the benefit of these holdouts, I am going to provide a list of some **simple, straight-forward problems** that even some well-known spokesmen for the fundamentalist position grudgingly concede.²

One of the "contradictions" McKinsey lists is that of Lot being described as both Abram's nephew and his brother. As he and numerous other skeptics (whose writings can be accessed easily on the Internet) see it, these verses represent a "simple, straight-forward problem" for the apologist who seeks to defend the inerrancy of the Bible.

The truth is, however, there is a "simple, straight-forward" **solution** to the problem. In Genesis 14:12, the Hebrew terms *ben 'achi* are used to indicate that Lot literally was Abraham's "brother's son." Lot was Haran's son, and thus Abraham's nephew (Genesis 11:27; 12:5). At

the same time, Lot was also Abraham's brother (Hebrew *'achiw*). He was not Abraham's brother in the literal sense we so often use this word today, but he was Abraham's brother in the sense that they were family. For the skeptic's argument to hold any weight, he first must prove that the term for brother (*'ach*) was used in the Bible **only** when speaking of a male sibling. But, they cannot prove that point. Although its basic meaning is male sibling (cf. Genesis 4:2), the Hebrew term for brother(s) appears some 629 times throughout the Old Testament in a variety of ways.

- Whether two males have the same mother and father, only the same father, or just the same mother, the term "brother" is used to describe their relationship (cf. Genesis 37:14; 42:3-4; Judges 8:19).
- In Genesis chapter 29, Laban is called Jacob's "brother": "And Laban said unto Jacob, 'Because **though art my brother**, shouldest thou therefore serve me for nought?'" (vs. 15, KJV). Just before Laban's statement, "Jacob told Rachel that he was her father's [Laban's] brother" (vs. 12, KJV). Considering that Jacob was only Laban's nephew (24:29-31), when these men used the term "brother" in discussions with (or about) each other, they merely were speaking of one another as blood relatives, and not actual male siblings.
- In another nuance, members of the same tribe are called "brethren" (*'acha*) in 2 Samuel 19:12.
- In Exodus 2:11, Moses' fellow Israelites are called "brethren" (cf. Acts 3:22; Hebrews 7:5). As is noted in A.R. Fausset's *Bible Dictionary*, the Israelites often "distinguished a 'brother' as an Israelite by birth, and a 'neighbor' a proselyte, and allowed neither title to the Gentiles."³

- In the midst of his suffering, Job spoke of his friends (Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar) as “brothers” (Job 6:15, NKJV; Hebrew *‘acha*).
- In the New Testament, the term “brother(s)” (Greek *adelphos*) is used numerous times in reference to the relationship Christians have with one another as children of God (1 Corinthians 5:11; 6:6; 7:12; Philippians 2:25; et al.).

Dennis McKinsey and other skeptics who parade Genesis 14:12 and 14:14 in front of the world as a “simple, straight-forward problem” that allegedly has no solution are (as usual) guilty of misrepresenting the biblical writers. Every indication in Scripture leads the unbiased person to conclude that the term “brother” carries a wide variety of semantic shadings.

Considering the many ways in which the term “brother” was used in ancient times, and even the variety of ways it is used in 21st-century America, any sincere truth-seeker should be disappointed at the blatantly false accusations made by McKinsey and others regarding Genesis 14 and the use of the term “brother.”

WAS KETURAH ABRAHAM’S WIFE OR CONCUBINE?

Genesis 25:1,4; 1 Chronicles 1:32-33

Although Keturah is mentioned only four times in the Bible (in two different sections of Scripture—Genesis 25:1,4; 1 Chronicles 1:32-33), her relationship to Abraham has come under severe scrutiny. Skeptics have charged the Bible writers with erring in regard to their portrayal of Keturah. Allegedly, Genesis 25:1 and

1 Chronicles 1:32 are contradictory, because the first passage indicates Keturah was Abraham's "wife," while the other says she was "Abraham's concubine." Based upon the understanding of some that there is a distinction of the Hebrew words "wife" (*iššâ*) and "concubine" (*pilegeš*) during the monarchic period, even some Bible believers may be somewhat perplexed at the different titles given to Keturah. Was she Abraham's wife, or was she his concubine? Many are aware that during David's reign as Israel's king, he had "wives" and "concubines" (2 Samuel 19:5). Also, during Solomon's kingship, "he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines" (1 Kings 11:3). In these contexts, the terms "wives" (*iššâ*) and "concubines" (*pilegeš*) are distinct terms that rarely, if ever, are used interchangeably. Such begs the question, "Why was Keturah called Abraham's wife in one passage, and his concubine in another?" Are these two sections of Scripture really contradictory, as Bible critics would have us believe?

First, for Genesis 25:1 and 1 Chronicles 1:32-33 to be a contradiction, one must know whether or not these passages are referring to the same time. It is possible that Keturah was Abraham's "concubine" in the beginning, and then became his "wife" at a later time. If such were the case, Bible writers could legitimately use both terms when describing her.

Second, although it might have been unusual for the terms "wives" and "concubines" to be used interchangeably during the monarchic period, evidence indicates that in patriarchal times, using these terms to refer to the same person was somewhat normal. Consider the following:

- Bilhah, Rachel's maid (Genesis 29:29), was one of Jacob's "concubines" (35:22). But, she also was called his "wife," both before and after she gave birth to two of Jacob's sons (30:4; 37:2).
- Genesis 16:3 calls Hagar Abraham's "wife" (*'iššā*), while Genesis 25:6 implies that Hagar, Sarah's maidservant, also was his "concubine" (*pilegeš*).
- Although Genesis 25:1 says, "Abraham again took a **wife**" (Keturah), verse 6 of that same chapter indicates Keturah also was his concubine.

And Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac. But Abraham gave gifts to the sons of the **concubines** which Abraham had; and while he was still living he sent them eastward, away from Isaac his son, to the country of the east (25:5-6).

Isaac, son of Sarah, was set apart from all of Abraham's other sons, which were born to him by his **concubines**. By implication, Keturah, who was not the mother of Isaac, was described as a concubine (cf. 1 Chronicles 1:32).

Hebrew scholar Victor Hamilton believes this concubine-wife relationship to be dissimilar to what was seen during the days of David and Solomon. It is reasonable to conclude that this "coidentification" in Genesis indicates "that the concubines of Abraham and Jacob were not *pilagšim* [concubines—EL] in the later sense, but that no term was available for that type of concubinage; thus *pilegeš* and *'iššā* were used as synonyms to describe these women in the patriarchal narratives."⁴ In an article that the late Semitist Dr. Chaim Rabin wrote regarding the origin of *pilegeš*, he stated: "By alternating the terms within the easily apprehended

framework of a story, a similar impression of ‘in-betweenness’ was created.”⁵

Keturah was a concubine-wife. It seems that she was more than a concubine (often considered a second-rate wife of servant status), but not on a par with Sarah, Abraham’s first “wife” and mother of the promised son (Genesis 17:15-22). Just as Bilhah, Jacob’s concubine-wife, did not rival Rachel or Leah, Keturah was not equivalent with Sarah. Thus, Bible writers were not mistaken when referring to Keturah and Bilhah as both wives and concubines; they simply used two words to indicate the “in-between” position the women held.

DIFFERENT NAMES, SAME PERSON

Matthew 1:9; 2 Kings 15:7

Names can be rather confusing at times. A teacher might become puzzled on the first day of school when she finds out that half of her students do not immediately respond when she calls roll. The reason: they normally are called by another name than that which appears on the school records. A coach may not immediately recognize a certain player’s identity, because his team only speaks of this player (on the opposing team) by using a nickname. After some investigation, however, the coach soon learns who the player actually is. Millions of individuals through the millennia have worn more than one name. Even at Apologetics Press, nearly half of my coworkers wear derivatives of their full, official name. Most people in the 21st century understand that this is simply the way it is; people often go by more than one name.

When reading the Bible, we need also to remember that people in ancient times frequently had more than one name as well. Keeping this in mind will help clarify various passages that may seem somewhat ambiguous. When studying the book of Genesis, it is helpful to bear in mind that Abram's name was changed to Abraham (Genesis 17:5), and Jacob's to Israel (Genesis 32:28). Later, while living in Egypt, "Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaphnath-Paaneah" (Genesis 41:45). Numerous other individuals mentioned in the Bible also were known by more than one name.

- Moses' father-in-law was known both as Reuel and Jethro (Exodus 2:18; 3:1).
- Gideon acquired the name Jerubbaal because he destroyed the altar of Baal at Ophrah (Judges 6:32; 7:1; 8:29,35).
- Pharaoh Necho changed the name of King Josiah's oldest son, Eliakim, to Jehoiakim (2 Kings 23:34).
- The apostle Peter is sometimes called Peter, Simon Peter, Simon, and Cephas (Matthew 14:28; 16:16; 17:25; John 1:42; 1 Corinthians 1:12).
- And Saul is called Paul (Acts 13:9).

Attention needs to be given to how the Bible writers frequently used different names when referring to the same person, because recognition of such name usage may help clarify certain alleged contradictions. Take, for instance, Matthew 1:9. Someone might wonder why Matthew mentioned Uzziah as being the father of Jotham, while 2 Kings 15:1-7 and 1 Chronicles 3:12 call Jotham's father Azariah. The answer lies in the fact that both names apply to the same person. Within

the same chapter (2 Kings 15), Jotham's father is called both Azariah (15:7) and Uzziah (15:32). The names are different, but they refer to the same person (cf. 2 Chronicles 26:1-23; Isaiah 1:1). Countless Bible questions can be answered logically just by acknowledging that the ancients often were just as flexible in their giving of names as people are in the 21st century.

GOOD WORKS—TO BE SEEN, OR HIDDEN?

Matthew 5:14-16; Matthew 6:1-4

When examining various websites, articles, and books on alleged Bible contradictions, you will likely notice how some allegations seem to appear everywhere, regardless of the length of the skeptical resource. One question that has made its way onto numerous skeptics' lists (somewhat surprisingly) is whether or not God wants His disciples to do good works to be seen of men. Purportedly, two statements that Jesus made within the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) are incompatible. First, Jesus stated:

You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. **Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works** and glorify your Father in heaven (Matthew 5:14-16).

Later, Matthew recorded a warning Jesus gave His audience, saying:

Take heed that you **do not do your charitable deeds before men**, to be seen by them....

[W]hen you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly (6:1,3-4).

According to skeptics, these New Testament passages are contradictory. At one moment, Jesus supposedly said, “We should” let others see our good works, and in the next He said, “We shouldn’t” let others see our good works. Are the skeptics correct in their assertions? What is the truth of the matter?

The Bible student who carefully examines these passages (and others) will notice that Jesus never said that His followers must not do good deeds in the presence of others. On the contrary, He has always wanted good deeds to be done, but they are to be done for the purpose of giving **God** the glory, **not man**. Sadly, many Bible critics have twisted the true message of Jesus, in an effort to force a contradiction in His teachings (cf. 2 Peter 3:16). The Bible teaches that God **expects** His followers to be doing good deeds. To the churches of Galatia, the apostle Paul wrote: “As we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith” (6:10). During the last week of His life, Jesus taught that His disciples are responsible for doing such things as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and visiting the sick (Matthew 25:31-46). But these good works, and many others, are to be done in order to bring glory to **God**, not ourselves. When Jesus said, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works,” He ended this sentence with the phrase, “and glorify your Father in heaven.” A similar

statement was written years later by the apostle Peter:

Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evil-doers, **they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God** in the day of visitation (1 Peter 2:11-12).

Through the good works of mankind, **God** is to be exalted. (“To **Him** be the glory both now and forever”—2 Peter 3:18). Man, on the other hand, must never perform godly works for the purpose of drawing attention to himself.

In their efforts to expose the Bible as a book of errors and Jesus as less than divine, skeptics frequently omit the part of Matthew 6:1-4 that gives the context of Jesus’ statement concerning good deeds. Jesus was not forbidding all good deeds done in public. Rather, He was condemning the performance of “charitable deeds before men, **to be seen by them**” (6:1). In the very next verse, Jesus elaborated on what He meant, saying, “Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men.” The hypocritical scribes and Pharisees, whom Jesus explicitly condemned earlier in this sermon (5:20), performed “all their works... to be seen by men” (Matthew 23:5). This was the attitude of which Jesus warned His listeners. Do not do charitable deeds in order to receive praise from men, but do them (whether private or public) to be seen of God.

Jesus taught that the proper motivation must lie behind every “good” action, in order for that action to be pleasing

in God's sight. Some godly actions may be done in secret (e.g., giving monetarily to a good work, praying for the sick, fasting, etc.). Others can (and must) be done openly (e.g., preaching the Gospel—cf. Acts 2). In whatever actions we engage ourselves, in order for them to be pleasing to God, they must stem from a sincere heart whose motivation is to bring glory to God.

A DONKEY AND HER COLT

Matthew 21:1-9; Mark 11:1-7

Although most Christians would rather not concern themselves with some of the more minute details of Jesus' life reported in the New Testament, when challenged to defend the inerrancy of The Book that reports the beautiful story of Jesus, there are times when such details require our attention. Such is the case with Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem during the final week of His life. People who wear the name of Christ enjoy reading of the crowd's cries of "Hosanna!" and meditating upon the fact that Jesus went to Jerusalem to bring salvation to the world. Skeptics, on the other hand, read of this event and cry, "Contradiction!" Allegedly, Matthew misunderstood Zechariah's prophecy, and thus contradicted what Mark, Luke, and John wrote regarding Jesus' final entry into Jerusalem.⁶ Matthew recorded the following:

Now when they drew near Jerusalem, and came to Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find **a donkey tied, and a colt with her**. Loose them and bring them to Me. And if anyone says

anything to you, you shall say, ‘The Lord has need of them,’ and immediately he will send them.” All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying: “Tell the daughter of Zion, ‘Behold, your King is coming to you, lowly, and sitting on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey.’” So the disciples went and did as Jesus commanded them. **They brought the donkey and the colt, laid their clothes on them, and set Him on them.** And a very great multitude spread their clothes on the road; others cut down branches from the trees and spread them on the road. Then the multitudes who went before and those who followed cried out, saying: “Hosanna to the Son of David! ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!’ Hosanna in the highest!” (Matthew 21:1-9).

Skeptics are quick to point out that the other gospel writers mention only “one colt,” which the disciples acquired, and upon which Jesus rode. Mark recorded that Jesus told the two disciples that they would find “**a colt** tied, on which no one has sat” (11:2). The disciples then “went their way, and found **the colt** tied by the door outside on the street, and they loosed **it**.... Then they brought **the colt** to Jesus and threw their clothes on it, and He sat on **it**” (Mark 11:4,7; cf. Luke 19:29-38; John 12:12-16). Purportedly, “[t]he author of Matthew contradicts the author of Mark on the number of animals Jesus is riding into Jerusalem.”⁷ Can these accounts be reconciled, or is this a legitimate contradiction?

First, notice that Mark, Luke, and John did not say that **only** one donkey was obtained for Jesus, or that **only** one donkey traveled up to Jerusalem with Jesus.

The writers simply mentioned one donkey (the colt). They never denied that another donkey (the mother of the colt) was present. The fact that Mark, Luke, and John mention one young donkey does not mean there were not two. If you had two friends named Joe and Bob who came to your house on Thursday night, but the next day while at work you mention to a fellow employee that Joe was at your house Thursday night (and you excluded Bob from the conversation for whatever reason), would you be lying? Of course not. You simply stated the fact that Joe was at your house. Similarly, when Mark, Luke, and John stated that a donkey was present, Matthew merely supplemented what the other writers recorded.

Consider the other parts of the story that have been supplemented by one or more of the synoptic writers.

- Whereas Matthew mentioned how Jesus and His disciples went to Bethphage, Mark and Luke mentioned both Bethphage and Bethany.
- Mark and Luke indicated that the colt they acquired for Christ never had been ridden. Matthew omitted this piece of information.
- Matthew was the only gospel writer to include Zechariah's prophecy.
- Mark and Luke included the question that the owners of the colt asked the disciples when they went to get the donkey for Jesus. Matthew excluded this information in his account.

As one can see, throughout this story (and the rest of the Gospel accounts for that matter), the writers consistently supplemented each other's accounts. Such supplementation should be expected only from independent

sources—some of whom were eyewitnesses. It is very possible that Matthew was specific in his numbering of the donkeys, due to the likelihood that he was an eyewitness of Jesus' final entrance into Jerusalem.

Second, regarding the accusation that Matthew wrote of two donkeys, instead of just one (because he allegedly misunderstood Zechariah's prophecy), it first must be noted that Zechariah's prophecy actually mentions two donkeys (even though only one is stated as transporting the King to Jerusalem). The prophet wrote: "Behold, your King is coming to you...lowly and riding on a donkey [male], a colt, the foal of a donkey [female]" (Zechariah 9:9). In this verse, Zechariah used Hebrew poetic parallelism (the balancing of thought in successive lines of poetry). The terms **male donkey**, **colt**, and **foal** all designate the same animal—the young donkey upon which the King (Jesus) would ride into Jerusalem (Mark 11:7). Interestingly, even though the colt was the animal of primary importance, Zechariah also mentioned that this donkey was the foal of a female donkey. One might assume that Zechariah merely was stating the obvious when mentioning the mother's existence. However, when Matthew's gospel is taken into account, the elusive female donkey of Zechariah 9:9 is brought to light. Both the foal and the female donkey were brought to Christ at Mount Olivet, and both made the trip to Jerusalem. Since the colt never had been ridden, or even sat upon (as stated by Mark and Luke), its dependence upon its mother is very understandable (as implied by Matthew). The journey to Jerusalem, with multitudes of people in front of and behind Jesus and the donkeys (Matthew 21:8-9), obviously would have been much

easier for the colt if the mother donkey were led nearby down the same road.

The focal point of the skeptic's proposed problem with Jesus' entry into Jerusalem is how He could have ridden on two donkeys at once. Since Matthew 21:7 states: "They brought the donkey and the colt, laid their clothes on them, and **set Him on them**" (NKJV), some have concluded that Matthew intended for his reader to understand Jesus as being some kind of stunt rider—proceeding to Jerusalem as more of a clown than a king. Such reasoning is preposterous. Matthew could have meant that Jesus rode the colt while the other donkey walked along with them. Instead of saying, "He rode one donkey and brought the other with him," the writer simply wrote that He rode "them" into Jerusalem. If a horse-owner came home to his wife and informed her that he had just ridden the horses home a few minutes ago from a nearby town, no one would accuse him of literally riding both horses at once. He merely was indicating to his wife that he literally rode one horse home, while the other one trotted alongside or behind him.

A second possible solution to this "problem" is that Jesus **did** ride **both** donkeys, but He did so at **different** times. However unlikely this possibility might seem to some, nothing in Zechariah's prophecy or the gospel accounts forbids such. Perhaps the colt found the triumphant procession that began on the southeastern slope of the Mount of Olives near the towns of Bethphage and Bethany (about 1¾ miles from Jerusalem)⁸ too strenuous. Zechariah prophesied that Jesus would ride upon a colt (9:9), which Jesus did. He also easily could have ridden on the colt's mother part of the way.

Third, Matthew 21:7 may not be referring to the donkeys at all. Greek scholar A.T. Robertson believed that the second “them” (Greek *auton*) refers to the **garments** that the disciples laid on the donkeys, and not to the donkeys themselves. In commenting on Matthew 21:7 he stated: “The garments thrown on the animals were the outer garments (*himatia*), Jesus ‘took his seat’ (*epekathisen*,...) upon the garments.”⁹ Skeptics do not want to allow for such an interpretation. When they read of “them” at the end of Matthew 21:7 (in the New King James Version), skeptics feel that the antecedent of this “them” must be the previous “them” (the donkeys). Critics like John Kesler¹⁰ also appeal to the other synoptic accounts (where Jesus is said to have sat upon “it”—the colt), and conclude that Matthew, like Mark and Luke, surely meant that Jesus sat upon the donkeys, and not just the disciples’ clothes (which were **on** the donkeys). What critics like Kesler fail to acknowledge, however, is that in the Greek, Matthew’s word order is different than that of Mark and Luke. Whereas Mark and Luke indicated that the disciples put their **clothes on the donkey**, Matthew’s word order reads: they **put on the donkeys clothes**. The American Standard Version, among others (KJV, RSV, and NASB) is more literal in its translation of this verse than is the NKJV. It indicates that the disciples “brought the ass, and the colt, and **put on them their garments**; and he sat thereon” (Matthew 21:7, ASV; cf. RSV, KJV, NASB). When Matthew wrote that Jesus sat “on **them**,” he easily could have intended for his readers to understand this “them” to refer to the clothes, and not to the donkeys. If the disciples’ clothes were placed on both donkeys

(as Matthew indicated), and then Jesus mounted the colt, one logically could conclude that Jesus sat on the clothes (which were placed upon the colt).

Any of these logically possible solutions should cause fair-minded readers to pause and realize that in no way has Matthew been proven to be guilty of error. One of the fundamental principles of nearly any study or investigation is that of being “innocent until proven guilty” (a principle addressed more thoroughly in chapter 1). Any person or historical document is to be presumed internally consistent **until it can be shown conclusively that it is contradictory**. This approach has been accepted throughout literary history. The accepted way to critique any ancient writing is to assume innocence, not guilt. If we believe the Bible is innocent until proven guilty, then any **logically possible** answer should be sufficient to nullify the charge of error. When a person studies the Bible and comes across passages that may **seem** contradictory at first glance (like the verses explained in this section), he does not necessarily have to pin down the exact solution in order to show their truthfulness. The Bible student need only show the **possibility** of a harmonization among passages that might appear to conflict on the surface in order to negate the force of the charge that a Bible contradiction really exists. We act by this principle in the courtroom, in our treatment of various historical books, as well as in everyday-life situations. It is only fair, then, that we show the Bible the same courtesy by exhausting the search for possible harmony among passages before pronouncing one or more accounts false.¹¹

WHAT WAS THE INSCRIPTION ON THE CROSS?

Matthew 27:37; Mark 15:26; Luke 23:38; John 19:19

Controversy has surrounded the death of Christ on the cross for almost two millennia. In the days of the apostle Paul, it served as a “stumbling block” to the Jews and “foolishness” to the Greeks (1 Corinthians 1:23). Throughout the past 2,000 years, men and women of all ethnicities have rejected—for many objectionable reasons—the story of the crucified, resurrected Savior. Sadly, for some today, even the physical cross itself has become a stumbling block. Because of an alleged contradiction surrounding the actual words written on the cross of Christ, some believe that the message of the cross once preached by John, Paul, Peter, Philip, and others simply cannot be trusted. According to skeptics, the gospel writers disagreed regarding what the title read that appeared on the cross above Jesus’ head.

Matthew: “This is Jesus the King of the Jews” (27:37).

Mark: “The King of the Jews” (15:26).

Luke: “This is the King of the Jews” (23:38).

John: “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews” (19:19).

Question: Did Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John **disagree** on what was written on the cross, or did these four independent writers record trustworthy statements?

Before answering the above question, consider the following illustration. Tonight after getting home from work, I inform my wife (Jana) about an accusation I read

on a billboard on the way home regarding one of our friends who is running for city council. I proceed to tell her that the accusation read: “John Doe is a thief.” The following day, our niece (Shanon) comes by the house and mentions to Jana that she just saw a billboard (the same one that I had mentioned a day earlier) that read: “City council candidate John Doe is a thief.” Finally, the next day, a friend (Rhonda) visits Jana and informs her about the same sign, saying it reads: “Montgomery City Council candidate John Doe is a thief.” Question: Would anyone have justification for saying that Shanon, Rhonda, and I **disagreed** regarding what the billboard said? Certainly not! We all three reported the very same accusation (“John Doe is a thief”); Shanon alone mentioned the fact that he was a “city council candidate”; and Rhonda added that he was a candidate from “Montgomery.” All three of us reported truthfully the allegation we saw on the billboard. Similarly, the accusation above Jesus on the cross is the same in all four narratives—“the King of the Jews.”

Matthew: “This is Jesus **the King of the Jews**” (27:37).

Mark: “**The King of the Jews**” (15:26).

Luke: “This is **the King of the Jews**” (23:38).

John: “Jesus of Nazareth, **the King of the Jews**” (19:19).

The only variation in the inscription is in the personal name of Jesus. This alleged contradiction is easily explained by acknowledging that John recorded the full inscription, while the other writers assumed all to understand the personal name, and therefore simply

focused on the accusation on which the crucifixion was based. The accusation was not that this man was Jesus of Nazareth, since there was no controversy regarding His name, nor His hometown. It was a known fact that the man crucified between the two thieves was indeed “Jesus of Nazareth.” Somewhat like the controversial accusation mentioned regarding John Doe, the key charge levied against Jesus was that He was “the King of the Jews,” and this title was mentioned by all four gospel writers.

Also involved in this alleged problem regarding the accusation that appeared on the cross is the fact that the superscription was written in three different languages, and translation may have been involved in some instances. According to John, the title was “written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin” (John 19:20; cf. Luke 23:38). Pilate is said to have written the inscription (John 19:19), and he (or whomever he ordered to write the inscription—cf. John 19:1) could have written a slightly different wording in each of the languages according to his proficiency in each language, or according to how much time he wanted to spend writing each one. Furthermore, as Albert Barnes noted: “One evangelist may have translated it from the Hebrew, another from the Greek, a third from the Latin, and a fourth may have translated one of the inscriptions a little differently from another.”¹²

The inscription on the cross of Christ mentioned by all four gospel writers proves yet again, not that the Bible contains discrepancies, but that the narrators wrote independently. They did not rely upon one another to ensure that their facts were exactly correct. Rather, their

accurate accounts of Jesus' life stand solidly upon the "inspiration of God" (2 Timothy 3:16).

"MEET ME IN GALILEE"

Matthew 28:7,10

One question that skeptics frequently ask regarding various events in the Bible is "Why?" Why did God create the Sun on day four after creating light on day one? Why did God command the Israelites to walk around Jericho one time a day for six days, and seven times on the seventh day before the city was destroyed? Why did Jesus choose Judas as an apostle if He knew that he would betray Him? And so on. Since skeptics are unable to find legitimate internal contradictions about various occurrences in Scripture that seem peculiar to them, they simply ask questions beginning with "Why...?" in hopes that doubt will take hold of the Bible reader—seeds of doubt that they hope eventually will grow into full-fledged disbelief in the trustworthiness of the Bible.

One question I was asked by a skeptic is **why** an angel (and later Jesus) informed Mary Magdalene and the other women who came with her to the tomb of Jesus on the day of His resurrection, to tell the disciples to go meet Him in Galilee? If Jesus was going to meet the disciples in Jerusalem that very day anyway, why did He instruct the women saying, "Go and tell My brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me" (28:10)? Allegedly, "If Jesus was going to meet with the disciples at Jerusalem first, then there was no need for Jesus to tell Mary to remind the disciples about the scheduled meeting (cf. Matthew 26:32) in Galilee. Jesus

Himself could have informed them about the Galilean meeting when He appeared to them later that evening in Jerusalem.”

Although Christians are not obligated to answer knowledgably every single question beginning with “Why...” (cf. Isaiah 55:8-9; Romans 11:33), most of the time either the Scriptures or reason reveal(s) logical answers. Such is the case with the question concerning why Jesus commanded Mary Magdalene and the other women to tell the disciples to go meet the Lord in Galilee when the Lord was going to appear to them that evening in Jerusalem anyway.

Before consulting Scripture to answer this question, consider the following illustration. Your boss informs you at your house on a Thursday night that he has scheduled a meeting for you, your ten coworkers, and numerous others the following week beginning on Monday in Atlanta. However, on Friday morning, you awake to hear on the news that your boss was in a terrible accident on his way home from your house the previous night. He was run off of the road by a drunk driver, after which his car rolled down an embankment while he was thrown out of the front windshield. Reports are that he died in the ambulance on the way to the hospital. On Sunday afternoon, however, your son returns from visiting a friend in the hospital who just had knee surgery. He informs you that, to his surprise, he saw your boss checking out of the hospital—**alive!** Your son says: “He told me that he would meet you in Atlanta tomorrow.” What would your reaction be? Although your son is a trustworthy teenager, how could your boss really be alive? And even if somehow he was

resuscitated from an apparent death, surely he would not be checking out of the hospital already? Surely your son was just mistaken. And surely the meeting is not still going to occur?

If your boss got word about your unbelief in his well-being, do you think it would be appropriate for him either to contact you, or visit you, and show you firsthand that he is well? Of course it would. Even though he indicated to you on Thursday night, and to your son on Sunday, that he would meet you in Atlanta for a business meeting with dozens of others, it still would be appropriate for him to contact you (again) and let you know that the meeting is still on schedule. No one would see his “repetitious” testimony and presence in your home as something superfluous considering the ordeal he had just recently experienced.

If the skeptic can see the rationality of this illustration, one wonders why he cannot see the rationality of Jesus appearing to the disciples **in Jerusalem**, even after informing Mary Magdalene to remind them to meet Him **in Galilee**. The disciples had just seen their Lord arrested, tortured, and crucified. They were scared for their own lives. They “forsook him” during His arrest in the garden (Mark 14:50; cf. 14:27). Peter denied knowing Him three times, just a short while later (Mark 14:66-72). And, on the day of Jesus’ resurrection, John recorded how the disciples (except Thomas) met behind closed doors “for fear of the Jews” (John 20:19). These men obviously were traumatized by all of the events of the past 72 hours. “[T]hey mourned and wept” for the loss of their leader (Mark 16:10). They were mentally and emotionally troubled.

Then entered Mary Magdalene and the other women who told the apostles (and those who were gathered together with them) that they had seen Jesus—**alive** (Luke 24:9-10)! Sadly, the disciples rejected the women's testimony. Luke recorded: "[T]heir words seemed to them like idle tales, and they did not believe them" (24:11). The apostles doubted that Jesus was alive (cf. Luke 24:38). Later on that same day, Mark wrote that two other disciples informed them of Jesus' resurrection, but "they did not believe them either" (16:12-13). In fact, when Jesus appeared to the apostles (except Thomas) on the evening of His resurrection, He said: "Why are you troubled? And why do **doubts** arise in your hearts? Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have" (Luke 24:38-39). The apostles later reported Jesus' appearance to their fellow apostle, Thomas, who had missed the opportunity to see, touch, and eat with Him. Like his fellow apostles, who previously had rejected the eyewitness testimony, Thomas responded, saying, "Unless **I see** in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will **not** believe" (John 20:25).

Multiply many times the doubts you would have of seeing your employer for a meeting three days after he was ejected through the front windshield of his car and reported on the news to be dead. Only then might you come close to the frazzled mindset of the unbelieving apostles.

Why did Jesus appear to the apostles in Jerusalem before meeting with them (and many others—cf. 1 Corinthians 15:6) a three-days' journey away in Galilee? Both

common sense and the Scriptures indicate that it was due to their unbelief in His resurrection. Jesus wanted to ensure that they believed He had risen!

SHOULD WE FEAR GOD?

2 Timothy 1:7; 1 John 4:18; Deuteronomy 6:13

The word “fear” appears in the New King James Version of the Bible 367 times. In some of these occurrences, the text is expounding upon “the fear of the Lord” and its relationship to wisdom (cf. Job 28:28; Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 1:7). In numerous other passages of Scripture, one can read where God commands that His creation fear Him (Leviticus 25:17; Deuteronomy 6:13; Matthew 10:28; et al.). It is widely known that one of the repeated truths in the Bible is that God’s “mercy is on those who fear Him” (Luke 1:50). It also is well known, however, that in the New Testament Paul informed Timothy that “God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7). The apostle John went even further, saying, “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment” (1 John 4:18).

Some time ago, Steve Wells highlighted 2 Timothy 1:7 and 1 John 4:18 (verses indicating Christians are **not** to fear), and placed alongside these verses 26 Bible references that specify **we are to fear God**. He then asked, “Should we fear God?” Obviously, it was Wells’ intent to convince his readers that the Bible’s discussion of fear is contradictory. How can a person fear God and not fear God at the same time? Although this is a question one might think that a skeptic never would raise due to its seemingly obvious answer, it nevertheless

requires a response.

In most cases, when the Bible praises man's fearlessness and his need to move beyond fear, it is using the term in a different context than the way it is used when referring to "the fear of the Lord." The passage in 2 Timothy 1:7 is not teaching that we should not fear God; rather, Paul was instructing Timothy that we should not fear **for our lives** while doing the Lord's work. God wants His children to be fearless in their service to Him. Such courage will help His people "not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord" (2 Timothy 1:8). Like the Israelites who were instructed by Joshua and Caleb not to fear the people of Canaan (Numbers 14:8-9), Christians must not fear their adversaries around them, nor the task before them. God expects His people to understand that "He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

But what about 1 John 4:18? Is it not referring to fearing God? A person must keep in mind that the term "fear" is used in various senses in Scripture (and whenever different senses of the same word or thing are under discussion, the skeptic's allegations hold no value). Fear can mean terror, dread, and horror; but it also can mean awe, reverence, and respect. The "perfect love" about which John writes casts out the former, not the latter. As the late Guy N. Woods noted:

"Fear," as here contemplated, is not that which the Psalmist declares is "the beginning of wisdom" (Psalm 111:10), a reverential, godly fear, which shrinks from any action which would displease God, the fear which an obedient child has for a loving father;...but **terror, dread, slavish fear,**

such as is characteristic of a slave in the presence of a cruel and heartless master.... The fear that is absent from genuine love is the fear of the whip in the hands of the master; the dread of the chastisement which comes to the disobedient. Perfect (mature) love casts out such fear, because it cannot exist where genuine love is.¹³

In Malachi 2:5, the prophet linked fear and reverence together in describing the attitude that Levi (whose name here represents the entire priestly class) possessed at one point in the past. Malachi stated: “So he feared Me and was reverent before My name.” The Hebrew word *yare’*, frequently translated “fear,” also means “religious awe.” For this reason, some modern versions (like the NASB) have translated Malachi 2:5 thusly: “[S]o he **revered** Me, and **stood in awe** of My name.”

Today, God expects His people to revere Him, not panic at the thought of Him as a slave might fear his cruel master. Furthermore, one way a Christian walks “in the fear of the Lord” (Acts 9:31) is by boldly following in the steps of the Savior, Who stood fearless in the face of His adversaries.

WILL EARTH “BE BURNED UP” OR “ABIDE FOREVER”?

2 Peter 3:10; Ecclesiastes 1:4

According to certain Bible critics, 2 Peter 3:10 contradicts Ecclesiastes 1:4. Whereas Peter wrote, “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both **the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up,**”

Solomon declared in the book of Ecclesiastes, “One generation passes away, and another generation comes; but **the earth abides forever.**” Is one of these two declarations an “erroneous statement” as skeptics contend,¹⁴ or is there a logical explanation regarding why the “burned up” Earth is said to “abide forever”?

The answer to this question actually is very simple: the Bible frequently uses the term “forever” (Hebrew *olam*) in a more limited sense, to mean “a **long** duration,” and not necessarily a literal **eternal** existence.¹⁵ Consider a few examples:

- Prior to the Israelites’ departure from Egypt, Moses instituted the Passover. He then added: “And you shall observe this thing as an ordinance for you and your sons **forever**” (Exodus 12:24).
- Under the Law of Moses, when a servant pledged allegiance to his master, the master would “take an awl and thrust it through” the servant’s ear to the door (Deuteronomy 15:17). This was a sign that the servant would work for his master “**forever**” (15:17).
- After the Israelites visited King Rehoboam and petitioned him to lighten their burdens (2 Chronicles 10:3-4), the elders advised the king to be kind to the people and they would be his servants “**forever**” (10:7).

Like so many words throughout Scripture that have more than one meaning, the term “forever” must be understood in light of the context in which it is found. The above-mentioned passages clearly use “forever” in a limited sense, referring to a “long duration” and not literal unendingness. What’s more, considering how many words (e.g., “forever”) have more than one meaning, skeptics cannot justifiably label passages like

Ecclesiastes 1:4 and 2 Peter 3:10 contradictory unless they can prove both passages are using the word in the exact same sense. The proper understanding of these passages is that though the Earth has outlasted countless generations (lasting “forever” in limited sense), one day the Earth “will be burned up.”

Finally, we frequently use the word “forever” in a limited sense in the 21st century (e.g., “That lecture lasted forever!”). One wonders why skeptics would disallow the Bible writers the same freedom of expression.

ENDNOTES

Chapter 1

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2. Simon Greenleaf (1995), *The Testimony of the Evangelists* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Classics), p. 16, emp. added.
3. *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary* (2013), www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary, italics in orig.
4. D.R. Dungan (1888), *Hermeneutics* (Delight, AR: Gospel Light), reprint, pp. 300-309.
5. J.W. McGarvey (1886), *Evidences of Christianity* (Cincinnati, OH: Standard), 2:32, emp. added.
6. Mark A. Smith (1995), “Gospel Wars: Galilee-vs-Jerusalem,” <http://www.jcnot4me.com/Items/contradictions/GALILEE-vs-JERUSALEM.htm>.
7. Genesis chapter 1 details the history of the six days of Creation. Chapter 3 describes the history of the Fall of Man. Chapters 6-9 record the history of Noah and the Flood, while chapter 11

gives various historical details of what occurred at the Tower of Babel. Although some liberal scholars have attempted to rationalize a non-historical view of Genesis 1-11 in an attempt to hang on to central components of the Theory of Evolution (e.g., billions of years of time), the fact is, critical analysis of Genesis (and especially of Genesis 1-11), confirms what most people can easily detect from even a superficial investigation of the book—it was written as a real history, and not as a myth or an exaggerated legend. For more information, see Dave Miller (2020) “Genesis: Myth or History?” apologeticspress.org/genesis-myth-or-history-5793/.

8. “Deuteronomy” is derived from the Greek name (*Deuteronomion*) given to the fifth book of Moses in the Septuagint. The Hebrew title for Deuteronomy is *Haddebbharim*, meaning “the words,” which is derived from the first line of the book.
9. Dungan, p. 166.
10. Admittedly, some make various distinctions between letters and epistles (contending that epistles, rather than letters, are more formal literary works that were written more for posterity). It is not my purpose to make this distinction here, nor to propose which New Testament epistles are more or less formal. The purpose here is more general in nature.
11. Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart (2014), *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), p. 60, italics in orig.
12. The “Minor” prophetic books are known as such, not because they are less important, but because they are much shorter in overall length.
13. Admittedly, other challenges exist, including the difficulty in attempting to discover the original chronological order of the various oracles.
14. Their cultural, political, and overall historical backgrounds were vastly different from our own. The three centuries covered in the prophetic books of Isaiah-Malachi (760 B.C.-460 B.C.) were characterized by “unprecedented political, military, economic, and social upheaval” (Fee and Stuart, p. 197).
15. T. Longman III (1996), “Poetry,” *New Bible Dictionary* (Downers

- Grove, IL: Intervarsity), p. 938.
16. Ibid., pp. 938-939.
 17. Clinton Lockhart (1915), *Principles of Interpretation* (Fort Worth: S.H. Taylor), p. 55.
 18. E.g., Psalm 19:1.
 19. E.g., Psalm 19:7-11.
 20. E.g., Proverbs 12:1-2.
 21. I am not opposed to poetry; it's simply not a skill or passion of mine. Those who are more creative and artistic than myself doubtlessly have a much greater appreciation for poetry in general. Hopefully this admiration and passion will lead those individuals to be even more appreciative of the beauty of biblical poetry through which God communicated the most important and beautiful truths the world has ever known.
 22. Think of the many songs you know "by heart."
 23. Fee and Stuart, p. 205.
 24. "Hyperbole" (2016), *Merriam-Webster*, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hyperbole>.
 25. For a brief discussion on whether or not babies are born sinners, see Moises Pinedo (2009), "Are Children Born with Sin?" Apologetics Press, www.apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=11&article=2697. See also Kyle Butt (2003), "Do Babies Go To Hell When They Die?" Apologetics Press, <https://www.apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=13&article=1201>.
 26. Clinton Lockhart (1915), *Principles of Interpretation* (Fort Worth: S.H. Taylor), p. 108, italics in orig.
 27. See Steve Wells (2021), <http://www.skepticsannotatedbible.com/contra/judge.html>. See also Donald Morgan (2021), "Bible Inconsistencies – Bible Contradictions?" The Secular Web, https://infidels.org/library/modern/donald_morgan/contradictions.html.
 28. Of course, one cannot help but immediately ask if those who

- parrot this claim actually disobey their own interpretation and “judge” someone whom they deem as “judging” them.
29. If so, skeptics rightly contend that this contradicts what other verses teach.
 30. For a brief explanation of Matthew 7:6, see Wayne Jackson (2017), “Concerning ‘Dogs’ and ‘Hogs,’ *Christian Courier*, <https://www.christiancourier.com/articles/1343-concerning-dogs-and-hogs>.
 31. 1 Corinthians 5:1-11; Ephesians 5:11; Romans 16:17; 2 John 9-11.
 32. Wayne Jackson (1988), “Principles of Bible Prophecy,” *Reason & Revelation*, 8[7]:27-30, July, emp. added.
 33. Leon Morris (1995), *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), revised edition p. 202, emp. added.
 34. “Attributed to Robert McCloskey, U.S. State Department spokesman, by Marvin Kalb, CBS reporter, in TV Guide, 31 March 1984, citing an unspecified press briefing during the Vietnam war,” <http://quotes.yourdictionary.com/author/quote/601648>.

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2. Dennis McKinsey (2000), *Biblical Errancy* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books).
3. R. Paul Buchman (2011), “1001 Contradictions and Discrepancies in the Christian Bibles,” <http://www.1001biblecontradictions.com/index.html>.
4. Atheist Dan Barker has alleged that the Bible paints a contradictory picture of God and His knowledge or lack thereof. In his 2009 debate with my colleague Kyle Butt, Barker said: “Look what God said after he stopped it [Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac—EL]. He said: ‘Lay not thine hand upon the lad,

neither do thou any thing unto him: for I know now, I now know, that you fear God, seeing that you have not withheld thy son.' I know now? I thought God knew everything. The Bible says God knows the future but here He is saying, 'I didn't even know.' The Bible even says that God searches and understands all the imaginations of the heart. The God of the Bible knows the future. The God of the Bible does not know the future."

5. Henry M. Morris (1976), *The Genesis Record* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker), p. 272.
6. Morris, p. 342.
7. Robert Jamieson, et al. (1997), *Jamieson, Fausset, Brown Bible Commentary* (Electronic Database: Biblesoft).
8. Dan Barker (1992), *Losing Faith in Faith* (Madison, WI: Freedom From Religion Foundation), p. 196; Dan Barker (2008), *godless* (Berkeley, CA: Ulysses Press), p. 230; see also the *The Butt/Barker Debate: Does the God of the Bible Exist?*
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13. See Kyle Butt and Dave Miller (2003), "Who Hardened Pharaoh's Heart?" <https://apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=11&article=1205>.
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24. See J. Paul Tanner (1997), "The Message of the Song of Songs," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 154:158, April.
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26. R.V.G. Tasker (1967), *The Epistle of James* (London: Tyndale Press), p. 106.
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28. C.S. Lewis (1952), *Mere Christianity* (New York: Simon and Schuster), pp. 45-46, italics in org.
29. Hebrews 5:8; 1 Peter 2:21ff.; Romans 5:8-10; cf. 1 John 4:9-10.

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7. See Colin Chapman (1981), *The Case for Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), p. 29; Gary R. Habermas (1996), *The Historical Jesus* (Joplin, MO: College Press), pp. 193-196.
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36. See *The Anvil Rings* volume 1, chapter 2.

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48. Ker Than (2007), "Huge 'Ocean' Discovered Inside Earth," *LiveScience.com*, http://www.livescience.com/environment/070228_beijing_anomaly.html, emp. added.
49. Ibid., emp. added.
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51. As well as Psalm 90:10.
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54. Dave Miller (2002), "Did Jesus Go to Hell? Did He Preach to Spirits in Prison?" Apologetics Press, <https://www.apologeticspress.org/APContent.aspx?category=10&article=851&topic=71>, emp. added.

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55. See chapter 5.
56. Ibid.
57. Genesis 11:10, 7:6, and 8:13 seem to indicate that Shem was not the firstborn of Noah, but was born two years later. If so, the number 500 represents the year in which Noah **began** having sons. A comparison of Genesis 11:26, Acts 7:4, Genesis 11:32, and 12:4 suggests that Abraham was not the firstborn son in his family either. Likely, Shem, Abraham, Arphaxad (Genesis 11:10; 10:22) and others are all mentioned first for the same reason—because they are Messianic ancestors, not because they were necessarily the firstborn sons of their fathers.
- Interestingly, numerous other Messianic ancestors, such as Seth, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, and Perez, were not firstborn sons. Lest someone accuse Moses of dishonesty when recording these genealogies, we must remember that “the year of begetting a first son, known in the Old Testament as ‘the beginning of strength,’ was an important year in the life of the Israelite (Gen. 49:3; Deut. 21:17; Psa. 78:51; and Psa. 105:36). It is this year...and not the year of the birth of the Messianic link, that is given in each case in Genesis 11” [John C. Whitcomb and Henry M. Morris (1961), *The Genesis Flood* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker), p. 480.]
58. See 1 Chronicles 1-11 where people are listed (e.g., the children and grandchildren of Zerubbabel—3:19ff.) who would likely not even be born until sometime after the close of the events recorded in 2 Chronicles; cf. Ezra 1-5. See also Genesis 10-11.
59. Dungan, p. 195, emp. added.
60. Which is unproven at best and outright wrong at worst.
61. From “An Examination of Noah’s Ark and the Global Flood” (2004), *Reason & Revelation*, 24[12]:111, December, by Brad Harrub and Bert Thompson.
62. Michelle Andrews (2004), “Author, Author?” *U.S. News & World Report—Special Collector’s Edition*, released in the fall of 2004, pp. 28.
63. This section is from an article titled “Legends of the Flood,” originally co-authored with my esteemed colleague Kyle

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 65. Ibid., pp. 103,249.
 66. John William Dawson (1895), *The Historical Deluge in Relation to Scientific Discovery* (Chicago, IL: Revell), pp. 4ff.
 67. See James Perloff (1999), *Tornado in a Junkyard: The Relentless Myth of Darwinism* (Arlington, MA: Refuge Books), p. 167.
 68. Perloff, p. 168.
 69. Schoch, p. 103.
 70. Schoch, p. 104.
 71. Schoch, p. 252.
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 80. Dawson, pp. 4ff.

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19. Morris, p. 167.
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6. See Gleason L. Archer (1982), *An Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), p. 110.

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17. Robert Jamieson, et al. (1997), *Jamieson, Fausset, Brown Bible Commentary* (Electronic Database: Biblesoft).
18. See Kyle Butt (2003), “Do Babies Go to Hell When They Die?” Apologetics Press, <http://www.apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=13&article=1201>.
19. Dave Miller (2009), “Did God Order the Killing of Babies?” Apologetics Press, <http://www.apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=13&article=2810>.
20. Kyle Butt (2009), “Is God Immoral for Killing Innocent Children?” Apologetics Press, <http://www.apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=11&article=260>.
21. Exodus 20:16; Leviticus 19:11; Proverbs 6:16-19; Ephesians 4:25; Colossians 3:9; Revelation 21:8.

22. Romans 3:23; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:22.
23. Inspired spokesmen and writers communicated the Spirit's supernatural revelation accurately as He "carried" them "along" (2 Peter 1:20-21, ESV), but inspiration was not a 24-hour-a-day, supernatural process that protected inspired men from ever being able to sin.
24. Keep in mind that God often did **not** stop to specify when individuals lied (and sinned) in Scripture (cf. Genesis 3:4; 4:9; 27:24; 37:31-35; 1 Samuel 21:2), any more than He always paused to specify when someone performed a righteous or courageous act.
25. "This passage clearly affirms that the state—civil government—has the God-ordained responsibility to keep law and order, and to protect its citizens against evildoers. The word 'sword' in this passage refers to capital punishment. God wants duly constituted civil authority to invoke the death penalty upon citizens who commit crimes worthy of death" [Dave Miller (2002), "Capital Punishment and the Bible," <https://apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=7&article=683>].
26. See Kyle Butt (2009), "Killing, Murder, and the Bible," <http://apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=13&article=2794>.
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28. J.H. Thayer (1977 reprint), *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker), p. 676.
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30. Or is it possible that when Elisha said to the Syrians, "I will bring you to the man whom you seek," that **he meant** "the king of Israel" (whether the Syrians understood him or not)? Elisha may have been thinking, "These people are at war with the king of Israel, not me. The king is who they really want, so that's where I will take them."
31. This scenario reminds me of the "rape-exception" that is continually brought up in discussions about abortion and the value of human life. Rape, of course, is a terribly repulsive sin, which

warrants the most extreme forms of punishment. However, one terrible act (rape) does not authorize another (the murder of an unborn child). Furthermore, the “rape-exception” is used by many in hopes of validating all abortions, not just “the exception.” Similarly, many people seem to think that a violent intruder into our lives gives Christians the “right to lie,” yet again, one wrong does not make another wrong “right.”

32. Thayer, p. 676, emp. added.
33. Thus, the condemnation of “deception” in Scripture (e.g., 2 Timothy 3:13) would be a condemnation of dishonest deception or sinfully motivated deception.

Chapter 7

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6. Dennis McKinsey (2000), *Biblical Errancy* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus), p. 61.
7. J.H. Thayer (1958 reprint), *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark), p. 94.
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9. For a lengthy discussion of John 3:16, see *The Anvil Rings*, volume 3, pp. 109-127.

10. For a lengthy discussion of Ephesians 2:8-9, see *The Anvil Rings*, volume 3, pp. 93-109.
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14. See "Prayer of Salvation" (no date), http://www.jesussaves.cc/prayer_of_salvation.html.
15. Steven F. Staten (2001), "The Sinner's Prayer," <http://www.chicagochurch.org/spirituallibrary/thesinnersprayer.htm>.
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17. "How to Become a Christian" (no date), *The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association*, <http://www.billygraham.org/believe/howtobecomeachristian.asp>.
18. E.g., "The thief on the cross was saved, yet not baptized. Thus, we don't have to be baptized to be saved." For a full refutation of this line of reasoning, see Dave Miller (2003), "The Thief on the Cross," <https://apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=11&article=1274>.
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22. "Water Baptism is not for Salvation," (no date), Southwest Baptist Church, Wichita Falls, TX, <http://www.southwest-baptist.org/baptism.htm>, emp. in orig.

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24. J.H. Thayer (1977 reprint), *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker), p. 248, emp. added. Cf. Wayne Jackson (1997), “The Role of ‘Works’ in the Plan of Salvation,” *Christian Courier*, 32:47, April.
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27. Steve Wells (2013), *The Skeptic’s Annotated Bible* (SAB), p. 1627.

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Chapter 9

1. After all, as the late atheistic astronomer Carl Sagan, put it: “The Cosmos is all that is or ever was or ever will be” [Cosmos, 1980

- (New York: Random House), p. 4]. And, since a miracle is an extraordinary event that demands a supernatural explanation, “no such event ever could occur in a world where only natural forces operate.” Once a person denies God and the miracle of Creation, “then he or she is forced to deny that miracles of any kind can occur” [Kyle Butt (2001), “Is It a Miracle?,” www.apologeticspress.org/APContent.aspx?category=22&article=555].
2. See [apologeticspress.org](http://www.apologeticspress.org) for a plethora of information on this subject.
 3. See Kyle Butt (2000), “The Historical Christ—Fact or Fiction,” *Reason and Revelation*, 20[1]:4-5, January, <http://www.apologeticspress.org/articles/157>.
 4. See Kyle Butt (2004a), “Archaeology and the Old Testament,” *Reason and Revelation*, 24[3]:17-23, March, <http://www.apologeticspress.org/articles/2502>. See also Kyle Butt (2004b), “Archaeology and the New Testament,” *Reason and Revelation*, 24[10]:89-95, October, <http://www.apologeticspress.org/articles/2591>.
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 8. *Ibid.*, 9:8:6.
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18. Curr, 98:471-472.

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5. Chaim Rabin (1974), "The Origin of the Hebrew Word *Pilegeš*," *Journal of Jewish Studies*, 25:362.
6. See Curt van den Heuvel (2003), "Matthew Misunderstood an Old Testament Prophecy," *New Testament Problems*, <http://www.2think.org/hundredsheep/bible/ntprob.shtml>.
7. "Bible Contradictions" (no date), *Capella's Guide to Atheism*, <http://web2.iadfw.net/capella/aguide/contrad.htm#num%20animals%20Jesus%20rode>.
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9. A.T. Robertson (1930), *Word Pictures in the New Testament—Volume 1* (Nashville, TN: Broadman), 1:167
 10. John Kesler (2003), “Jesus Had Two Asses,” <http://exposed.faithweb.com/kesler2.html>.
 11. See chapter one for more information. Cf. J.W. McGarvey (1886), *Evidences of Christianity* (Cincinnati, OH: Standard), 2:32).
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 13. Guy N. Woods (1979), *A Commentary on the New Testament Epistles of Peter, John, and Jude* (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate), pp. 304-305, emp. in orig.
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*This index specifically highlights only those biblical passages that directly relate to various criticisms of skeptics discussed in this volume.

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2:25–177-182

2 Peter

3:10–298-300

1 John

3:20–41-44

4:8–52-64

4:18–296-298

The Anvil Rings

VOLUME 2

Critically examining one's faith and taking the time and effort to find answers to difficult questions is a good (and necessary) thing to do if a person wants to have a fortified faith. Far too often, Christians find themselves unprepared to combat the charges levied against the Bible by infidels and skeptics. Like volumes 1 and 3 of *The Anvil Rings*, this volume helps arm the Christian for combat by logically answering numerous Bible questions.

- Does God really know everything?
- Did Jesus condone law-breaking?
- How many animals of each kind did Noah take on the ark?
- Why are three different answers given to the question regarding what a person must do to be saved?
- Did Jesus cleanse the Temple at the beginning or the end of His ministry?
- Did God approve of Rahab's lie?

The *Anvil Rings* series was written in order to assist Christians in their fight against skepticism, and to help non-Christians see how logical it is to believe in an inspired, inerrant Bible. Whether you are a plumber or a preacher, a biochemist or a bricklayer, a student or a secretary, when questions are raised regarding an alleged contradiction between two or more passages of Scripture, this series can assist you in your search for, and defense of, the Truth.

About the Author

Eric Lyons is a native of Muskogee, Oklahoma, and is a graduate of Freed-Hardeman University, where he earned a B.S. degree with a double major in Bible and history, and an M.Min. Eric has served as a full-time member of the Bible Department at Apologetics Press since 2001. He has authored or co-authored more than 20 books and has recorded numerous Bible videos.



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