

# The Anvil Rings

VOLUME 3



ANSWERS TO ALLEGED BIBLE DISCREPANCIES

**Eric Lyons**

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**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

A typical conversation between a Christian and a skeptic might sound something like this:

Christian: “Hello, friend. I was wondering if you would be interested in having a Bible study?”

Skeptic: “I don’t believe the Bible is God’s word, so I don’t think so.”

Christian: “Do you mind if I ask why you don’t believe the Bible is from God?”

Skeptic: “If the Bible were really from God, it wouldn’t have all those contradictions in it.”

Christian: “Oh. What contradictions are you referring to? Would you mind pointing out a couple for me?”

Skeptic: “There are so many that it’s hard to think of just one or two. Let me pull up some on my phone.”

Christian: “Okay.”

Skeptic: “Let me see.... Oh, here we are. I’ll rattle off 10 for you from this very enlightening, atheistic web-site. (1) Exodus 6:3 says that God did not reveal His name Jehovah to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, yet the book of Genesis repeatedly says He did. (2) Leviticus 11:13-19 classifies bats as birds (and everyone knows bats are **not** birds). (3) Ephesians 2:8-9 says that a person is saved by grace and not works, while James 2:24 says ‘a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.’ How does that make any sense? Is a person saved by grace, faith, or works? (4)....”

Christian: “Wow! That’s a lot of criticism of the Bible. Would you be willing to look more closely at these passages with me to see if those contradictions are actually contradictions?”

To my Christian friends, let me remind you that one of the main reasons unbelievers reject the supernatural inspiration of the Bible and refuse to become Christians is because they believe that Scripture contains errors—that the Bible writers made any number of manmade mistakes in penning the Book. Thus, if you want to help teach someone the Gospel in our increasingly secular society, it is very likely that one of the first things you will need to do is answer their questions and concerns about the Bible itself. After all, you are asking them to make radical changes in their lives based upon what “the Bible says.” Why would they follow a Book that they believe to be fallible at best and full of lies at worst?

To my non-Christian friends, I beg you to take more than a cursory glance at the Bible verses in question. Many

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through the centuries have treated the Bible unjustly, yet common decency demands that we attempt to examine it fairly. It is universally honorable to draw justifiable, coherent conclusions and to make “righteous judgments” (John 7:24) about people and the things they communicate. Just as you reasonably want people to take the time and energy to understand you and to be fair with your words, I humbly ask you to consider some rational explanations to the Bible passages often alleged to be contradictory. Let’s apply the Golden Rule to our efforts at understanding any and all communication, including the Bible itself. “Whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them” (Matthew 7:12). Since everyone wants to be understood in a fair manner, let’s be fair with the Bible.

Although the Bible writers often are **accused** of having written contradictory statements, I am convinced that an honest, in-depth study actually demonstrates that the so-called “contradictions” are merely **accusations** of contradictions and not valid, proven inconsistencies. Differences? For sure. But not discrepancies.

In truth, the various writers of Scripture wrote in astonishing harmony with one another. My hope and prayer is that this third volume of *The Anvil Rings* will be of assistance in helping better understand the consistent harmony of the Bible.

# Chapter 1



## ONE ALL-ENCOMPASSING REASON TO BELIEVE THE BIBLE

How many times have you sat in a class and wondered what in the world the teacher was talking about? How often in high school or college did Mrs. Jones or Professor Brown introduce a subject that you had never heard of before, with words you did not know, and concepts you did not understand? “What does that sentence even mean?” you thought to yourself. “How am I ever going to solve this long, complicated trigonometry problem?” It could be that you felt a little (or a lot) panicked. Perhaps you wanted to give up. But then, you paused, took a deep breath, and cleared your mind. You began the “comprehension process” with the most simple word or step that you **did** understand.

And then you took another small step. And another... Until finally, after a while, you “got it!”

Sometimes it’s also very helpful to begin a study with a short, overall summary. For example, if someone (who doesn’t know anything about the Bible) asks you to tell them all about it, you could begin the conversation with something simple: “The Bible is about God’s grace and man’s response (obedient or disobedient).” You might say, “Scripture is about sin, salvation, and submission to the sacrificial Savior.” Or, you could simply say, “The Bible is all about Jesus. The Old Testament predicted His coming, and the New Testament tells us that (a) He, indeed, did come...to save us from sin, and (b) He is coming once more to judge the world. So, we need to serve Jesus—the King of kings—daily!” These summary statements don’t explain everything, but they do help get students into the right frame of mind. It’s like making sure we “see the forest” (at least briefly) before focusing on “a tree.”

Bible study is simply better when we continually keep the overall main theme of Scripture in mind. Likewise, a consideration of the proofs for Bible inspiration<sup>1</sup> is also better—more simple and memorable—when we **boil it all down**.

## INSPIRATION CLAIMS AND THE NECESSITY OF EVIDENCE

If God exists (and there is ample evidence that He does),<sup>2</sup> then it is reasonable to conclude that God (1) could **freely choose** to communicate to His human creation, (2) would have the **ability** (as the omnipotent Creator) to communicate to man, (3) **would choose** to reveal important infor-

mation to His human creation if He expected anything from them (e.g., faith, commitment, obedience, worship, etc.), and (4) would reasonably **inform** humanity that the message was, indeed, from Him (i.e., He would not leave it up to mere guesswork as to whether or not He had ever communicated to mankind).

Even though we would expect to find that any book produced by God would claim divine inspiration, any rational person knows that **such a claim does not prove anything in and of itself**. It is a necessary trait of inspiration, but it is in no way a sufficient trait. Simply because a book or writing claims divine inspiration is not positive proof of its inspiration. Any person could stand in front of an audience and claim to be the President of the United States. In fact, he could make that claim hundreds of times. But his many claims to the presidency would fail to prove his case unless he could provide sufficient evidence.

When Jesus revealed Himself to the world as the Son of God at about the age of 30 (Luke 3:23), He did not expect people to believe Him simply because **He said** He was the Messiah. On the contrary, Jesus said, “**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 10:37-38). If the Messiah was not to be trusted merely based upon **claims** of messiahship, neither should the Bible. Again, though the claim of inspiration is important (and expected if the Bible is the Word of God), **mere claims prove nothing**.

Those who penned the Bible did not expect the world to receive their writings as God’s Word simply because they

claimed they were. The Bible writers insisted that their writings were not based on imaginary, unverifiable people and events, but instead were grounded on solid, verifiable facts. The apostle Peter 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” (2 Peter 1:16). In his introduction to the book of Acts, Luke stated 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). The Bible writers understood and insisted that the information they penned was accurate and factual, and should be accepted, not based on a lack of evidence or a “leap in the dark,” but on an abundance of verifiable proof.

So what is the proof that the Bible is of supernatural origin? Why should an honest truth-seeker come to the conclusion that the Bible is the special revelation from the Creator of the Universe?

## A SIMPLE SUMMARY OF THE PROOF

In short, the main, overarching reason that the Bible is demonstrated to be of divine origin is because **the Bible writers were correct in everything they wrote—about the past, the present, and even the future.** Eighteenth-century English poet Alexander Pope succinctly noted in “An Essay on Criticism” what every rational person knows all too well—**“to err is human.”**<sup>3</sup> Even though we may set high standards for ourselves and learn all that we can, and even though we may put as many safeguards in place as is humanly possible, mistakes will be made; igno-

rance will be revealed; errors will occur. The uninspired, though conscientious, Christian writers at Apologetics Press know this fact all too well. We spend hundreds and hundreds of hours every year researching, writing, proofing, and editing in an **attempt** to get **everything** correct. Yet, inevitably we make grammatical, historical, scientific, geographical, etc. mistakes in nearly everything we publish. Despite our best efforts, we are living proof that “to err is human.”

As great of a historian as Herodotus was, he sometimes erred. As brilliant of a man as Aristotle was, he was terribly incorrect at times.<sup>4</sup> As accomplished a writer as was the eighth-century B.C. Greek poet Homer, sometimes “even good old Homer nods.”<sup>5</sup> It simply is **humanly** impossible to be correct about everything a person says or writes. “**With God,**” however, “**all things are possible**” (Mark 10:27).

Indeed, if an all-knowing, all-powerful God exists, then He could guide even uneducated men to write about events that occurred hundreds or thousands of years **before their time** with complete accuracy. He could “move” (otherwise) ordinary individuals to write flawlessly about any number of **contemporary** people, places, and things (2 Peter 1:20-21). He could even guide men to write about **future** events with perfect accuracy. In truth, the one overarching, all-encompassing reason that a person can come to the rational conclusion that the Bible is “given by inspiration of God” is because the writers of the Bible were amazingly accurate... about **everything**.

## **SKEPTICS UNDERSTAND THIS REASONABLE ARGUMENT (THOUGH THEY DISAGREE WITH OUR CONCLUSION)**

Through the centuries, people have attempted to justify their rejection of the inspiration of the Bible for a number of different reasons, but the most frequently cited “logical” reason why skeptics reject the Bible’s claim of inspiration is because of presumed discrepancies in Scripture. It is alleged that the Bible writers made numerous mistakes in their writings, often contradicting either what another biblical penman wrote, or some known historical, geographical, or scientific fact. A plethora of books and websites dedicated to trumpeting “Bible contradictions” have been published in recent years. For example, Mike Davis, author of *The Atheist’s Introduction to the New Testament*, claimed in the first three pages of his book:

When I started to study the New Testament seriously ...I found it to be filled with more contradictions and inconsistencies than I ever imagined or remembered from my days in Baptist Sunday School.... [Y]ou can use the Bible to prove that the Bible itself is untrustworthy. If you are familiar with these biblical flaws, you can easily prevail in any debate with the typical Christian fundamentalist....

The basic writings of the Christian religion are so full of absurdity, contradiction and discord that the only way to maintain the truth of Christian doctrine is to ignore the Bible itself. Fortunately for most Christian churches, this is not a problem, because most Christians do not read the Bible seriously, and are

woefully unaware of its contents, except for what their preachers tell them on Sunday mornings.<sup>6</sup>

Dan Barker, co-president of the Freedom from Religion Foundation and one of America's most popular atheists, wrote in his book *godless*: “[T]he bible contains hundreds of discrepancies.... **[C]ontradictions underscore the fact that, on balance, the bible is not a reliable source of truth.**”<sup>7</sup> Just five years after Dennis McKinsey released his 550-page *Encyclopedia of Biblical Errancy* (1995), he penned an **850-page** reference guide titled *Biblical Errancy*—a volume that purports to address “virtually every significant topic of Scripture containing errors, contradictions, and fallacies, delineating the problems within each.”<sup>8</sup>

To unbelievers, Bible “errors” are one of the main reasons, if not the chief reason, why they have rejected the Bible as God’s Word. A few years ago, a gentleman wrote our offices at Apologetics Press mentioning why he became an unbeliever: “The turning point for me,” he said, “was when I realized that the Bible was not inerrant.” Another gentleman contacted us some time ago, identified himself as a non-Christian, and indicated that “these Bible discrepancies are one of the biggest factors of my still not being a Christian.” In reaction to a 2010 article that atheist John Loftus wrote on why he rejects the Bible, one responder said, “The chief reason I do no[t] believe the Bible is god’s ‘Word’ is because of biblical errancy. I believe that there are numerous contradictions, errors, and failed prophecies in the Bible.”<sup>9</sup>

Although some Christians have incorrectly argued that inerrancy is not inherent in the inspiration of the Scriptures, the fact is (as the skeptic knows all too well), if the Bible

writers made mistakes—if they contradicted each other’s accounts—then the Bible is not of divine origin. One of the first things that any honest truth-seeker would want to know, if someone came to him claiming to be in possession of revelation from God, is if the “revelation” was factually accurate. The fallibility of the message would be the first indication that it was man-made and not Heaven-sent. On the other hand, factual accuracy would be the **first** thing to expect from any document claiming to be God breathed.

**The skeptic has logically argued** that, **if** the “inspired” apostles and prophets made mistakes in their “inspired” writings, then they were not guided “by inspiration of God.” **Where skeptics have gravely erred**, however, is concluding that the Bible writers actually made mistakes in their penning of Scripture. In truth, the “contradictions” that the Bible writers supposedly made are actually mere presumptions or misinterpretations on the part of the reader.

### **TRIED, TESTED, AND TRUE**

Try it. Test it. And find it to be just so. Water always expands (rather than shrinking) when it freezes. The flame of a match will always go upward (and never downward), regardless of which way you hold the match. Like  $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$ , some things are proven to be true, and should be believed.

When Jesus came to Earth, He was tried, tempted, and tested. Was He really Who He claimed to be? Was He sinless? Was He the Son of God? Though He “was in all points tempted as we are,” He was found to be “without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). Though He was accused by His enemies of being of the devil, He offered flawless proof that He was

the supernatural God from heaven. Those who followed the evidence to its logical conclusion made the rational decision to accept the Truth and follow Jesus.

Similarly, the Bible has been tried and tested over and over again (for the past 2,000 years) and found to be true—to be accurate. Whether addressing a real, historical person from 3,000 years ago (such as King David), ancient cities (like Babylon and Tyre), ancient peoples (such as the Hittites),<sup>10</sup> specific things (like King Hezekiah’s tunnel that has been found in Jerusalem),<sup>11</sup> comparable biblical accounts (such as the independent accounts of Jesus’ resurrection), or even the future (such as the hundreds of prophecies perfectly fulfilled in Jesus Christ),<sup>12</sup> Bible writers have been found to be consistent and correct—repeatedly. Such overall accuracy (especially from such diverse writers) is (a) humanly impossible, and (b) the overall, main reason to believe the Bible is from God.

## **PREPARE YOURSELF TO DEFEND THE BIBLE’S ACCURACY**

What is the **rational** response of unbelievers who hear Christians logically argue that “the main reason we have concluded that the Bible is divinely inspired is because the writers of the Bible wrote free from the kinds of errors that thousands of years of human history has demonstrated normal, uninspired men make in their writings”? They say: “Show us the proof.” And what do they further (and logically) question once various proofs of biblical accuracy are presented? They often question specific Bible passages, which they believe contradict another biblical statement or some known fact. Consequently, in order to fully explain

and reasonably defend the main, overarching reason the Bible is inspired of God (the Bible writers' complete accuracy), we should seriously study those Bible passages that may seem to skeptics and others to be flawed in some way. Consider two different examples.

### **Example: Does God Dwell in Light or Darkness?**

In the 2009 Kyle Butt/Dan Baker debate on the existence of the God of the Bible,<sup>13</sup> atheist Dan Barker spent nearly two-thirds of his opening 15-minute speech alleging that the Bible's portrayal of God is contradictory. Barker alleged several discrepancies (most all of which we have answered in one of the three volumes of *The Anvil Rings* or on the Apologetics Press website), including that God cannot logically dwell in both light and darkness. Twelve minutes and five seconds into his first speech, Barker asserted:

Does God live in light or does God live in darkness?  
First Timothy 6: "The King of kings, Lord of Lords dwelling in the light which no man can approach."  
James 1:17: He's "the Father of lights" and on and on we see God is light. There's no darkness in him at all.  
However, in 1 Kings 8: "Then spake Solomon: 'The Lord said that he would dwell in the thick darkness.'"  
First Samuel 22: "He made darkness pavilions round about Him, dark waters and thick clouds of the sky."  
Psalm 18:11: "He made darkness his secret place." So, God lives in light. God lives in darkness.<sup>14</sup>

Do these verses actually paint a contradictory picture of God? What is an honest Bible student to think?

First, the Bible uses the terms "light" and "darkness" in several ways and in a variety of contexts. God's dwelling

place in the spiritual realm of the heaven of heavens is filled with “unapproachable light” (1 Timothy 6:16), because His unrestrained glory illuminates it (Revelation 21:23). God made light in the physical Universe during the six-day Creation and “called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night” (Genesis 1:5). He made the Sun, Moon, and stars on day four of Creation, thus making Him the “Father of lights” (James 1:17). Jesus was miraculously transfigured before three of His apostles and “His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light” (Matthew 17:2). The psalmist referred to light in the sense of divine instruction: “The entrance of Your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple” (Psalm 119:130). On the other hand, the psalmist referred to those who “do not know, nor...understand,” as those who “walk about in darkness” (Psalm 82:5). While addressing the subjects of sin and righteousness, the apostle John used the terms light and darkness symbolically: “God is light (i.e., holy) and in Him is no darkness (i.e., sin)” (1 John 1:5). This same apostle referred to Jesus as “the Light” throughout his gospel account (1:4-9; 8:12; 9:5; 12:34-36,46), and Matthew recorded that Jesus spoke of His disciples as “the light of the world” (5:14-16), reflectors of His righteousness.

Notice that Barker never hinted at the different ways in which the words “light” and “darkness” are used in Scripture. He simply positioned a phrase like that found in James 1:17 regarding God being the Creator (“Father”) of lights against the poetic statement found in Psalm 18:11 (“He made darkness his secret place”) and expected his listeners to believe they are contradictory. But the fact is, God being the Father of the Sun, Moon, and stars made on day four,

has no bearing whatsoever on the question of whether God dwells in darkness or light. **What** God has created and **where** God dwells are two different things. One cannot fault Scripture when a critic compares apples and oranges. For there to be a legitimate contradiction, the same thing must be under consideration.

Second, the passage in 1 Kings 8:12 that Barker noted (“The Lord said that he would dwell in thick darkness”—KJV) is not discussing God’s dwelling place in the heaven of heavens. First Kings 8:12-13, along with 2 Chronicles 5:13-14, discuss God’s presence in the physical Temple in Jerusalem. Just as “the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle” in the days of Moses (Exodus 40:34), so “the house of the Lord [the Temple], was filled with a cloud” (2 Chronicles 5:13). Similarly, the **highly poetic** wording in Psalm 18 and 2 Samuel 22 (a quotation of Psalm 18) pictures God, not on His majestic, glorious throne in heaven, but as One Who “came down” from heaven (Psalm 18:9), “flew upon the wings of the wind” (18:10), and delivered His servant David from his enemies while making “darkness His secret place” and “His canopy...dark waters” (18:11). As H.C. Leupold commented:

The picture is that of a violent storm—a figure so frequently used in the Scriptures to furnish the accompaniment of God’s approach, He Himself being as it were housed in the storm. From the time of Sinai onward these figures become standard (cf. Exod. 19:16-18; Judg. 5:4,5; Ps. 68:7; 77:16-18; Is. 29:6; 30:27ff.; etc.). As the storm sweeps near, He is in it. The thick storm clouds are the material upon which He rides.<sup>15</sup>

When a person takes the time to carefully inspect Dan Barker's allegation that the Bible paints a contradictory picture of God, the sincere truth-seeker will discover the vacuousness of his charges. Time and again, both in his debate with my colleague Kyle Butt and in his writings, Barker has disregarded the fact that for a legitimate contradiction to exist, one must be referring to the same person, place, or thing, at the same time, and in the same sense.

### **Example: How Were Mary and Elizabeth Related?**

The New Testament contains two genealogies of Christ. Matthew recorded the genealogy of Christ from Abraham to Jesus (1:1-16), while Luke recorded Christ's genealogy from Jesus all the way back to Adam (3:23-38). The differences in the genealogies result from the fact that Matthew gives the genealogy of Jesus through Joseph, while Luke presents the genealogy of Jesus through Mary (cf. Luke 1:30-32). [NOTE: Luke followed the strict Hebrew tradition of mentioning only the names of males. Therefore, in Luke 3, Mary is designated by her husband's name.] Still, some wonder how Mary could be a descendant of David. Skeptic Dennis McKinsey, for example, asked in his journal, *Biblical Errancy*, "If, using the genealogy in Luke, Jesus's claim to descent [*sic*] from David, of the tribe of Judah, is through Mary rather than Joseph, then **how can it be that Mary's cousin, Elizabeth, was descended from the house of Aaron, of the tribe of Levi?**"<sup>16</sup> Do Luke 1:5 and 1:36 imply that Mary could not have been a blood descendant of King David?

First, the King James translation of the term *syngenis* as "cousin" (Luke 1:36) is unwarranted and somewhat mis-

leading to those who normally interpret the word to mean “first cousin.” The Greek term *syngenis* simply means “relative” (NKJV, NASB, NIV) or “kinswoman” (ASV, RSV). It is “a general term, meaning ‘of the same family.’”<sup>17</sup> Thus, Mary and Elizabeth may have been first cousins, or they may have been fourth cousins. All we know for sure is that they were kin.

Second, Mary and Elizabeth could have been from different tribes and still have been first cousins. It may be that their mothers were sisters. Their mothers could have been from the tribe of Judah **or** Levi. As commentator Matthew Henry noted: “Though Elisabeth was, on the father’s side, of the daughters of Aaron (v. 5), yet on the mother’s side she might be of the house of David, for those two families often intermarried, as an earnest of the uniting of the royalty and the priesthood of the Messiah.”<sup>18</sup>

However Mary and Elizabeth were related, tribal heritage among the descendants of Jacob was passed down through fathers, not mothers (cf. Ruth 4:18-22); children were always of their father’s tribe, not their mother’s. Thus, Elizabeth and Mary were descendants of Aaron and David, respectively, by way of their fathers’ ancestry, and not necessarily of their mothers’. Thus, there is no proven contradiction here.

## ONE OF THREE CHOICES

Imagine someone walking up to you and saying in the most sincere, straightforward manner: “Hello. I’m God, the Creator of the Universe.” Such an extraordinary claim is **extremely** rare. Virtually no one makes such a serious assertion of Divinity—at least no sane, honest person. Such

a claim is the most astonishing (and disrespectful) claim a mere human being could make. Most people probably live a lifetime without ever hearing a declaration of being Divine.

Perhaps the second most amazing claim that human beings could make about themselves is not that they are Divine, but that God (the real Divine One) has supernaturally guided them to communicate various things to others. Once again, such a claim is very, very rare. Yet, anyone who reads the Bible cannot help but be impressed with the fact that the Bible is replete with statements that suggest that it is a product from God. Second Timothy 3:16 states: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.” In fact, if you were to search the entire Bible, you would discover that it contains over 2,700 instances in which divine inspiration is claimed.<sup>19</sup>

So what are we to make of these serious claims of divine inspiration by the Bible writers? In truth, it’s pretty simple; we have three choices. The Bible writers were lunatics, liars, or truth-tellers (and the Holy Spirit was the ultimate source of their writings).

The honest person surely must admit that the Bible is not a product of the mentally insane. Did lunatics write the world’s best-selling book in all of history? Did men without any sense pen a book that some of the world’s greatest minds have studied daily for decades? Even many unbelievers have admitted that at least parts of the Bible are full of meaningful, beautiful poetry. The “lunatic” option for the Bible writers is a very illogical choice.

If the Bible was not written by lunatics, then it was written either by the honest or the dishonest. Logically, no other

choices exist. There is no middle ground. It is one or the other. Moses either lied or was truthful when he recorded: “And God spoke all these words...” (Exodus 20:1-3). Moses claimed such divine inspiration literally hundreds of times. Was he a liar, or was he telling the truth? In the New Testament, Paul said that the things he wrote “are the commandments of the Lord” (1 Corinthians 14:37). Was he telling the truth, or was he lying? This same question can be asked of all the writers of the Bible.

The Bible is either a product of God or a product of liars. [If these men were liars, then they repeatedly pronounced their own destruction, for they claimed that lying is sinful and that all impenitent liars will suffer eternal destruction.] The Bible is either the greatest book the world has ever known, or it is one of the worst (with thousands of lies about being from God). The Bible is either a book purely of man-made tales and mistakes, or it is the product of God-inspired men who wrote with astonishing accuracy.

You have to make a choice. But be sure to make an honest, informed decision. Don't just “believe the hype.” Don't hastily base your decision on something as shallow as a meme or a tweet (by skeptics or Christians). Dig in and follow the evidence wherever it leads. We hope and pray that you will seriously consider the explanations for the inerrancy of Scripture in the following chapters and come to appreciate the amazing, all-encompassing reason to believe that the Bible writers were supernaturally guided by God (2 Peter 1:20-21).

# Chapter 2



## THE HARMONY OF THE BIBLE

Suppose you were assigned the very challenging task of helping to write a 1,000-page book on human health and nutrition with 39 other people. The publishers of the book would like for it to become the best, most trusted, and complete resource in the world on “eating and living healthy.” Obviously for that to happen, it must be accurate about most everything. Are eggs good or bad for a person? If good, how many can the average person consume a day? Is coffee harmful or helpful to long-term health? Is it okay to eat red meat, wheat, and granulated sugar? And what about animal milk? How much direct sunshine should a person receive? Is running long distances good for the body, or is regular walking better? Etc.

The book needs to be internally consistent (without contradictions), as well as in harmony with all scientific facts

(whether known or **currently unknown!**). The publishers do not want a book about what scientists thought 10 years ago, what they “think” now, or what they might “think” 100 years from now. They want to print a resource that can stand up to all manner of scrutiny. They want a book that will stand the test of time and be helpful to people for the next 2,000 years (if Jesus has not returned by then).

As if the task does not sound difficult enough, the publishers also inform you that the chosen authors of the book have **a lot** of differences. Ages range from 20 to 80. Several writers are from the U.S., but some are also from Canada, Mexico, and Brazil. Most speak English, but some speak Spanish, and two speak Portuguese. Obviously, there are a number of cultural differences among the writers, including their diets. What’s more, only a few of the chosen authors know that much about nutrition.

To top it all off, there is no financial benefit for working on such a difficult project. No one will get a paycheck. Everything is being done for the good of humanity. So get to work and help the world become physically healthier.

## **HUMANLY IMPOSSIBLE!**

Could such a health and nutrition book, which is intended to be perfectly accurate about everything (including those things **currently unknown**)—could such a book by so many diverse authors really be perfectly harmonious with itself and externally consistent with every physical truth of the natural realm? The answer is a big “NO.” In fact, no one expects such amazing unity, consistency, and perfection from a **manmade** book. There are simply too many things that man does not know and too many things that people (even

medical doctors, nutritionists, and scientists) disagree about for such a health and nutrition book ever to be published.

## BIG DIFFERENCES AMONG THE BIBLE WRITERS

The Bible was penned by approximately 40 different human writers. What's more, these men did not all live at the same time—not even in the same century! Moses lived around 1,500 B.C., Isaiah around 700 B.C., Malachi around 400 B.C., and the New Testament penmen wrote from around A.D. 50-100. Yes, the Bible writers penned Scripture over a period of about **1,600 years!**

The Bible writers were also very different—people from various backgrounds, cultures, and education systems. Moses “was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians” (Acts 7:22), as he grew up as the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter. Amos was a “sheepbreeder and a tender of sycamore fruit” from the town of Tekoa in Judah (Amos 7:14; 1:1). Nehemiah was the butler to a foreign king in the Persian city of Shushan. Solomon was the son of Israel's most famous king (David). Luke was a physician; Matthew a tax collector; Paul a highly educated Jew. And Peter and John were fishermen with little formal education.

Consider also the different kinds of composition in Scripture. Moses wrote a great amount of **history** and **law** in the first five books of the Bible. Many of the proclamations and prophecies in the last 17 books of the Old Testament are in the form of Hebrew **poetry**. David also wrote a lot of beautiful poetry in the songs recorded in the book of Psalms, while Solomon wrote hundreds of proverbs. What's more, most of the New Testament is comprised of **letters**

that were written to a variety of people...in various places... for different immediate purposes.

John wrote his gospel account to prove “that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name” (John 20:30-31). Paul wrote to Timothy saying, “I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church” (1 Timothy 3:15). And Peter wrote a practical letter on Christian living to give hope to persecuted Christians, saying, “I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God in which you stand” (1 Peter 5:12).

## **INCREDIBLE CONSISTENCY DESPITE ALL THE DIFFERENCES**

Despite all of the **different** writers, time periods, places, cultures, languages, audiences, styles, and immediate purposes, the Bible writers did what is humanly impossible: They wrote in perfect harmony with one another. They did not contradict each other, nor any established fact. Their writing has stood the test of time. Indeed, as Isaiah wrote 2,700 years ago, “The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever” (40:8).

### **Harmony of History**

When dishonest people are afraid that others will check on their stories to see if they are true, liars will often be very vague about where they have been, who they were with, and what they were doing. In contrast to manipulative liars, the Bible writers did not attempt to save themselves from scrutiny by being vague about people, places, and events

in the past. Throughout Scripture, the writers noted specific people in specific cities at specific times doing specific things. From Sargon of Assyria taking the city of Ashdod in Isaiah's day (Isaiah 20:1), to the governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate, who delivered Jesus over to be crucified (Matthew 27; Mark 15; Luke 23; John 18-19), to the apostle Paul standing before such first-century rulers as Felix, Festus, and Herod Agrippa (Acts 24-26), the Bible writers were specific—and spot on! They never contradicted each other, nor any known historical fact.

### **Unity of Overall Theme**

One central theme runs throughout the Bible: God's plan of salvation through Jesus Christ. From the first prophecy of the coming Messiah in Genesis 3:15 to Malachi's prophecy (at the end of the Old Testament) of the one who would come to prepare the way for the Messiah (3:1; 4:5), the Old Testament tells us through promises, prophecies, and word pictures that "the Savior is coming."

- The sons of Abraham in Genesis (21:12; 22:18; 26:4) pointed to the One, saving Seed of Abraham (Galatians 3:16), Jesus Christ.
- All the Passover lambs slain, from Israel's Egyptian exodus and over the next 1,500 years, pointed to the ultimate Passover Lamb, Who once and for all took away the sin of the world (1 Corinthians 5:7; John 1:29).
- The Levitical high priest foreshadowed the "great High Priest who has passed through the heavens" (Hebrews 4:14) and has opened up the way into "the Holiest" (10:19-21).
- Though the descendants of Jacob would "multiply as the stars of heaven" (Genesis 26:4), one particular saving Star was prophesied to come out of Jacob (Numbers 24:17)—"the Bright and Morning Star" (Revelation 22:16), Whose

entrance into the world was also signified by the appearance of “His star” (Matthew 2:2,9).

- He would be a Moses-like prophet (Deuteronomy 18:15-18; Acts 3:20-24), a David-like king (Isaiah 11:1-10; Romans 1:3-4), and a Melchizedek-like priest (Psalm 110:4; Hebrews 7:17).
- He’s Isaiah’s suffering servant (53), Micah’s babe of Bethlehem (4:2), and Zechariah’s humble King, “coming to you....lowly and riding on a donkey” (9:9).

Some 400 years after the close of the Old Testament, the first four books of the New Testament (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) were written to testify to the truth that, indeed, “Jesus, the Savior, came” (fulfilling in minute details hundreds of Old Testament prophecies). He came to “seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10). He came to “give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). This central, united theme of Scripture is continued in Acts-Revelation, and is (a) made clearer by explanations of “the mystery of Christ” (Ephesians 3:1-5; cf. 1 Peter 1:10-12), and (b) made eternally important by the continual reminder of Jesus’ future return and subsequent Judgment of men’s souls (2 Corinthians 5:9-11).

### **Consistency of Criticism**

Human beings have a tendency to be biased. We tend to favor family, friends, and our “home team” over all others. We are prone to downplay our own mistakes and sins (and those close to us), yet the inappropriate actions of others often highly irritate us. We tend to think of our heroes as doing no wrong, and often make them out to be above criticism. We tend to overlook the flaws of our favorite political candidates, while we pick apart even the tiniest

imperfections in the candidates we oppose.

One of the amazing qualities of Scripture is the Bible writers' consistency of criticism. In addition to their acknowledgement of the sins of other peoples (e.g., Egyptians, Canaanites, Assyrians, Babylonians, etc.), they were most critical of the "home team"—the descendants of Abraham through whom God would bless all nations (Genesis 12:1-3). What? Surely the genealogy of Christ was presented as flawless by the ancient, sacred writers? Not in the least. Instead, the curtain is pulled wide open for all to see.

Jacob, also known as Israel (Genesis 32:28), the father of the 12 patriarchs and tribes of Israel, deceitfully (and shamefully!) stole his brother's blessing from their aging, blind father (Genesis 27). Judah committed fornication and sired two sons with his daughter-in-law, Tamar (Genesis 38)—both of whom are listed in the genealogy of Christ in the first chapter of the New Testament (Matthew 1:3). [By the way, Judah's oldest two sons were previously killed by God because of their wickedness and disobedience—Genesis 38:6-10.] The great King Solomon foolishly accumulated a shocking number of concubines (300) and wives (700), who "turned his heart after other gods" (1 Kings 11:4). Kings Ahaz and Manasseh were so contaminated with evil that they actually sacrificed their own children to pagan gods (2 Chronicles 28:1-4; 33:1-9). Even the most famous hero in Jewish history, the greatest king of Israel, did not escape the consistent pen of the Bible writers. They did not overlook the fact that even David—the first name listed in Matthew's genealogy of Christ—stole a good man's wife, committed adultery with her, attempted to cover up his sin, and when that did not work, he arranged for the murder of Uriah, which also

resulted in the deaths of untold others (2 Samuel 11).

Such impartial, consistent criticism did not end with the closing of the Old Testament. **Even Jesus' inner circle**—the 12 apostles—were not spared the objective, unbiased treatment of the Bible writers. In addition to Judas being a covetous thief and traitor, the apostles are described (even by their own pens—e.g., Matthew and John) as being slow to believe, weak in faith, self-centered, and fearful. At Jesus' arrest in Gethsemane, “They all forsook Him and fled” (Mark 14:50). The apostle Peter even denied the Lord three times just prior to His crucifixion. And years later, he was called out for being a hypocrite by the apostle Paul (Galatians 2:11-14), who also admitted to his own imperfections, noting that apart from Jesus, “Who knew no sin” (2 Corinthians 5:21), “**all** have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). It simply cannot be reasonably denied that the Bible writers were **remarkably united** in their consistent criticism of sins and all who commit them.

### **Consistent Impartiality of God**

The Bible writers' unbiased critique of men naturally flows from the very nondiscriminatory, even-handed nature of God, which the Bible writers consistently revealed. Moses wrote: “For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, **who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe**. He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing. Therefore love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Deuteronomy 10:17-19). Fifteen hundreds years later, Peter said: “God shows no partiality. But in **every** nation **whoever** fears Him and

works righteousness is accepted by Him” (Acts 10:34-35).

Just as God was longsuffering with the Israelites, God was patient with the Canaanites (Genesis 15:16). Just as God eventually punished the impenitent, wicked Canaanites, God chastened the rebellious Israelites—all in His own, infinite timing. Just as God was forgiving toward Israel when they repented of their rebellion against him (cf. Judges), God was forgiving to the penitent Assyrians (cf. Jonah).

According to Paul, God “does not receive a face” (Galatians 2:6, NASB literal footnote rendering); that is, “God does not judge by external appearance” (Galatians 2:6, NIV). The reason it is impossible to hold “the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons” (James 2:1, ASV), is because our Creator and Savior is no respecter of persons. Neither money, nor beauty, nor flattering words can get an impenitent sinner out of trouble with God. His impartial nature is as unchanging as His consistent Word, and the Bible writers were perfectly consistent in their portrait of God.

### **Consistent Supply of Rational Evidence and Thought**

God has consistently dealt with mankind in rational ways providing the evidence needed for a reasonable faith. “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are **clearly seen**, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse” (Romans 1:20). Since the time of Adam and Eve, mankind has been able to clearly see how “the things that are made” testify on behalf of a powerful, invisible Creator. As the psalmist proclaimed: “The heavens declare

the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out through all the earth. And their words to the end of the world” (Psalm 19:1-4). The reason why “the **fool** has said in his heart, ‘There is no God’” (Psalm 14:1), is because God has always given man adequate evidence for His existence.

When the prophet Samuel addressed the nation of Israel at Saul’s coronation, he did not merely deliver an emotionally based speech. He commanded them, saying, “[S]tand still, that I may **reason** with you before the Lord” (1 Samuel 12:7). Similarly, Isaiah wrote: “‘Come now, and let us **reason** together,’ says the Lord, ‘Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow’” (Isaiah 1:18). Consider also the stark contrast between Elijah and the prophets of Baal. In hopes of getting the attention of the bogus god Baal, these emotionally charged, pretend prophets “leaped about the altar,” “cried aloud,” and “cut themselves, as was their custom, with knives and lances, until the blood gushed out on them” (1 Kings 18:26,28)—all for naught. Elijah, on the other hand, had a rational faith that was grounded in the Word of God. He said to God, “I have done all these things **at Your Word**” (1 Kings 18:36). His personal faith, as well as the message of faith that He preached, were rooted and grounded in the Heavenly revealed, rational Word of Almighty God. Biblical faith, after all, “comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17).

This same kind of rational, evidence-based faith and preaching can be found in the New Testament. Consider

the actions and teachings of Jesus. He could have merely **announced** to the world that He was the Messiah. He could have only **told** people that He was the Son of God. He could have expected everyone simply to believe His **claims** that He was Heaven-sent, and never given His contemporaries any proof for His deity. However, even though there were occasions when Jesus chose not to offer additional proof of His deity (because of the hard-heartedness of many of His hearers; e.g., Mark 8:11-12), Jesus understood the essentiality of evidence. During His earthly ministry, He repeatedly gave ample proof of His deity. He noted how **John the Baptizer** bore witness on His behalf (John 5:33). He said, “[T]he **Father** Himself, who sent Me, has testified of Me” (John 5:37; cf. John 1:32-33; Matthew 3:16-17). He spoke of how “the **Scriptures**...testify of Me” (John 5:39), and specifically noted how “**Moses**...wrote about Me” (John 5:46). He also noted how His **miraculous works** bore witness to His deity (John 5:36). Jesus performed many miracles that demonstrated His power over nature, disease, demons, and death.<sup>1</sup> He understood that His own verbal testimony alone would not convince anyone in a court of law (John 5:31; cf. Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15).

Jesus was not the only New Testament figure who demonstrated the necessity of a knowledge-based faith. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John packed their gospel accounts with confirmation of Jesus being the Christ. Consider just the beginnings of these four books. Matthew began his account of the Gospel by genealogically proving that Jesus was the promised seed of Abraham and David (Matthew 1:1-17). He then noted how Jesus was born of a virgin, fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 (1:18-25). Mark began “the gospel

of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (Mark 1:1) by quoting Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3. Mark proved prophetically that John the Baptizer was “the voice of the one crying in the wilderness,” and Jesus was “the LORD” (1:3). Luke opened his account of the Good News with an appeal to evidence, knowledge, and understanding:

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).

Then there is John’s gospel account, which, from beginning to end, is packed with proof that Jesus is the miracle-working Son of God (John 1:3; 2:1-11; 20:30-31; 21:25). In fact, the stated purpose of his record of the various miracles of Christ (and there were many others John did not mention) was so 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).

When the apostle Paul stood before Festus and King Agrippa, he spoke of those things “which the prophets and Moses said would come—that the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles” (Acts 26:22-24). However, as Paul “made his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, ‘Paul, **you are beside yourself!** Much learning is driving you **mad!**’” (26:24). How did Paul

respond? Did he answer with a mere emotional appeal as so many religionists do today? Did he welcome the idea of an unreasonable, unverifiable Gospel? Not at all. Paul humbly, but confidently, replied: “I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of **truth** and **reason**” (Acts 26:25).

A survey of the Scriptures reveals a consistent treatment of (1) the need for, and (2) the demonstration of the evidence that leads to a reasonable faith in God, His Word, and His Son. Such harmonious truth is the foundation of **real** faith.<sup>2</sup>

### **Unity of God’s Moral Instruction**

The Bible penmen wrote many things that God desires for mankind to know and do. Amazingly, whatever moral instruction they gave, they were always in perfect harmony with what the other Bible writers wrote.

#### ***Value of Human Life***

Human life was precious in Adam’s time, which is why it was sinful for Cain to murder his brother Abel (Genesis 4). Murder was also wrong in the times of Noah (Genesis 9:6), Moses (Exodus 20:13), David (2 Samuel 11-12), Isaiah (Isaiah 1:15,21), and the apostles (Revelation 21:8)—periods of time spanning some 4,000 years! The Bible writers were perfectly consistent in their condemnation of murder. Not all killing is murder (since sometimes it is tragically accidental, and sometimes it is for punishment purposes—Genesis 9:6; Romans 13:1-4), but murder has always been wrong, and the Bible is perfectly consistent on this subject. Man may take and consume the lives of plants and animals, but he has never been authorized to murder man, “for in the image of God He made man” (Genesis 9:6).

### *Truth and Lies*

The Bible writers were also in perfect harmony in their praising of truth and disapproval of lying. Around 1,450 B.C., Moses wrote: “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor” (Exodus 20:16). About 500 years later, Solomon noted how “lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who deal truthfully are His delight” (Proverbs 12:22). And then about 1,000 years after Solomon, Paul reminded the Ephesians: “Putting away lying, ‘Let each one speak truth with his neighbor’” (Ephesians 4:25). From beginning to end (Revelation 21:8), the Bible writers’ message about truth is perfectly consistent: God is truth (John 14:6) and His followers are to be truthful, regardless of the situation.

### **Example of New Testament Harmony: Elder Qualifications**

Consider one final example of perfect biblical unity, regarding elders (also known as bishops or pastors in the New Testament),<sup>3</sup> who lead in autonomous, local churches of Christ. The apostle Peter penned this statement in 1 Peter 5:1: “The elders who are among you I exhort, **I who am a fellow elder...**” Thus, Peter was not only a specially chosen apostle of Christ (Matthew 4:18-22); at some point he was also appointed as an elder in a local church.

Consider that to be an elder a man must be the “husband of one wife,” as Paul detailed in his letters to both Timothy (1 Timothy 3:2) and Titus (1:6). Interestingly, Matthew (8:14), Mark (1:30), and Luke (4:38) all record how on one occasion Jesus visited Peter’s house and healed **Peter’s “wife’s mother”** of a high fever. Thus, diverse New

Testament writers clearly reveal that Peter was married and would meet this prerequisite of serving as an elder.

Of further significance is the fact that the apostle Paul, who wrote about half of the books of the New Testament, describes himself as being unmarried (1 Corinthians 7:8; 9:5). Thus, Paul would not have been qualified to hold the office of an elder **and is never described as being one**. When all these puzzle pieces are put together, we can understand that the subtle statements in the books of 1 Peter, 1 Timothy, Titus, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and 1 Corinthians intertwine perfectly to give a consistent picture of the qualifications of an elder as they relate to the lives of Peter and Paul.

### THE HUMANLY IMPOSSIBLE... IS DISTINCTLY DIVINE

As we discussed at the beginning of this chapter, it is **humanly** impossible for so many different writers from different times, places, and cultures, and with different educational backgrounds and occupations, etc., to pen a perfectly consistent book, especially one that is 1,000 pages or more in length. Yet, the Bible writers did just that. They wrote in perfect harmony with one another and with every known fact of the Universe. How could they do the humanly impossible? The answer is simple (and yet amazing!): they were informed and guided by the omniscient, omnipotent Creator and Sustainer of the Universe. Though perfect biblical unity and consistency is **humanly** impossible, “**with God** all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26). “All Scripture is given **by inspiration of God**” (2 Timothy 3:16). The Bible writers were “**moved by the Holy Spirit**” (2 Peter 1:21).

# Chapter 3



## SEVEN “ATHEIST- MAKING” BIBLE VERSES YOU NEED TO KNOW

It might surprise some Christians to learn that a number of prominent atheists and agnostics have alleged that, of all things, the **Bible** “made them” unbelievers. According to 20<sup>th</sup>-century British playwright, A.A. Milne, author of the Winnie the Pooh books, “The Old Testament is responsible for more atheism, agnosticism, and disbelief—call it what you will—than any book ever written.”<sup>1</sup> Renowned British agnostic Bertrand Russell wrote a booklet in 1927 titled “Why I Am Not a Christian” (which eventually made its way onto the New York Public Library’s “Books of the Century List”).<sup>2</sup> In the pamphlet, Russell commented on Jesus and the gospel accounts, saying, “I do not believe one can

grant either superlative wisdom or the superlative goodness of Christ as depicted in the Gospels.... I am concerned with Christ **as He appears in the Gospels**, taking the Gospel narrative as it stands, and there one does find some things that do not seem to be very wise.”<sup>3</sup>

In more recent times, the YouTube channel, *BigThink*, featured popular American magician, actor, and entertainer Penn Jillette in a video titled “How Did You Become an Atheist?” The video has been viewed well over 2 million times. In it, Jillette stated: “I read the Bible, cover to cover. And I think that anyone who is thinking about maybe being an atheist, if you read the Bible...cover to cover, I believe you will emerge from that as an atheist.... **The Bible itself will turn you atheist faster than anything.**”<sup>4</sup>

What scriptures do these and other atheists contend will turn a Bible reader into an unbeliever? What in the Bible exactly would turn a person to atheism or agnosticism? Consider seven of the top alleged “atheist-making” Bible verses.

### **#1—“LOT OFFERED HIS DAUGHTERS TO THE WICKED MEN OF SODOM”**

When Penn Jillette was asked, “Why would reading the Bible make you an atheist?” he said, “Because what we get told about the Bible is a lot of picking and choosing.” He then gave his first actual example of what will make a person an atheist, saying: “When you see Lot’s daughter gang raped and beaten and the Lord being okay with that.”<sup>5</sup>

Indeed, in an attempt to protect two guests in his house, Lot offered his two daughters to an angry mob of homosexuals in Sodom, saying, “See now, I have two daughters who have not known a man; please, let me bring them out to

you, and you may do to them as you wish” (Genesis 19:8).<sup>6</sup> As incomprehensible and detestable as Lot’s actions were, there is **nothing** in Genesis 19 or anywhere in Scripture that indicates **God** was “okay with that” (as Gillette contends). Quite the opposite, in fact. Genesis 19 actually reveals that the two guests, who were really angels sent by God, did not allow anything to happen to Lot’s daughters. Rather, they struck the wicked men of Sodom with blindness and later safely ushered Lot’s daughters (as well as Lot and his wife) out of the repulsively sinful city prior to God destroying it (19:12-25).

Still, some find it quite troubling that in the New Testament, Peter uses the term “righteous” three times in 2 Peter 2:7-8 to describe Lot: “God...delivered **righteous** Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked (for that **righteous** man, dwelling among them, tormented his **righteous** soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds).” Why did Peter repeatedly call Lot “righteous” when many see a different picture of Lot in Genesis? Was Lot really righteous?

One must keep in mind that though a Bible writer may have recorded specific sins and foolish acts of an individual, such revelation does not mean that the person could not also have been righteous. Christ was the only perfect man ever to live (2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:22). Though Noah, Abraham, Moses, etc. were counted faithful (Hebrews 11:7-29), they occasionally disobeyed God’s will (cf. Numbers 20:1-12), and acted foolishly or cowardly (cf. Genesis 9:21; 12:12-20; 20:1-18). God never blessed their disobedience, only their faithfulness. Similarly, just because Peter called Lot righteous does not mean that Lot was perfect. Even

the apostle Peter, who also served as an elder in the Lord's 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).

Furthermore, Peter's statements about Lot's righteousness must be considered in their proper context. Similar to how Noah was an island of righteousness surrounded by a sea of iniquity (2 Peter 2:5), Lot was surrounded by extremely "wicked," "filthy," "lawless" citizens of Sodom (2 Peter 2:7-8). Although Lot was **far** from perfect, he was not a wicked, lawless, unrighteous citizen of Sodom; he was righteous. Lot separated himself from the unlawfulness of the inhabitants of Sodom and was even tormented "day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds" (2 Peter 2:8).

Though Lot's offering of his daughters to the Sodomites is inexcusable (as it seems were Abraham's actions in Egypt and Gerar when he allowed his wife to be taken by kings in order to preserve his life; see Genesis 12:10-20; 20:1-18), Genesis 19 clearly indicates the distinction between the righteousness of Lot and the wickedness of the inhabitants of Sodom. The Sodomites even hinted at such when they declared that Lot "keeps acting as a judge" (Genesis 19:9). This was the distinction Peter made—not that Lot was perfect, but that he remained uncontaminated by the level of intense iniquity prevalent throughout Sodom. Like Christians today who strive to walk in the light, though they are imperfect (1 John 1:5-10), Lot was a righteous man, who also made some memorable mistakes.

## #2—“GOD TOLD ABRAHAM TO KILL HIS SON”

Genesis 19:8 is only the proverbial tip of the iceberg of verses atheists contend will make a person an unbeliever. The very next example Penn Jillette gave in his popular six-minute video was “Abraham being willing to kill his son.”<sup>7</sup> Not only was Abraham willing to kill his son Isaac, God actually instructed him to do so, saying, “Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you” (Genesis 22:2). *The Telegraph* of London highlighted this verse as “No. 8” in its article, “Top 10 **Worst** Bible Passages.”<sup>8</sup> In his 2009 debate with Kyle Butt, American atheist Dan Barker asked the audience to “remember the thing about when Abraham—he [God] asked Abraham to sacrifice his son, Isaac. By the way, Abraham should have said, ‘No way, I’m better than you, I’m not going to kill my son.’”<sup>9</sup>

Are Penn Jillette, Dan Barker, and other atheists right? Is this a good Bible verse to use to spread atheism? Should this passage of Scripture logically lead people away from the Bible and the God of Abraham to atheism?

Prior to a discussion of Genesis 22, one is compelled to ask the atheist upon what basis he deems the killing of a child as wrong or evil? As leading unbelievers have admitted, atheism logically implies, “**Everything** is permitted,”<sup>10</sup> **including murder**. Do atheists not frequently justify the murder of unborn children? Renowned atheist Peter Singer indicated in 2000 that it would not even be wrong to kill a disabled child **who had already been born**. He wrote: “[K]illing a disabled infant is not morally equivalent to kill-

ing a person. **Very often it is not wrong at all.**"<sup>11</sup> Thus, some of the world's leading atheists have justified murdering human beings, even when doing so means the taking of the **only life** that a child will have (according to naturalistic atheism, which implies that there is no eternal afterlife). So how exactly can atheists objectively and non-hypocritically condemn God and Abraham in Genesis 22?

### **It Was a "Test"**

Even still, Genesis 22 poses no real problem. Why? Because God did not actually intend for Abraham to kill his son as a burnt offering; God's command was only a "test" (22:1). When a mother asks her young son (whom she watched from a distance make a mess), "Who did this?" the question is not asked for informational purposes. She is testing her son to see if he will tell the truth and take responsibility for his actions. When a teacher gives her class what appears to be an impossible-to-pass, closed-book test (the contents of which have never been covered in class), the students may initially think their teacher is being terribly unfair. However, the students later learn that the test was actually "a test" of their character: who all would be honest and take their "F" versus who would dishonestly cheat on the test in order to get an "A"? In the end, those who "failed" were actually given a "100," while those who "passed" were given a "0." At first, before all the facts were known, the teacher seemed quite unfair; but in the end, the students learned an important life-lesson, while also discovering that their teacher was actually very just and wise.

Scripture reveals that God has occasionally asked questions and made statements that were meant, not in the

more normal ways, but as “teaching moments” or “tests.” In John 6, Jesus asked Philip about the great multitude who followed Him, saying, “Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?” (John 6:5). But Jesus asked the question “**to test him**, for He Himself knew what He would do” (6:6). Would Philip and the apostles recall that Jesus miraculously had furnished more than 100 gallons of a tasty beverage at the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee (in John 2) and conclude that Jesus alone could just as easily miraculously feed thousands of people on this occasion if He so desired? Or, would the disciples worry themselves with the large number of people and the limited natural resources? Jesus knew they were not going to purchase food for the multitude, but He still asked the question—because it was a test of their faith. He made it a “growing moment.”

On another occasion, Jesus tested a Gentile woman (Matthew 15:21-28). Initially (and superficially), one might conclude that Jesus was rude and unloving to the woman who asked Him, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed” (15:22). However, many people miss the fact that Jesus was testing this Canaanite woman, while at the same time teaching His disciples (who earlier claimed that the Pharisees were offended at His preaching—15:12) how the tenderhearted respond to potential offensive truths. Unlike the hypocritical **Jewish** scribes and Pharisees who, earlier in the chapter, responded to Jesus’ “hard preaching” with hard-heartedness (Matthew 15:1-12), a **Gentile** woman seeking assistance from Jesus acknowledged her unworthiness and persistently pursued the Holy One for help, even in the

face of a difficult, divinely orchestrated test. In the end, Jesus did what He knew He was going to do all along—He healed the humble woman’s demon-possessed daughter.

So what does all of this have to do with Abraham in Genesis 22? Simply that God never actually wanted Abraham to sacrifice his son—any more than Jesus wanted His disciples to purchase bread to feed thousands of people, or than He wanted to withhold healing from a Gentile woman’s daughter. Abraham’s faith was tested, and He passed the test without ever killing Isaac (Hebrews 11:17).

In fact, had Abraham actually killed Isaac, he would have disobeyed God, since at the moment when Abraham was about to slay his son, “the Angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, ‘Abraham, Abraham!... Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him’” (Genesis 22:11-12).

Admittedly, God’s test of Abraham was a deep and difficult experience for the patriarch. But keep in mind that God knew all along (1) it was a test, and (2) that the passing of the test did not actually include Abraham killing Isaac. The patriarch demonstrated such great, trusting commitment to God that he would be **willing** to not withhold (22:12) even his most precious, promised son, if that is what his Master asked of him.<sup>12</sup> Such complete trust is what God wants from anyone who seeks after Him (Matthew 16:24-25; Philippians 1:21).<sup>13</sup>

### #3—“GOD ACCEPTED JEPHTHAH’S DAUGHTER AS A HUMAN SACRIFICE”

In “The 10 Worst Old Testament Verses by Dan Barker,” the outspoken atheist listed Judges 11:30-39 as #5—Jephthah

burning his daughter “as an acceptable sacrifice to God.”<sup>14</sup> This Bible passage also made the *Telegraph’s* top 10 list, coming in at #7.

You may recall the brief story of Jephthah and his daughter in Judges 11:29-40. Upon becoming Judge of Israel, “the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah” and “he advanced toward the people of Ammon” (11:29). “And Jephthah made a vow to the Lord, and said, ‘If You will indeed deliver the people of Ammon into my hands, then it will be that whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the people of Ammon, shall surely be the Lord’s, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering’” (11:30-31). According to Holy Writ, Jephthah defeated Ammon, and his daughter was the first to meet him when he returned home (11:32-34), which meant she was to “be the Lord’s,” offered as “a burnt offering.” Judges 11:39 states: Jephthah “carried out his vow with her which he had vowed.”

Is it possible that Jephthah literally sacrificed his daughter as a “burnt offering” (Judges 11:29-40)? Yes, it’s possible. Sadly, many children in ancient history were sacrificed at the hands of powerful leaders, including some evil kings of Judah (2 Chronicles 28:1-3; 33:6-9). But if Jephthah actually sacrificed his daughter, he committed a grave sin, since literal human burnt offerings were condemned by God under the Law of Moses (Deuteronomy 12:31; 18:10).

Despite what Barker and others contend, there simply is no indication in the book of Judges (or anywhere else in Scripture) that God sanctioned Jephthah’s actions (and such silence on God’s part cannot reasonably be interpreted as approval). Admittedly, Judges 11:29 indicates

that “the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah,” but this occurred prior to his journey through Gilead, Manasseh, and Mizpah, and prior to his battle with the Ammonites, which included conquering 20 of their cities (11:33). Thus, the statement of Judges 11:29 references a moment in time at least several weeks or months prior to Jephthah carrying out his rash vow. What’s more, having “the Spirit of the Lord” does not mean a person could never sin and do foolish things. This phrase is found seven times in Judges. It can indicate God’s consecration of a judge, such as in Othniel’s case, when “the Spirit of the Lord came upon him, and he judged Israel” (Judges 3:10). At other times, it refers more to the courage and superhuman strength that the Lord provided them, such as in Samson’s case (Judges 14:6; 14:19; 15:14). Jephthah was a courageous leader, but he was not without sin (Judges 11:3; Romans 3:23). If he literally sacrificed his daughter, he did so without God’s authorization.

A much more likely explanation to the Jephthah question centers around the fact that sometimes a “sacrifice” is offered in a figurative sense. In addition to modern man often speaking metaphorically of “sacrificing” money, sleep, time, energy, etc. for good causes, consider that such figurative sacrificing also took place in ancient Israel. In fact, hundreds of years before Jephthah’s day, ever since the Israelites escaped Egyptian bondage following the tenth plague (the death of the firstborn of Egypt), the people of Israel “offered” both man and beast to God. Jehovah “consecrate[d]...all the firstborn, whatever opens the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and beast; it is Mine,” says the Lord (Exodus 13:2).

There is a sense in which “**all** males that open the womb” were “sacrifice[d] to the Lord” (Exodus 13:15). But exactly how were all the firstborn males offered in a special way to God? Were they all literally sacrificed as a burnt offering? All the firstborn males among **clean** animals/livestock were **literally** to be **burned**, but not among the unclean. **Unclean** animals, such as the donkey, were “**redeemed**” with a lamb (Exodus 13:13; Numbers 18:15). That is, the donkey was to be delivered or rescued from a sacrificial death with a replacement.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, “all the firstborn of man” among the Israelites were redeemed.

Rather than literally sacrifice the firstborn male children of the Israelites (as they did their livestock—Exodus 13:2,12-16; 22:29-30), God set apart the Levites for Himself for religious service (“that they may perform the work of the Lord,” Numbers 8:11).

God said: “I Myself have taken the Levites from among the children of Israel instead of every firstborn who opens the womb among the children of Israel. Therefore the Levites shall be mine, because all the firstborn are Mine. On the day that I struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, I sanctified to Myself all the firstborn in Israel, both man and beast. They shall be Mine: I am the Lord” (Numbers 3:12-13).

How were the clean animals given to the Lord? In literal sacrifices. How were the firstborn male humans given to the Lord? Not in literal burnt offerings, but in sacrificial service to God (cf. Romans 12:1).

Interestingly, Numbers 8 indicates that the consecration of the Levites was a type of offering—a symbolic wave offering. After God instructed the Israelites to “lay their hands

on the Levites” (as they were “offering” them as a sacrifice to the Lord; cf. Leviticus 4:13-15), He said:

Aaron shall **offer** the Levites before the Lord **as a wave offering from the people of Israel**, that they may do the service of the Lord. Then the Levites shall lay their hands on the heads of the bulls, and you shall offer the one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering to the Lord to make atonement for the Levites. And you shall set the Levites before Aaron and his sons, and shall **offer them as a wave offering to the Lord**.

Thus you shall separate the Levites from among the people of Israel, and the Levites shall be mine. And after that the Levites shall go in to serve at the tent of meeting, when you have cleansed them and **offered them as a wave offering**. For they are wholly given to me from among the people of Israel. Instead of all who open the womb, the firstborn of all the people of Israel, I have taken them for myself. For all the firstborn among the people of Israel are mine, both of man and of beast. On the day that I struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt I consecrated them for myself, and I have taken the Levites instead of all the firstborn among the people of Israel (Number 8:10-18, ESV).

Like the Levites, who were symbolically offered before the Lord, it is very likely that Jephthah similarly “sacrificed” his daughter. She could have been “sacrificed” as a “burnt offering” at the tabernacle **in the sense** that she became one of the “serving women who assembled at the door of the tabernacle” (Exodus 38:8; cf. 1 Samuel 2:22). Perhaps like Anna centuries later, Jephthah’s daughter was “offered” to serve God “with fastings and prayers night and day,”

never again to leave the area of the tabernacle (cf. Luke 2:36-38). Such a figurative offering makes perfect sense in light of the fact that Jephthah’s daughter and her friends **never lamented her death**. They mourned—just not her death. What was their sorrow? They “bewailed her **virginity**” (Judges 11:38). In fact, three times her virginity is mentioned (11:37-39), the last of which is noted immediately following the revelation that Jephthah “carried out his vow with her which he had vowed. **She knew no man**” (11:39).

If Jephthah killed his daughter as a literal burnt offering, the repeated bewailing of her virginity makes no sense. (If someone was about to kill your unmarried daughter, would you feel the need to mourn her virginity—or her imminent death?) On the other hand, if Jephthah’s daughter was about to be “offered” to God to serve perpetually at the tabernacle, and to live the rest of her life as a single, childless servant of the Lord, it makes perfect sense that she and her friends would lament her lasting virginity. When we allow the Bible to explain the Bible, the symbolic offering of Jephthah’s daughter makes perfect sense. But regardless, there was no wrongdoing by God in the events of Judges 11.

#### #4—“GOD WANTS YOU TO BE HAPPY TO DASH BABIES AGAINST THE ROCKS”<sup>16</sup>

Dan Barker listed Psalm 137:8-9 as #1 on his list of “worst Old Testament verses.” He stated: “I have always thought this was **the worst verse in the bible**, and my opinion remains unchanged.”<sup>17</sup> According to the *Telegraph*, this passage “is often omitted from readings in church,”<sup>18</sup> apparently because “it’s just so bad, we’re too embarrassed to read it.”

So what does Psalm 137:8-9 say? “O daughter of Babylon, who are to be destroyed, happy the one who repays you as you have served us! **Happy the one who takes and dashes your little ones against the rock!**” According to critics, God is suggesting that believers “**should be happy,**” even “blessed”—“to kill innocent babies of those who are keeping you from worshipping your own god.”<sup>19</sup> But is this really what the text means? As is so often the case, the **context** of the passage has been ignored or dismissed, and the **worst possible** interpretation is touted as the correct interpretation.

What is this nine-verse psalm all about? It’s really quite simple to understand and interpret **if** a little time is taken and the context is considered. The Jewish psalmist was captive in Babylon (vs. 1). As he and others longed to return to their homeland of Judea, their Babylonian plunderers and captors requested entertaining songs about Jerusalem (vs. 3). The mournful psalmist did not want to sing and play joyful songs in Babylon, while he mourned being torn away from Zion (vss. 4-6). He recalls how the Edomites (in essence) cheered on the Babylonians’ destruction of Jerusalem (vs. 7). But then the inspired psalmist concluded in verses 8-9 with a prophecy about **Babylon’s own downfall**: “O daughter of Babylon, **who are to be destroyed,** happy the one who repays you as you have served us! Happy the one who takes and dashes your little ones against the rock!” The psalmist was really doing nothing more than what other Bible writers did: prophesying about the coming devastating destruction of Babylon at the hands of the Medes and Persians. Babylon was a mighty kingdom (Isaiah 13:19), but it was going to fall (21:9), and it would fall to “the Medes” (13:17; 21:2).

In Jeremiah 12:1, the prophet asked God about the Babylonians’ destruction of Judah, saying, “Why does the way of the wicked prosper? **Why are those happy who deal so treacherously?**” Jeremiah was not suggesting God commanded the Babylonians to rejoice about Judah’s destruction; rather, he was **describing** their doom. Jeremiah would later prophesy of Babylon’s destruction, saying: “Because you were **glad**, because you **rejoiced**, You destroyers of My heritage...Chaldea shall become plunder; all who plunder her shall be **satisfied**” (50:11,10). Like the Babylonians who “rejoiced” at Judah’s destruction, the Medes and Persians would be “happy” when they defeated Babylon. Again, God was not blessing the Medes and Persians with righteous happiness and satisfaction from their future destruction of Babylon, but was **describing their feelings** (however so wrong they were). Similarly, Psalm 137:8-9 only describes (**not prescribes!**) how the one who would conquer Babylon would be happy, even when he “dashes your little ones against the rock!”<sup>20</sup>

### #5—“GOD COMMANDS WIVES TO SUBMIT TO THEIR HUSBANDS”

Believe it or not, according to *The Telegraph* of London, one of the “top 10 worst Bible passages” is Ephesians 5:22, in which Paul taught, “Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord.”<sup>21</sup> In his book *God: The Most Unpleasant Character in All Fiction*, Dan Barker titled chapter nine simply “Misogynistic.” Immediately under this chapter title, Barker prominently displayed Genesis 3:16 as apparent proof of God’s alleged misogyny: “Your desire shall be for your husband, and **he shall rule over you.**”<sup>22</sup> Later Barker

wrote: “Women are second-class. Because of Eve’s insubordination, she was forced to become dependent on man. From then on, all women are inferior, so the bible says.”<sup>23</sup>

Is God really misogynistic? Does the Bible teach that women are actually inferior to men? And do women, according to the Scriptures, have to “submit to their husbands”?

Before answering these questions (which we are happy to do), let’s pause momentarily to ask what value atheistic, Darwinian evolution places upon women? The fact is, Charles Darwin himself wrote in *The Descent of Man* that “[t]he chief distinction in the intellectual powers of the two sexes is shown by **man’s** attaining to a **higher eminence, in whatever he takes up, than can woman**—whether requiring deep thought, reason, or imagination, or merely the use of the senses and hands.... [T]he average of mental power in man must be above that of woman.... [M]an has ultimately become superior to woman.”<sup>24</sup> The Bible never teaches that men are more valuable than women, or that men should use their “intellectual powers” and physical strength to force women to do whatever they want. Yet, when atheistic evolution is taken to its logical conclusion, then “might makes right” and the “fittest” survive and excel to dominate and exploit the weaker to their own pleasure. Atheists simply have no logical moral grounds upon which to make a rational argument for why men should treat women with love and respect.

On the other hand, if God exists and the Bible is His Word, then a faithful man of God will love and cherish women. After all, the God of the Bible loves women. He loves “the world” (John 3:16), which is full of men **and**

**women.** He created women (as He did men) “in His own image” (Genesis 1:26-27). When God put on flesh and dwelt among mankind, He showed great compassion upon women (Luke 7:11-15; John 4:1-42; 19:25-27). He loves women so much that He freely offers them (as He does men) eternal life through Jesus’ sacrificial death (John 3:16; Luke 24:47; Romans 1:16). “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, **there is neither male nor female**; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). Christian husbands and wives are “**heirs together** of the grace of life” (1 Peter 3:7). In truth, men and women are equal in their worth to God.

Furthermore, **God** not only loves women, He commands **men** to love, cherish, protect, and honor women. To the church at Colosse Paul wrote: “Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them” (Colossians 3:19). To husbands in Ephesus he commanded: “[L]ove your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her.... So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself.... [L]et each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself” (Ephesians 5:25,28,33). Peter wrote that husbands are to dwell with their wives “with understanding, **giving honor to the wife**” (1 Peter 3:7).<sup>25</sup>

So what is the main problem that atheists and skeptics (especially in the 21<sup>st</sup> century) have with the biblical teachings about men and women? Largely that God created two (and only two) different sexes to have different roles in the home and in the Church. Yet, the omniscient, omnipotent, perfectly holy, loving, and just Creator of the Universe **has every right to define the roles of His creation.** A man

may dislike that he was not created with the anatomical and physiological ability to carry a child in a womb for nine months, to give birth to a baby, or to nurse a newborn. He may prefer to be a follower in the family rather than the courageous leader God expects him to be (1 Corinthians 11:3). He may wish that he wasn't assigned the role of selfless protector (Ephesians 5:25). If he was given the choice, he might rather take what he perceives (however so naively) to be the "easier role," and just "submit" to his wife, and let "the buck stop" with her, and not feel the pressure of being the leader of the family.

Children may cry that their Creator is unfair because they must "obey [their] parents" (Ephesians 6:1). Teenagers may think it quite ignorant to have to submit to older people (1 Peter 5:5) "who don't even know how to use a smart phone." An unmarried man with no children may disdain God for detailing in the Bible that he's not qualified to be an elder or deacon in the local church (1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9)—even though he's a billionaire and the CEO of a Fortune-500 company! "How could a poor, married farmer with 10 kids be more qualified to serve as an elder of a local church than a billionaire bachelor?!"

Similarly, a woman may dislike that Paul wrote that "the head of every man is Christ" and "the head of woman is man" (1 Corinthians 11:3). She may claim that the biblical teaching of man's headship over women (Genesis 3:16) and the command for wives to "submit to" their husbands "made her an atheist." She may openly despise Christianity, since, in the church, the apostle Paul taught, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed

first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor” (1 Timothy 2:12-14, ESV).<sup>26</sup> Yet, none of this proves that God doesn’t exist or that the Bible is not His inspired revelation to humanity. It only demonstrates what has always been the case—most people do “what is right in their own eyes” (cf. Judges 17:6; 21:25). Like spoiled children who are angry at their parents (whose rules they deem “unfair” and do not understand the wisdom of), prideful people become angry with their “Father” in heaven. Most people refuse to bow to the will of their Creator. Most of humanity fails to “humble [themselves] under the mighty hand of God” (1 Peter 5:6). It should come as no surprise then that the same souls who refuse to “acknowledge God” (Romans 1:28, ESV) and to submit to Him, will also belittle His Word, especially those passages requiring humble, respectful submission of wives to their husbands.

### **#6—“GOD COMMANDS SLAVES TO SUBMIT TO THEIR MASTERS”**

“It’s bad enough that the Bible teaches that wives are to submit to their husbands, but Scripture doesn’t stop there. The Bible writers actually command slaves to submit to their masters! How can anyone be okay with that kind of biblical teaching? How can any decent, morally minded person be a Bible-believing Christian when the Bible requires such rubbish?!”

Unsurprisingly, on most any list of “bad Bible passages” you will find one or more of the following verses:

- Ephesians 6:5—“Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling” (ESV).

- Colossians 3:22—“Slaves, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters” (ESV).
- 1 Timothy 6:1—“Let all who are under a yoke as slaves regard their own masters as worthy of all honor” (ESV).
- 1 Peter 2:18—“Servants, be submissive to your master with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh.”

According to Penn Jillette, there is a “**celebration of slavery**”<sup>27</sup> in the Bible, which is another reason he gives for being an atheist. Number 10 on the *Telegraph’s* “Top 10 Worst Bible Passages” is 1 Peter 2:18. And, one of the self-professed “tantalizing tidbits” that Valerie Tarico listed in her Salon.com article (titled “11 Kinds of Bible Verses Christians Love to Ignore”), was the Bible’s treatment of slavery. According to Tarico, “The Good Book contains passages about...slavery that Evangelicals conveniently refuse to acknowledge.... The reality is that the Bible says much more in support of slavery than against it. Even the New Testament Jesus never says owning people is wrong. Instead, the Bible gives explicit instructions to masters and slaves. Awkward.”<sup>28</sup>

Americans often envision ancient slavery as the kind of oppressive bondage that was popular among some slave owners in North America in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, when millions of Africans were stolen from their homelands and shipped across the Atlantic. Certainly, some first-century slavery was similar, but often it was quite different. For example, slavery in New Testament times was not based on race. Many foreign soldiers and their families became slaves after being captured during times of war.<sup>29</sup> What’s more, “[s]ome became slaves because they could not pay back the money they had borrowed. The government would also take people into slavery if they could not pay their taxes.”<sup>30</sup>

Consider the fact that the ancients would no doubt interpret certain **modern American practices** as forms of “slavery.” For example, hundreds of thousands of Americans who work, labor nearly one-third of every year **for the government**. That is, Americans are **forced** by the government **with the threat of fines and imprisonment** to pay over 100 days’ wages to local, state, and federal governments every year. According to irs.gov, U.S. citizens who fail to pay government-mandated taxes can be prosecuted and imprisoned for up to five years. (Imagine 1<sup>st</sup>-century slaves walking into a U.S. prison and seeing men and women living for years in a six-by-eight-foot prison cell for the same crime that they committed, which resulted in their enslavement. What might they call prisoners today who may be forced to pick up trash on the side of the Interstate or perform some other kind of labor? A kind of “slave.”) And what about the military draft—“the practice of **ordering people by law to serve** in the armed forces”?<sup>31</sup> To this day, all 18-25-year-old males in the U.S. are required to register with the Selective Service System in case of “a crisis requiring a draft”<sup>32</sup>—a draft in which thousands or millions of men would be **forced** to go to war, and possibly die for their country, whether they wanted to or not. (I’m not suggesting that we should defraud the government, or that we should refuse to submit to its authority if the draft is reinstated; I am simply suggesting that “slavery” was broadly defined in the first century.) When people disparage Bible writers for commanding slaves to be obedient to their masters, we must understand that there were various kinds of slavery in the first century, including some forms that resemble certain practices today, which may be generally

accepted and morally justified.

What's more, the Bible does **not** celebrate and champion slavery, at least not the kind of slavery most people think of when they hear the term. In truth, Paul specifically condemned "kidnappers" (*andrapodistais*) or "menstealers" (KJV) as lawless and insubordinate individuals who practice that which is "contrary to sound doctrine" (1 Timothy 1:10). Greek authorities define this kidnapper as a "slave-dealer."<sup>33</sup> Far from endorsing such activity, Paul groups these men-stealing, slave traders with murderers, liars, and other ungodly sinners (1 Timothy 1:9-10).

So why does God require slaves to respect, honor, and even serve their masters? The fact is, Paul's and Peter's instructions for slaves to honor their masters is perfectly consistent with the rest of God's Word regarding all Christians submitting to those in positions of authority. To the Christians living in the heart of the Roman Empire, Paul taught: "Let **every soul** be subject to the governing authorities.... Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor" (Romans 13:1,7; cf. Matthew 22:21). Similarly, Peter wrote: "Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors.... For this is the will of God.... Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king" (1 Peter 2:13-17). Was the Roman Empire corrupt in many ways? Certainly. Was a Christian's submission to Rome a blanket endorsement of the Empire? Not at all. But Christians were (and are) to be humbly compliant.<sup>34</sup>

God expects all Christians to have a spirit of submission. Children are to submit to their parents (Ephesians 6:1-3).

Young people are to be submissive to older people (1 Peter 5:5). Wives are to submit to their husbands (1 Peter 3:1-2). Members of local churches are to submit to their overseeing elders who rule over them (Hebrews 13:17; Acts 20:28). Local shepherds are to submit fully to the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:1-4). In short, all Christians, including those in leadership positions, are to “be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for ‘God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble’” (1 Peter 5:5). And, yes, God expects His people to humbly “submit...to every authority instituted among men,” whether to kings or to slave masters (1 Peter 2:13,18, NIV).

God did not create the practice of slavery.<sup>35</sup> And His instructions regarding a slave’s submission to his master were not given because God favors a master over his slave (Galatians 3:28), or because He simply wants some people to have harder lives than others. The specific purpose that Paul gave for Christian slaves submitting to their pagan masters was “so that the name of God and His doctrine may not be blasphemed” (1 Timothy 6:1).

God commands **all Christians** to do their best to make the most for the cause of Christ **in whatever situation** they find themselves. “Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called. Were you called while a slave? Do not be concerned about it; but if you can be made free, rather use it. For he who is called in the Lord while a slave is the Lord’s freedman. Likewise he who is called while free is Christ’s slave” (1 Corinthians 7:20-22). Whether a person becomes a Christian while in slavery or in a terrible marriage, God wants His people to change from the inside out and have a positive spiritual impact on those around

them—so that the souls of the lost might be saved (cf. 1 Peter 3:1-2). We are called to be obedient to parents, husbands, governing officials, and yes, even slave owners. “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works **and glorify your Father in heaven**” (Matthew 5:16). Rather than giving people reasons to curse Christ and His doctrine, Christians are called to be obedient to all those in positions of authority **“for the Lord’s sake**” (1 Peter 2:13). We are called to be honorable at all times so that we may “put to silence the ignorance of foolish men” and “by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation” (1 Peter 2:15,12). In short, “humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time” (1 Peter 5:6).

Over time, with the spread of Christianity and with increasing numbers of slave masters becoming Christians, the physical lives of many slaves would have improved dramatically. As slave owners with honest and good hearts learned (1) to love the Lord with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength, and (2) to love their neighbors (including their slaves) as themselves (Matthew 22:36-40), they would give up “threatening,” just as God commands (Ephesians 6:9). As Christian slave owners contemplated treating others how they wanted to be treated (Matthew 7:12), they would give their slaves “what is just and fair,” knowing that they, too, had a Master in heaven (Colossians 4:1). As slave owners submitted to Christ, they would be transformed by the Gospel, learning to be “kindly affectionate” to everyone (Romans 12:2,10), including all those who served them.<sup>36</sup> In short, far from endorsing sinful slavery, the Gospel, **taken to its logical conclusion**, would eventually lead truth-seek-

ing masters and government officials to help bring an end to any kind of cruel, sinful captivity.<sup>37</sup>

Atheists may express repulsion for what the Bible teaches about slavery but, in truth, it’s the atheistic position that is quite irrational. After all, upon what logical grounds can an atheist ever call anything absolutely, objectively evil, including the kidnapping of people and forced servitude? And if “might makes right” and the “fittest survive” (and flourish), could an atheist not logically rationalize stronger people stealing and subjugating weaker people for their own purposes? If God does not exist, and man is nothing more than an evolved animal, it would be just as “right” to capture, enslave, and multiply human beings as it is to trap mice, encage rabbits, and breed dogs. Such is simply the case if atheism is true.

### **#7—“CHRIST PREACHED A HELL-FIRE-AND-BRIMSTONE ETERNAL PUNISHMENT”**

Last, but not least, the Bible’s teaching on the reality of eternal punishment for unbelievers has perhaps “made” more atheists than any other teaching of Scripture. After expressing that he did not “believe one can grant either superlative wisdom or the superlative goodness of Christ as depicted in the Gospels,” popular early-20<sup>th</sup>-century agnostic Bertrand Russell indicated that he was not concerned about what **other people** said about Christ, but “**with Christ as He appears in the Gospels.**”<sup>38</sup> How so? In his widely distributed pamphlet “Why I Am Not a Christian,” Russell argued, “There is one very serious defect in Christ’s moral character, and that is that He believed in hell. I do

not myself feel that any person who is really profoundly humane can believe in everlasting punishment. Christ certainly as depicted in the Gospel did believe in everlasting punishment.”<sup>39</sup>

Many Christians foolishly and hypocritically avoid the Bible’s teaching on hell, but refer regularly to Scripture’s allusion to heaven. Yet, as Russell and many other critics of Christ are very well aware, according to Jesus and the Bible writers, “eternal punishment” is just as much a reality as “eternal life.” After explaining to His disciples how God will separate the righteous from the wicked at the Judgment (Matthew 25:31-45), Jesus concluded by telling them that the wicked “shall go away into eternal punishment: but the righteous into eternal life” (25:46, ASV).<sup>40</sup> Earlier He stated that the wicked will be sent away “into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:41). Hell’s fire “shall never be quenched” (Mark 9:43), the figurative “worm” that eats on the flesh of hell’s inhabitants “does not die” (Mark 9:48), and the wicked who find themselves in hell (due to their rejection of God’s gracious gift of salvation through Christ) “shall suffer the punishment of eternal destruction” (2 Thessalonians 1:9, RSV). As it was in Sodom, when God “rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all, even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed” (Luke 17:29-30). Thus, as Jesus taught, “My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him!” (Luke 12:4-5).

Bertrand Russell accused Jesus’ preaching to be full of

“vindictive fury against those people who would not listen to His [Jesus’] preaching.” “You do not,” he contrasted, “find that attitude in Socrates. You find him quite bland and urbane towards the people who would not listen to him; and it is, to my mind, far more worthy of a sage to take that line than to take the line of indignation.” He added:

I really do not think that a person with a proper degree of kindness in his nature would have put fears and terrors of that sort into the world.... I must say that I think all this doctrine, that hell-fire is a punishment for sin, is a doctrine of cruelty. It is a doctrine that put cruelty into the world and gave the world generations of cruel torture; and the Christ of the Gospels, if you could take Him as His chroniclers represent Him, would certainly have to be considered partly responsible for that.<sup>41</sup>

So there you have it: how can people believe and accept the message of the chroniclers of Christ (i.e., the Gospel writers), when such accounts are full of hell-fire-and-brimstone preaching?

Consider four reasons why Jesus’ and the Bible’s teachings on hell logically should **not** make **anyone** an atheist. First, Bertrand Russell stated that he did not “feel” that any “humane” person can believe in eternal punishment, and since Christ did, then He had a “defect” in His “moral” character. Yet, truth, objectivity, and logical argumentation are **not** based upon people’s feelings. Atheists cannot logically condemn the Bible’s teaching about hell as objectively “inhumane” and “immoral,” while simultaneously believing that human beings arose by chance from rocks and rodents over billions of years. If an eternal, supernat-

ural Creator does **not** exist, then **objective**<sup>42</sup> goodness and wickedness, justice and cruelty **cannot** logically exist. **Actual** good and evil, fairness and unfairness can only exist if there is some real, objective point of reference—“some objective standard...which is other than the particular moral code and which has an obligatory character which can be recognized.”<sup>43</sup> Indeed, the **best** that atheists can “argue” about the biblical teaching of hell is that they “feel” like it is “immoral,” but they cannot actually prove such.

Second, atheists and agnostics also fail in their assessment of hell because they fail to grasp what the Bible teaches about the reality, offensiveness, and severity of sin. This failure should come as no surprise because a person cannot have a proper view of sin without having a proper view of God and the Bible. Once a person comes to know that God exists and the Bible is His Word,<sup>44</sup> he then learns that there are no “white lies,” innocent “alternative lifestyles,” or mere “affairs.” There is only Truth or lies. There is only God’s infinite right way versus all of the prideful ways of man. There is only pure holiness versus repulsive unholiness. There is only light and darkness. And, since “God is light and in Him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5), His innately pure and holy nature will not allow Him to tolerate lawlessness (Habakkuk 1:13; Isaiah 59:1-2; 1 John 3:4).

Third, God’s perfect justice demands punishment for wrongdoing. The Bible reveals that God is 100% just. There is nothing unfair about Him. “Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne,” exclaimed the psalmist (89:14). “All of His ways are justice, a God of truth and without injustice; righteous and upright is He” (Deuteronomy 32:4). A just judge is one who shows no partiality (Deuteron-

omy 1:17), and God “shows no partiality nor takes a bribe” (Deuteronomy 10:17). A corrupt judge allows the guilty to go unpunished, while a just judge pronounces righteous judgment upon lawbreakers. “[H]e who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality” (Colossians 3:25). The guilty cannot “buy” their way out of punishment. They can’t “flirt” their way out of righteous judgment. Similar to how citizens of an earthly kingdom rightly rejoice at the pronouncement of punishment for the wicked, humanity should rejoice that we have a just Judge who also punishes evildoers.

“But wait a minute! A just judge wouldn’t punish people forever!” Says who? Says the sinner who has a shallow, flippant view of the wretchedness of sin and the holiness of God? Says the sinner who did the crime but doesn’t like the time? Says the person who is not perfectly impartial? Says the person who knows virtually nothing compared to the omniscience of God? What’s more, aren’t just and fair sentences and punishments (even in the physical realm) often much, much longer than the amount of time the crime actually took to commit? A man can murder an innocent person in only one second and yet justly spend the next 1.5 **billion** seconds (or 50 years) in prison. Certainly the thought of being punished forever and ever is a sobering, scary thought, but in truth, only the omniscient, infinitely wise, and perfectly just Judge is in a position to decide appropriate punishment for unforgiven sin. In truth, a rejection of God based upon the biblical teaching of hell is a rejection based upon emotion, not evidence.

Fourth and finally, though “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23), and though all sinners

deserve eternal punishment, **because of God's perfect love, no one** has to go to hell. God has given us an all-powerful, spiritual lifeline (Romans 1:16). Indeed, "the wages of sin is death, **but** the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). Some unbelievers love to talk about God's "vindictive fury," but they willfully ignore the overall theme of the Bible—"God is love" (1 John 4:8). He doesn't want **anyone** to perish (2 Peter 3:9). God "desires all men to be saved" (1 Timothy 2:4). From the moment wretched sin entered the world, God began revealing His answer to the sin problem (Genesis 3:15; 12:1-3). Following thousands of years of promises and prophecies throughout the Old Testament pointing to the ultimate "Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29), "God sent forth His son" to redeem the slaves of sin to become children of God (Galatians 4:4-5). "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that **whoever** believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved" (John 3:16-17). Indeed, God is so loving that He not only warned us of the eternal consequences of unforgiven sin,<sup>45</sup> but even when we succumbed to sin, God took upon Himself the punishment for our sins, that we might be saved! So why will many people still go to eternal hell? Because they **choose** to. Because they "trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was [they were] sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace" (Hebrews 10:29).

# Chapter 4



## ALLEGED SCIENTIFIC MISTAKES

In our scientifically advanced age of cloning, biometrics, Pentium processors, and the Internet, Americans' skepticism of biblical inerrancy appears to have reached an all-time high, especially in regard to matters of the Bible and science. How can a book, parts of which were written 3,500 years ago, have relevant scientific data? How could the Bible writers have made accurate statements about the heavens, long before the invention of telescopes and satellites? How could they have correctly classified animals before the development of Linnaean taxonomy? How could their references to zoology, botany, astronomy, and human anatomy be trustworthy?

Although the purpose of the Bible is not to provide a commentary on the physical Universe, Christians rightly conclude that, if the Bible was truly given "by inspiration

of God” (2 Timothy 3:16-17),<sup>1</sup> then it should be free from the kinds of errors that books written by uninspired men contain. The Bible may not be a textbook of biology, geology, or chemistry (the Bible is about God and redemption through Jesus Christ), but “wherever it deals with these fields, its statements are true and dependable.”<sup>2</sup> At least common sense demands such, if the writers really were “carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21, NIV).

According to many outspoken skeptics, the Bible writers made several scientific slip-ups. In a 1991 article titled “Scientific Boo-Boos in the Bible,” Christian-turned-skeptic Farrell Till alleged: “One thing the Bible definitely is not is inerrant in matters of science.... [T]he Bible is riddled with mistakes.”<sup>3</sup> Elsewhere Till challenged Christians to explain

why a divinely inspired, inerrant book has so many obvious scientific errors in it. And if the Bible is riddled with scientific errors, they should wonder too about the truth of that often parroted claim that the Bible is inerrant in all details of history, geography, chronology, etc., as well as in matters of faith and practice. It just ain’t so!<sup>4</sup>

In his book *The Encyclopedia of Biblical Errancy*, Dennis McKinsey penned a section titled “False Science,” in which he stated: “A...major area in which the Bible fails miserably concerns the large number of statements that are patently erroneous from a scientific perspective. On numerous occasions the Bible makes statements that have little or nothing to do with scientific accuracy.”<sup>5</sup> According to McKinsey,

Few topics activate biblical critics more than that of biblically based scientific contradictions and inac-

curacies. That is readily understandable, in view of the fact that the book is a veritable miasma of poor science, bad math, and inaccurate geography, all with a heavy overlay of mythology and folklore.... Scripture is a veritable cornucopia of scientific inaccuracies, falsehoods, and blunders.<sup>6</sup>

After listing 21 alleged scientific blunders in the Bible, McKinsey declared: “So that is biblical ‘science.’ Can you conceive of a more discordant deluge of deceptive delusion! Saddest of all is that **most of Christianity’s most prominent spokesmen are fully cognizant of these biblical inanities, but have spared no effort to avoid them or minimize their importance.**”<sup>7</sup>

The truth is, faithful Christian apologists have no reason to avoid McKinsey’s or anyone else’s questions about the reliability of the Bible. We may find some of the alleged discrepancies quite insignificant, and wonder why such allegations would even be made, but we will not avoid questions about the Bible’s inspiration and inerrancy out of fear that the Bible may not be the Word of God. In fact, among other things, this chapter addresses McKinsey’s first four scientific slip-ups supposedly found in Scripture—alleged mistakes that McKinsey believes are some of the very best proofs of the Bible’s errancy.

## ARE BATS BIRDS?

Leviticus 11:13-19

Everyone knows that a bat is not a bird. Bats are beakless, give birth to live young, and then nurse their young with milk until they are self-sufficient. A bat’s wings are featherless, and its body is covered with hair. Based upon such

characteristics, scientists classify bats as mammals, not birds. So what does the Bible have to say about these creatures?

Bats are mentioned specifically only three times in Scripture. Isaiah warned Israel of the time when their idols would be cast away “into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth...to the moles and bats” (2:19-20). The other two occurrences are found in the Pentateuch amidst laws regarding clean and unclean animals. In the book of Leviticus, Moses wrote:

And these you shall regard as an abomination **among the birds**; they shall not be eaten, they are an abomination: the eagle, the vulture, the buzzard, the kite, and the falcon after its kind; every raven after its kind, the ostrich, the short-eared owl, the sea gull, and the hawk after its kind; the little owl, the fisher owl, and the screech owl; the white owl, the jackdaw, and the carrion vulture; the stork, the heron after its kind, the hoopoe, **and the bat** (11:13-19).

Deuteronomy 14:11-18 also lists the bat among “birds.” But bats aren’t birds; they are mammals.

According to skeptics, the Bible’s classification of bats as birds represents one of the “scientific difficulties in the Bible.”<sup>8</sup> Such categorization is supposedly “an obvious contradiction between the Bible and Science.”<sup>9</sup> Since “the bat, is, of course, a mammal, not a bird,” McKinsey listed Leviticus 11:19 as a “**superb** verse to use...to take enlightenment to the biblically benighted.”<sup>10</sup>

Was Moses, who “was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds” (Acts 7:22), so uninformed that he could not tell the difference between bats and birds? Was the God, Whom the Bible claims **cre-**

**ated** bats and birds, unable to **classify** them properly? How is this **not** “an obvious contradiction between the Bible and Science,” as Ibrahim Khalil asserted?

The elementary answer to these questions is simply that God did not classify animals 3,500 years ago according to our modern classification system. As far back as Creation, God has divided animals into very basic, natural groups. He made aquatic and aerial creatures on day five and terrestrial animals on day six (Genesis 1:20-25). Similarly, in the first 23 verses of Leviticus 11, God divided the creatures into land animals (11:2-8), animals “that are in the water” (11:9-12), “birds” (11:13-19), and flying insects (11:20-23). He did not divide animals into mammals, birds, reptiles, and amphibians. In fact, the group of “creeping things” mentioned later in Leviticus 11 (vss. 29-30; cf. Genesis 1:24-25) includes both mammals (e.g., mice) and reptiles (e.g., lizards). Clearly then, God divided animals according to their locomotion and environment rather than whether or not they have hair, lay eggs, or nurse their young.

Still, some may question why the English word “bird” is used for the category in which bats are listed. Why not simply call this group of animals “the flying creatures”? Actually, the term “bird” in Leviticus 11:13 (as well as Genesis 1:20-30) is translated from the Hebrew word *’ôp*, which literally means “flying creatures.”<sup>11</sup> It is derived from *’ûp*, meaning to “fly, fly about, fly away.”<sup>12</sup> That this word is not used solely for “birds” is evident from Leviticus 11:20-23, where it is used with *sherets* in reference to “winged creeping things” (ASV), i.e., flying insects.

Admittedly, bats and birds have many differences, but one major commonality—the ability to fly—is the very char-

acteristic God used to group them together. Why are no other mammals included in this list? Because “bats are the only mammals capable of true flight”<sup>13</sup>—another reason why Bible translators have chosen to use the term “birds” in these passages, instead of the more general term “flying creatures.” The rationale among translators seems to be, “if 99.9% of all ‘flying creatures’ are birds, then we will use the term ‘birds’ to translate the word ‘*ôp*.” Since Bible students should be very familiar with the figure of speech known as synecdoche (“by which a part is put for the whole”),<sup>14</sup> they should have little trouble understanding why translators continue to use the term “birds” to categorize all the flying creatures, including bats. After all, bats make up a very small percentage of all of the animals that fly.

What’s more, notice that bats are placed at the **end** of the list of birds and just before the list of flying insects. This placement is entirely proper for the only living “flying creature” that is neither a true bird nor an insect.

To accuse God or the Bible writers of categorizing animals incorrectly based upon Linnaeus’ taxonomy in *Systema Naturae* (1735), or any other modern method of classifying animals, is tantamount to criticizing people for not organizing their wardrobe or cataloging their books according to your own methods. Whether a person chooses to organize his books alphabetically, sequentially, or topically, according to the Dewey Decimal Classification System or the Library of Congress Classification System, is a matter of judgment. Likewise, it is extremely unfair to judge ancient classification systems according to modern man’s arbitrary standards. Skeptics are wrong for imposing their preconceived standards back on an ancient text. Frankly, placing

bats in the category of “flying creatures,” rather than with the land animals, “all that are in the water,” or the “creeping things,” makes perfectly good sense. Bats are, after all, “the world’s most expert **fliers**,”<sup>15</sup> not walkers, crawlers, or swimmers. For Moses’ allusion to bats to be a true error, he would have had to say something to the effect of, “bats are not flying animals.”

Sadly, one significant question often left unexplored in a discussion of the Bible’s treatment of bats and birds is why God classified bats as “unclean.” Was this simply due to many bats’ eerie outward appearance, or that they are nocturnal cave dwellers? Could there be something more? My colleague Kyle Butt addressed the wisdom of God’s instruction about bats in his book, *Behold! The Word of God*. The fact is,

...bats often carry rabies. While it is true that many animals are susceptible to rabies, bats are especially so. The American College of Emergency Physicians documented that between 1992 and 2002, rabies passed from bats caused 24 of the 26 human deaths from rabies in the United States.<sup>16</sup> In the *Science Daily* article describing this research, “Robert V. Gibbons, MD, MPH, of Walter Reed Army Institute of Research in Silver Spring, MD, reviewed the 24 cases of humans with bat rabies.” From his research, he advised “the public to seek emergency care for preventive treatment for rabies **if direct contact with a bat occurs**.”<sup>17</sup> Moses’ instruction to avoid bats coincides perfectly with modern research. Once again, the super-human wisdom imparted through Moses by God cannot be denied by the conscientious student of the Old Testament.<sup>18</sup>

## ARE RABBITS REALLY RUMINANTS?

Leviticus 11:6

Not only is Moses ridiculed for classifying a bat as a “bird,” but supposedly he made another mistake when he categorized the hare (or rabbit, NASB, NIV) as an animal that “chews the cud” (Leviticus 11:6; Deuteronomy 14:7). Cows, goats, sheep, and deer all have three- or four-chambered stomachs and bring already-chewed and swallowed vegetation up into their mouths to masticate once more. These animals “chew the cud” and are known as ruminants.<sup>19</sup> A rabbit, however, does not have a three- or four-chambered stomach, nor does it bring previously swallowed food directly back up from its stomach to its mouth to chew again. For these reasons, skeptics have repeatedly criticized the Bible’s categorization of a rabbit as an animal that “chews the cud.”<sup>20</sup> [NOTE: Skeptics have also charged the animal mentioned in Leviticus 11:5 (Hebrew *shaphan*) of not being a cud chewer. Since, however, there is disagreement over the identity of this animal (translated “coney” in the KJV, ASV, and NIV, “rock badger” in the NASB and RSV, and “rock hyrax” in the NKJV), our discussion will center solely on the rabbit. If the *shaphan* resembles the rabbit, as some believe,<sup>21</sup> then whatever arguments made for the rabbit’s inclusion in this list, might also apply to the *shaphan*.]

In an article titled “Bible Biology,” Farrell Till alleged: “The Leviticus writer made a serious biological error in describing them [rabbits and *shaphan*, which he contends are coney–EL] as cud chewers.... [T]hey have no cuds to chew.”<sup>22</sup> Elsewhere Till addressed this issue while simultaneously commenting on the scientific foreknowledge

argument that Christians sometimes use as one of the proofs for the Bible's inspiration:

Something that has long perplexed me is the way that inerrancy proponents can so easily find "scientific foreknowledge" in obscurely worded Bible passages but seem completely unable to see scientific error in statements that were rather plainly written. There are too many to discuss, but Leviticus 11:5-6 can serve as an example....They [rabbits and conies—EL] do not have compartmentalized stomachs that ruminants must have in order to be cud-chewers. Inerrancy champions have stumbled over these passages with various attempts to explain them....Yet after all has been said on the matter, the fact remains that hares and conies are not cud-chewers. But "Moses" said that they were.

One would think that if God were going to arm his inspired writers with scientific foreknowledge...he could have easily programmed them to know the simple fact that hares and conies aren't cud-chewers.<sup>23</sup>

Once again, we are told the Bible is wrong. And, if the Bible is wrong about something as basic as whether or not rabbits "chew the cud," how could anyone really believe that it was "given by inspiration of God" (2 Timothy 3:16)?

First of all, critics must acknowledge the fact that we frequently describe things as they **appear** to take place and not necessarily as they **actually** happen. Meteorologists talk about the Sun rising and setting, even though they know very well that actually the Earth is moving around the Sun, rather than vice versa. Doctors refer to a pregnant woman's water breaking, when actually the liquid

is amniotic fluid, and not merely H<sub>2</sub>O. Furthermore, the **amniotic fluid** does not break, rather the **sac** containing the fluid bursts. The Bible writers also referred to things as they **appeared**. Paul, for example, in his discussion of Jesus' resurrection, described some of the Christians who had died as having "fallen asleep" (1 Corinthians 15:6). Did Paul know that these Christians had died, and not merely "fallen asleep"? Most certainly. Did the Bible writers know that the bat is not a bird? Of course. But what about the rabbit? Why is it listed among the cud chewers? It may be simply because rabbits "**appear** to chew their food very thoroughly like true ruminants, and this is what the law is insisting on."<sup>24</sup> Rabbits move their jaws and wiggle their noses in a way which **looks like** they are ruminating.<sup>25</sup> In fact, so convincing is this appearance that, according to Walter Kaiser, "Carolus Linnaeus (1707-1778), to whom we owe the modern system of biological classification, at first classified the coney and the hare as ruminants."<sup>26</sup> In short, it may be that rabbits were listed as "cud chewers" based on simple observation.

Interestingly, though the rabbit (or hare) does not have a three- or four-chambered stomach from which it directly regurgitates previously swallowed food for a second chewing, it does practice what modern scientists call "refection." In his classic work titled *All the Animals of the Bible Lands*, George Cansdale addressed this process:

[A]t certain times of the day, when the hare is resting in its "form," it passes droppings of different texture and appearance which it at once eats again, swallowing them after little or no chewing. It thus seems to be eating without taking any green stuff into its mouth.

This is not, of course, the same thing as chewing the cud, but it has a similar effect. Like the ruminants, hares feed on bulky vegetable matter of which only a part can be digested, and the yield is largely the result of bacterial action inside the gut; the process of breaking down in to assimilable substances is started on the first passage through and taken a stage further on the second.<sup>27</sup>

According to biologist Leonard Brand, “Lagomorphs [hares and rabbits–EL] produce two kinds of fecal pellets which are produced at different times during the day. When the animals are active and feeding they produce the familiar hard pellets. When they cease their activity and retire to their burrows or resting areas, they begin producing soft pellets which they eat as soon as they are passed.”<sup>28</sup> So although rabbits do not regurgitate previously swallowed food, they do swallow their partly digested food a second time. In fact, rabbits reingest more than half of their feces.<sup>29</sup>

Still, the skeptic contends that the refecation of rabbits is not rumination. To compare the two supposedly represents a

complete failure to explain away the biological error of the Leviticus writer. After all has been said about what hares appear to be doing and how their reingesting of caecotrophic materials [caecal feces–EL] achieves the same purpose as cud-chewing, **the fact still remains that hares do not chew the cud.... [T]he Leviticus writer was wrong when he said that hares and coneys “chew the cud.”**<sup>30</sup>

But what did **Moses** mean when he used the phrase “chew the cud”? The word “cud” (Hebrew *gerah*) appears only 11 times in all of Scripture: seven times in Leviticus 11

and four times in Deuteronomy 14—every occurrence is in the two passages that give lists of clean and unclean animals. The rabbit is mentioned in each list as one that “chews the cud” (Leviticus 11:6; Deuteronomy 14:7). Therefore, if the only sections in Scripture where specific animals are mentioned that “chew the cud” include rabbits, then it is entirely proper to conclude that Moses simply defined “cud chewers” more broadly than modern scientists. Today, “cud chewers” (called ruminants) may be strictly defined as animals that “swallow their food without chewing it very much, store it temporarily in one of their stomach compartments, then later regurgitate it and rechew it thoroughly, and then swallow and digest it.”<sup>31</sup> It would be completely unjust, however, to force present-day definitions on a 3,500-year-old document. “As with Moses’ classification of bats as ‘birds,’ the modern definition of terms does not take away from Moses’ ability, or even his right, to use words as he sees fit to use them.”<sup>32</sup> What’s more, as Jonathan Sarfati concluded: “It is inconceivable that someone familiar with Middle-Eastern animal life would make an easily corrected mistake about rabbits, and also inconceivable that the Israelites would have accepted a book as Scripture if it were contrary to observation,”<sup>33</sup> especially when the Book has so many negative things to say about the Israelites.

## ARE FOUR-LEGGED FOWL FOR REAL?

Leviticus 11:20

Following the section in Leviticus 11 where various unclean birds are listed, verse 20 begins a new category with these words: “All **fowls** that creep, going upon all **four**, shall be an abomination unto you” (KJV). Fowls on

four legs? “Whoever heard of four-legged fowl?”<sup>34</sup> Surely Bible believers would agree with critics who contend that “there are no birds that go around on four legs,”<sup>35</sup> unless, of course, they are mutants. So why does Leviticus 11:20 refer to birds with four legs?

The problem in Leviticus 11:20 is not with God or His inspired writer, but with the King James Version’s translation of the verse. Moses was not referring to “birds,” but to “flying insects.” The Hebrew *sherets ‘ôp* is more accurately translated “winged creeping things” (ASV), “winged insects” (NASB, ESV, RSV), or “flying insects” (NKJV, NIV). Interestingly, in Deuteronomy 14:19, where these same creatures are discussed, the King James translators used the phrase “creeping thing that flieth” to translate the same Hebrew words (*sherets ‘ôp*) used in Leviticus 11:20. That this alleged contradiction is merely a translation issue has even been admitted by certain skeptics, including Farrell Till. Although Till chides the Bible writers elsewhere in his writings, he freely admits in this instance that “[f]our-legged fowls... would be a biological blunder indeed, but since **the context clearly indicated insects** in this passage, we won’t hold bibliolaters responsible for a translation flaw.”<sup>36</sup>

[NOTE: Although four-legged “fowls” are only found among mutated birds, we must not dismiss all “four-legged” flying creatures as biological impossibilities. Bats, mentioned one verse earlier (Leviticus 11:19), “**crawl on all fours**, with their long arms and flexible legs splayed out to the sides.”<sup>37</sup> What’s more, both history and the fossil record reveal that extinct flying reptiles also had arms and claws attached to membranous wings.<sup>38</sup> Though scientists believe these flying reptiles mainly walked upright, at the

very least their “hands” would have been used for climbing trees and handling food<sup>39</sup>—they would have used “all fours.” While we certainly believe that the “four-footed-fowl” difficulty surrounding Leviticus 11:20 is merely a translation problem, and not a mistake by the inspired writer, some flying mammals and reptiles currently have (or had in the past) four limbs.]

## GRASSHOPPERS DON'T WALK “ON ALL FOURS,” DO THEY?

Leviticus 11:20-23

All flying insects that creep on all **fours** shall be an abomination to you. Yet these you may eat of every flying insect that creeps on all **fours**: those which have jointed legs above their feet with which to leap on the earth. These you may eat: the locust after its kind, the destroying locust after its kind, the cricket after its kind, and the grasshopper after its kind. But all other flying insects which have **four** feet shall be an abomination to you (Leviticus 11:20-23).

Skeptics admit that Leviticus 11:20 is not referring to four-legged fowl, but to “flying insects.” However, as critics have repeatedly noted, insects have **six** legs, not four. About these verses, Dennis McKinsey asked: “Whoever heard of four-legged insects? In fact, whoever heard of any four-legged creeping things that fly?”<sup>40</sup> He then listed this alleged discrepancy as another “superb verse to use” when talking with Christians about the blunders in the Bible.<sup>41</sup> Steve Wells, author of *The Skeptic’s Annotated Bible*, wrote mockingly: “You’d think that since God made the insects, and so many of them (at least several million species),

that he would know how many legs they have.”<sup>42</sup> In her article titled “Scientific Errors in the Bible,” Loren Petrich declared: “There are...scientific difficulties in the Bible.... In the part of Leviticus which lists proscribed animals, we find that...grasshoppers have four legs.... [B]ut the number of legs possessed by grasshoppers should have been easy to find, since several people in the Bible reportedly ate grasshoppers, and one can always count the number of legs a grasshopper has before eating one.”<sup>43</sup> Farrell Till had much to say about the wording of Leviticus 11:20-23 in his article about “Bible Biology”:

Many of the biological mistakes in the Bible were anatomical in nature. The Leviticus writer...was so unobservant, for example, that he apparently thought insects were four-legged creatures....

An immensely greater problem than linguistic and translation flaws in this passage is the fact that whoever wrote it consistently referred to winged insects as four-legged creatures, a mistake that practically any modern-day elementary student would know better than to make. What educated person today doesn't know that insects have six legs? We have to wonder why God, who so routinely gave scientific insights to his inspired writers, couldn't at least have opened the eyes of his earthly messenger in this case and had him count the legs on a grasshopper....

What is there about insects that would warrant writing a description (like the one in the Leviticus passage) that mentions only four of their six legs?...[T]hese insects don't “go on all fours”; they go on all sixes. That's a strange oversight from an author writing under the direction of an omniscient deity who routinely gave marvelous scientific insights to his inspired crew.<sup>44</sup>

As one can see, critics of the Bible's inerrancy are not at a loss for words when they discuss the Bible's references to insects that "creep on all fours." But are the critics right?

Yes and no. The skeptic **is** right to conclude that insects such as locusts, grasshoppers, and crickets have three pairs of legs, not two pairs. But the skeptic is **not** correct in assuming that God or the Bible writers were unaware of this fact. The very idea that the Israelites, who during various plagues saw untold millions of insects at a time (e.g., locusts; cf. Exodus 10:1-20; Joel 1:4; Amos 4:9), were clueless about how many legs these creatures had, is outlandish—"people in biblical times could count legs just as easily as people today,"<sup>45</sup> probably much easier. As Petrich mentioned, the Israelites not only saw insects, but they ate them (cf. Mark 1:6; Leviticus 11:22), which means they would have seen them "up close and personal." Are we to believe that when the Israelites caught, cleaned, and put locusts up to their mouths, they never realized how many legs these insects had? The writer of Leviticus would have known this as surely as Americans know that beef comes from cows which walk on four legs.

So why did Moses use the term "four" to describe creatures with **six** legs? Likely for the same reason we refer to certain arthropods as having 100 or 1,000, legs—Moses was using a colloquial expression like one might hear on a farm; he was not writing a technical, scientific paper on the anatomy of insects. Idiomatic expressions were as prevalent in ancient times as they are in modern times. Today, we identify certain creatures as centipedes (meaning "hundred feet"), yet the "total number of legs in most species is closer to 30 than to 100."<sup>46</sup> We refer to other arthropods as

millipedes (meaning “thousand feet”), but no millipede has ever been reported as having anywhere near the number of feet suggested by its name. The “most leggy” millipede discovered in modern times had only 750 legs,<sup>47</sup> while the vast majority of millipedes have fewer than 400 legs.<sup>48</sup> Yet, we still call these creatures millipedes. Why? Because numbers are often used as more of a designation than a literal number. (Have you ever purchased a “2 x 4,” only to find that it was more like a “1½ x 3½”?) Just as the terms centipede and millipede signify “no more than that such insects have a great number of feet,”<sup>49</sup> the phrase “creep on all fours,” could reasonably refer to something other than insects that have literally only four legs.

Consider another example of the flexibility of names and numbers. In George Orwell’s novel *Animal Farm*, the pigs gave the farm animals “Seven Commandments.” The first two commandments were as follows: (1) Whatever goes upon two legs is an enemy; (2) Whatever goes upon four legs, or has wings, is a friend. Later, as the story goes, when the pigs realized that the “slower” animals (e.g., sheep) were unable to learn the Seven Commandments, they summed up the commandments of the farm with a single maxim: “Four legs good, two legs bad.” Did the pigs suddenly mean to exclude the birds from the good, four-legged animals? No. The pigs explained that by “two legs,” they meant “man,” and by “four legs,” they meant “animal” (regardless of whether the animals had four legs, or two legs and two wings).

The skeptic must admit the fact that numbers often represent something more than a literal number. But if this is the explanation to Moses’ use of the term “four” in Leviti-

cus 11:20-23, then what did he mean? Why did he use the expression “winged creeping things that go upon all **fours**” (Leviticus 11:20, ASV)? The fact is, he did not define the expression for us (though his contemporaries surely knew its meaning). The phrase likely means that, in contrast to birds (listed just previously—Leviticus 11:13-19), which walk **upright**, “winged creeping things” walk **horizontally**—they “go upon all fours.” Skeptics may not like this explanation (as it exonerates the Bible writer of any discrepancy), but they cannot argue with the fact that we often use similar language. If Farrell Till, Steve Wells, or other Bible critics have ever referred to centipedes and millipedes, one wonders why they would have a problem with Moses referring to the flying things that walk horizontally as “winged creeping things that go upon all fours.”

### “THE SUN STOOD STILL”—*REALLY?*

Joshua 10:10-14

In compliance with God’s will to punish the terribly wicked nations of Canaan (Deuteronomy 9:5; Joshua 10:8), Joshua and his army of Israelites engaged in battle with the “five kings of the Amorites” and their armies at Gibeon (Joshua 10:5,10). In the midst of the battle, which poured into other areas of southern Palestine, Joshua spoke to the Lord, saying: “Sun, stand still over Gibeon; and moon, in the Valley of Aijalon” (10:12). The inspired writer goes on to acknowledge: “So the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, till the people had revenge upon their enemies” (10:13). Even more emphatically, the writer testifies: “So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and did not hasten to go down for about a whole day. And there has been no

day like that, before it or after it, that the Lord heeded the voice of a man; for the Lord fought for Israel” (10:13-14).

What does the text mean when it says, “the Sun stood still”? Did the Sun literally stand “still,” or did the Earth stop its approximate 1,000-mph rotation on its axis in order to give the Israelites more time to defeat their enemies? And what about the Moon? Did it actually stop, too? What are we to make of such language?

First, is it possible that the same God Who miraculously created the entire Universe out of nothing could supernaturally (and literally) stop the Sun (or any other part, or all parts, of the Universe that He so chooses)?<sup>50</sup> Could the same God Who made light, as well as mornings and evenings on Earth, **without a Sun** (on days 1-3 of Creation; Genesis 1:3-19)<sup>51</sup> also cause the Moon to “stop”?<sup>52</sup> Is it possible for the omnipotent Creator, Who currently “upholds the universe by the word of His power” (Hebrews 1:3, ESV), to miraculously manipulate a day on Earth to His liking? Is it possible for God to refract light or to specially create some kind of light to illuminate a part of the Earth for a longer period of time than the normal daylight hours? Though skeptics often ridicule the idea of miracles, in truth, if a supernatural God exists, then supernatural miracles are possible. Could God Almighty work an astronomical miracle on behalf of the Israelites when they faced the armies of the Amorites if He so chose? Indeed, He could.

But how, exactly, could God have “stopped” the Sun and Moon? The fact is, we are not told **how** God could have worked such a miracle any more than we are told how He miraculously fed several thousand people with merely five loaves of bread and two fish (Matthew 14:13-21), how He

made an iron ax head float in water (2 Kings 6:4-7), or how exactly Jonah could have survived for three days in the belly of a fish. The recognition of God's unlimited knowledge and power should be a logically sufficient explanation.

Bible students must keep in mind that the book of Joshua is a historical composition, full of real people, places, dialogue, and events, and is written in ordinary language. Joshua is not a book of prophecy or poetry filled with extensive amounts of figurative language. Nothing in Joshua 10 suggests that we should interpret the account as highly figurative or symbolic. That said, one common element of normal, "everyday" speech and writing, both in Bible times and today, is the description of things **as they appear** (and not necessarily in the scientifically precise manner that we would expect in a geometry or chemistry classroom). Since to everyone on Earth (both in Bible times and today) it **appears** that the Sun moves from the east to the west, man has long referred to the **Sun rising** and **setting** (though technically what we see is the result of the Earth's rotation on its axis). Could it be that the miracle God worked in Joshua 10 had less to do with the Sun than one might initially think? Certainly. As Hebrew scholar Justin Rogers commented: "Indeed, it **appeared to them** that 'the sun stopped in the middle of the sky.' This is clear use of phenomenological language, and it simply means this day was unusually long. Daylight was halted miraculously so as to allow God's forces more time to conquer their foes."<sup>53</sup> God did not inform us of the precise manner in which He chose to work this marvelous miracle, but rest assured, it happened, and it was amazing. In fact, "there has been no day like that, before it or after it, that the Lord heeded the voice of a man" (Joshua 10:14).<sup>54</sup>

## WAS JONAH SWALLOWED BY A FISH OR A WHALE?

Jonah 1:17; Matthew 12:40

The book of Jonah reveals that “the Lord had prepared a great **fish** to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the **fish** three days and three nights” (1:17). About 800 years later, Jesus alluded to this amazing event (Matthew 12:39-41). According to the King James translation of Matthew 12:40, Jesus referred to Jonah being “three days and three nights in the **whale’s** belly.” Since fish and whales are different creatures, skeptics accuse Jesus and the Bible writers of making a mistake.<sup>55</sup> Dennis McKinsey alleged that **Matthew 12:40 is “[p]robably the most famous scientific error by Jesus.”**<sup>56</sup> “Apparently Jesus hadn’t read the Old Testament very closely.... Anyone with even a minimum of biological knowledge knows that a whale is not a fish and a fish is not a whale.”<sup>57</sup>

Such a criticism of Jesus and the Bible writers epitomizes the impotence of skeptics’ attacks on God and His Word. McKinsey based his criticism solely on an English translation made nearly **1,600 years after** Jesus spoke these words. The skeptic never bothered to compare translations. He never asked about the word that Jesus originally spoke or that Matthew recorded. He did nothing but make a cursory criticism that might sound sensible on the surface, yet with only a little investigation, is easily and rationally explained.

What was the underlying Greek word that is translated “whale” in the KJV (as well as a few other versions)? A brief look in various respected Greek dictionaries quickly reveals that the word is *ketos* and is defined broadly as a “large sea creature,”<sup>58</sup> “sea monster,”<sup>59</sup> or “huge fish.”<sup>60</sup> Jesus indicated

that Jonah was swallowed by a “large sea creature,” which was not necessarily a whale, but **may** have been.

Nearly 300 years before Jesus spoke of Jonah being swallowed by a *ketos* (Matthew 12:40), translators of the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) used this **same Greek word** (*ketos*) to translate the Hebrew word (*dahg*, fish) found in Jonah 1:17, 2:1, and 2:10. The fact is, as Hebrew and Greek scholar Jack Lewis concluded, both *dahg* and *ketos* “designate sea creatures of undefined species.”<sup>61</sup> In no way did Jesus, the Creator of all things (John 1:3), make a mistake about what kind of animal God “had prepared” to swallow Jonah. The animal was a great sea creature, and not necessarily a great “**fish**” according to our modern, more limited, definition of the word. It may very well have been a type of fish (e.g., shark), water-living mammal (e.g., whale), or extinct, dinosaur-like, water-living reptile. We simply cannot be sure. As Dave Miller concluded: “Both the Hebrew and Greek languages lacked the precision to identify with specificity the identity of the creature that swallowed Jonah.”<sup>62</sup>

Finally, a crucial truth that many miss in a discussion about God and the Bible writers’ naming and classifying of animals (as we noted in our previous discussion in this chapter about bats) is that God did not classify animals thousands of years ago according to our modern classification system. Just as God sensibly classified bats with “birds,” since they both fly (Leviticus 11:13-19), He could classify whales as “fish,” since they both maneuver by swimming. Remember, God divided animals more according to their locomotion and environment rather than strictly into “fish, mammals, birds, reptiles, and amphibians.” To accuse Jesus

or the Bible writers of incorrectly categorizing an animal—and to do so based upon Carolus Linnaeus’ 18<sup>th</sup>-century classification of animals, or any other modern method of classifying animals, is both illogical and unjust.

## **MUSTARD SEED MISTAKE, OR MISUNDERSTANDING?**

Matthew 13:31-32

In Matthew 13:31-32, the apostle recorded a brief parable that Jesus taught regarding His heavenly kingdom. “The kingdom of heaven,” Jesus said, “is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field, which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches.” The central truth of Jesus’ lesson was that the kingdom of heaven (i.e., the church; Matthew 16:18-19; Colossians 1:13), would be very small in the beginning (Acts 2), but in time would become very large. Rather than be a movement that died with its leader (cf. Acts 5:33-39), history shows that Jesus was exactly right in His prophecy: since His death and resurrection 2,000 years ago, multiplied millions of people have become citizens of this heavenly kingdom of which Jesus foretold.

Rather than acknowledge Jesus’ impressively fulfilled prophecy, His critics allege that He blundered in His reference to the mustard seed being “the least of all the seeds” (or as Mark words it, “smaller than all the seeds on earth”—4:31). Since other plant seeds technically are smaller than mustard seeds (e.g., epiphytic orchid seeds found in tropical rainforests), critics claim that Jesus made a scientific mistake.<sup>63</sup>

Although the Bible has shown itself to be historically and scientifically accurate time and again over the last 2,000 years, the reader must bear in mind that, just as we often do in modern times, Jesus and the Bible writers frequently used figures of speech. They sometimes used numbers as names instead of literal numbers (e.g., calling the apostles “the twelve” after Judas had died—1 Corinthians 15:5). They oftentimes referred to things **as they appeared** instead of as they actually were (e.g., Christians who had died were said to have “fallen asleep”—1 Corinthians 15:6). They used Hebrew idioms, even when writing in the Greek language (e.g., “three days and three nights”—Matthew 12:40). And, just as we communicate truths in the 21<sup>st</sup> century through easily interpreted exaggeration (e.g., “I’m so hungry I could eat a horse”), Jesus and the Bible writers also made use of hyperbolic expressions. For example, when Paul noted in his letter to the church in Colosse that the Gospel “was preached to every creature under heaven” (1:23), readers understand that Paul is 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 obviously using a figure of speech to communicate an astounding truth: the then-known world (of both Jews and Gentiles) had been exposed to the Good News of Jesus Christ.

So what about Jesus’ comment regarding the mustard seed being “the least of all the seeds” (Matthew 13:32)? Was Jesus scientifically inaccurate? Only in the same sense that people are today when they refer to it “raining cats and dogs” during heavy precipitation, or “burning up” during a heat wave. The fact is, Jesus was speaking proverbially

in this parable. In Palestine, mustard seeds were used comparatively when talking of very small things. For example, when Jesus taught about how the smallest amount of faith could bring about great results, He referred to this “faith as a mustard seed” (Matthew 17:20). Since the Jews were very familiar with the mustard seed, Jesus referred to what they could understand and appreciate. In **their** world, where they lived, planted, and harvested, they understood that the mustard seed was the smallest of the seeds they normally planted. And still, it could germinate, take root, and flourish, eventually becoming an 8- to 10-foot tall shrub.<sup>64</sup>

Similar to how we might say to someone, “**everyone** knows that two plus two is four,” Jesus told His Palestinian peers that the mustard seed is “the least of all the seeds.” Do most people on Earth likely know that two plus two is four? Yes. But millions of infants are ignorant of this mathematical fact, as are many mentally challenged individuals. Thus, the term “everyone” would be used in a limited sense. Likewise, when Jesus spoke of the mustard seed, He was speaking hyperbolically in a limited sense. The mustard seed “was the smallest usually sown **in Jewish fields.**”<sup>65</sup>

# Chapter 5



## **BIBLICAL *GRACE*, *FAITH*, AND *WORKS*— CONTRADICTORY, OR PERFECTLY CONSISTENT?**

*Biblical teaching on grace, faith, and works has long been criticized by skeptics and twisted by many religionists. In this chapter, we look extensively at two of the most frequently cited and misunderstood scriptures in all the Bible: Ephesians 2:8-9 and John 3:16.*

### **EPHESIANS 2:8-9**

In his book *The Encyclopedia of Biblical Errancy*, longtime Bible skeptic Dennis McKinsey described “the biblical road to salvation” as “vague and conflicting.”<sup>1</sup> He wrote:

[I]f one were to accept the Bible as God’s word and believe that heaven awaited those who gained entrance, one could never know for sure what must be done in order to reach heaven. The Bible is just too vague, too nebulous, too contradictory for even those who seek to follow its advice. This is because Scripture clearly outlines...different methods by which one can be saved and...the different methods are often either mutually exclusive, divergent, or contradictory.<sup>2</sup>

In his monthly journal on alleged Bible contradictions, McKinsey commented on Ephesians 2:8-9, calling it

a passage contradictory within itself. It says you are saved through faith, while simultaneously calling salvation a gift of God. How can it be a gift when it must be earned? If you don’t make an effort, if you don’t have faith in Jesus, then you aren’t saved. How, then, can it be called a gift completely divorced from any works on your part? You must do something—believe in Jesus—in order to receive it.<sup>3</sup>

Bob Seidensticker of patheos.com lists “**Faith saves (or do works save?)**” as #6 in his “Top 20 Most Damning Bible Contradictions.” He quotes Ephesians 2:8-9<sup>4</sup> saying, “That seems clear enough until we find the opposite claim elsewhere in the Bible.... For something so important as getting into heaven and avoiding hell, the New Testament is surprisingly unclear.” Seidensticker then asks, “[M]aybe it’s repentance that saves...or maybe baptism?” and lists Acts 3:19, Luke 24:47, Acts 2:38, and Romans 6:4 as alleged proof of a biblical inconsistency pertaining to salvation.<sup>5</sup>

Is the Bible really “unclear” about salvation? Is the one sentence recorded in Ephesians 2:8-9 self-contradictory?

Are McKinsey, Seidensticker, and other skeptics correct in their assessment of this passage of Scripture? How can these verses be consistent with other verses that teach the need for sinners to repent and be baptized? What rational response, if any, can be given from Scripture for all the differences skeptics cite?

### **Getting Context for Ephesians 2:8-9**

Proper interpretation is impossible without consideration of the context in which statements are made. Even some of the simplest of sentences, such as “She’s cold,” cannot be understood without context. Does “She’s cold” refer to a woman who is physically chilly because of low temperatures? Does she have a “cold” demeanor about her and seem unfriendly? Is she “cold” during a basketball game, because she has missed a lot of shots? Or, is “she” even a woman? Perhaps “she” is someone’s pet Chihuahua that gets cold easily? Who can actually know what such a simple statement means without more information?

### **Ephesians 1:1**

One of the best, most logical places to start when trying to understand any statement is “at the beginning.” Before abruptly jumping into Ephesians 2:8-9, it would be wise to go back to Ephesians 1:1 and learn some relevant information about the man who penned the letter and the people to whom he wrote.

#### ***Paul***

“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ” was not always a Christian. One might say that previously he was “Saul the sinner.”<sup>6</sup> In fact, “Christ Jesus came into the world to

save sinners, of whom” Paul humbly stated “**I am chief**” (1 Timothy 1:15). How so? He “persecuted this Way [followers of Jesus] **to the death**, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women” (Acts 22:4). He said of his prior life as a non-Christian:

I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.... [M]any of the saints I shut up in prison...; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities (Acts 26:9-11).

Paul meekly remarked: “I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:9-10).

How could one of the world’s most notorious persecutors of God’s saved people come to **be saved**? How could a man guilty of so many atrocities be forgiven? Because, as Paul reminded the Ephesians, “God...is rich in mercy,” has “great love with which He loved us,” and “when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)” (2:4-5). Yes, “according to the riches of His grace” (Ephesians 1:7), God will save even the “chief” of sinners.

But how and when exactly was Paul, the penman of Ephesians, saved? For that information, we have to refer back to the book of Acts. In chapter 22, we learn that when Saul the sinner asked Jesus, “What shall I do, Lord?” Jesus

(Who had miraculously appeared to him on the road to Damascus) said, “Arise and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all things which are appointed for you to **do**” (Acts 22:9-10). Saul then journeyed to Damascus and was told by God’s servant Ananias, “Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord”<sup>7</sup> (Acts 22:16). Did he do just that? Indeed, he did. “[H]e arose and was baptized” (Acts 9:18). Was Paul saved by grace, through faith, and not of works? Absolutely. Did he have his sins washed away when he was baptized? For sure. Did he see any inconsistency in these matters? Not at all. In fact, after becoming a Christian himself, Paul preached the necessity of baptism,<sup>8</sup> including in the city of Ephesus (Acts 19:1-5).

### ***The Early Ephesian Church***

As Paul was winding down his second missionary journey, he briefly stopped off in the grand city of Ephesus with Aquila and Priscilla and reasoned with the Jews in the synagogue (Acts 18:18-19). Paul then quickly departed for Antioch of Syria (from which he had begun his journey about three years earlier), but he left behind his two faithful Christian companions (Acts 18:18-21). Thus, the Lord’s church existed in Ephesus at least since the time that Aquila and Priscilla were there.

A devout Alexandrian preacher named Apollos then came to Ephesus and “taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John.” Thankfully, Aquila and Priscilla “took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately” (Acts 18:24-26).

Upon Paul’s return to Ephesus (early on during his third major missionary journey), he found 12 disciples there (Acts

19:1) and discovered that they, too, only knew of the baptism of John, and knew nothing of the Holy Spirit (19:2-3). Similar to Aquila and Priscilla teaching Apollos “the way of God more accurately,” Paul enlightened these men on the doctrine and baptism of Christ, after which “they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus” (19:4-5).

This was the early church in Ephesus. These individuals (and likely others who were becoming disciples of Christ—Acts 19:17-20,26) were some of those who spent upwards of three years with Paul (20:31), including two years listening to him “reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus” (19:9-10). This was the early church who received the epistle we call Ephesians. These were the Christians (along with others) who were reminded that “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). Like “Saul the sinner” who was baptized into Christ for the remission of sins, these disciples also understood the perfect harmony of being saved by grace through faith apart from works as they submitted to the Lord in baptism.

### **Ephesians Chapters 1-3**

The book of Ephesians is naturally divided into two parts. The first three chapters remind the young church of the amazing  **blessings of being in Christ** —in the redeemed, forgiven, blessed Church of Christ (1:22-23). Chapters 4-6 remind the church in very plain and practical language to act like faithful followers of Christ—“to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called” (4:1).

Ephesians 2:8-9 is embedded in the heart of the first section of Ephesians in which Paul reminds the church of—something every Christian continually needs to cele-

brate—the gracious **salvation** from sin found **in Christ**.

- 1:3—God has “blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.”
- 1:7—“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.”
- 1:11—The heavenly “inheritance” is found in Christ.
- 2:5—Sinners are made “alive together with Christ” and saved “by grace.”
- 2:13—Sinners “who once were far off” have been brought near to God “by the blood of Christ” and placed “in Christ Jesus.”
- 3:7—Paul became a servant of Christ “according to the gift of the grace of God...by the effective working of His power.”
- 3:11-12—The grand plan to save sinful man “was according to the eternal purpose” of God, “which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him.”

### **Repentance and Baptism in Ephesians**

Although skeptics allege that repentance and baptism contradict Ephesians 2:8-9,<sup>9</sup> Paul certainly didn’t believe so. In addition to what we have already learned about Paul’s conversion to Christ, as well as the early Ephesian Christians’ baptism “in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 19:5), the book of Ephesians itself bears witness to the fact that Paul saw no contradiction between (a) being saved “by grace...through faith...not of works,” and (b) repenting and being baptized.

#### ***Repentance***

In the same paragraph of Scripture in which Ephesians 2:8-9 resides, Paul reminded these early Christians in the Roman province of Asia that “we all **once** conducted our-

selves in the lusts of our flesh” and were “children of wrath” (2:3). Without knowing anything else, the clear implication of this statement is that they were **once** non-Christians who “walked” as “sons of disobedience” (2:2), **but now** are “in Christ” and act (or are supposed to act) completely different. They changed. They repented. While they **once** “walked” in darkness disobediently (2:1-3), they **now** are God’s “workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (2:10).

Christians are to “no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk in the futility of their mind” (4:17). Children of God, who are recipients of the grace of God, are supposed to have repented, having “put off...the old man,” and “put on the new man” (4:22,24). While “no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God” (5:5), Christians are “imitators of God...and walk in love.... But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you”—that is, among repentant Christians (5:1-3).

Anyone who takes the time to read and digest Ephesians in its entirety, should quickly come to realize that **repentance is implied and described throughout the letter**. Surely this should have some bearing on a fair reading and interpretation of Ephesians 2:8-9.

### ***Baptism***

But what about baptism? Are we to believe that such verses as Acts 2:38 and Romans 6:3-4 (which skeptic Bob Seidensticker specifically cited in his “Top 20 Most Damning Bible Contradictions” article) are inconsistent with Ephesians 2:8-9? Is being “baptized in the name of Jesus Christ

for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38) really incompatible with being saved “by grace...through faith...not of works”?

In addition to the fact that (1) Paul himself was baptized (Acts 22:16; 9:18), and (2) the Ephesians were baptized (Acts 19:1-5), (3) **within the book of Ephesians** Paul listed baptism among one of the most fundamental, unifying teachings of Scripture. Paul begged the Christians in Ephesus to endeavor “to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (4:3). He then listed seven essential “ones” upon which Christian unity is based: “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, **one baptism**; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (4:4-6). These seven “ones” are solid facts that undergird the Christian religion. And included in this exalted list, only a few verses away from Ephesians 2:8-9, is Paul’s mention of “baptism.”

Consider also Ephesians 5:25-26, where Paul noted how Jesus “loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her **with the washing of water** by the word.” Pray tell, what is this “washing of water”? Is it not logical to conclude it’s the same water baptism to which the Ephesians had already submitted after hearing Paul teach the word of God (Acts 19:1-5)? Did Paul, the penman of this statement in Ephesians 5, not comply with the command to “be baptized, and **wash away** your sins” (Acts 22:16)? Shouldn’t it be clear that this reference to “the washing of water” in Ephesians 5:26 is the same “one baptism” that Paul had just highlighted one chapter earlier?

Furthermore, notice what Paul taught in Ephesians 2:4-6 (in the very paragraph in which 2:8-9 is found): “But God,

who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and **raised us up together**, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” Upon first glance, a reader may miss yet **another** biblical reference to baptism. How so? Prior to penning Ephesians, Paul had previously written to the church in Rome, saying,

Or do you not know that as many of us as were **baptized** into Christ Jesus were **baptized** into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through **baptism** into death, that **just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life**. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection (Romans 6:3-5).

Likewise, to the church at Colosse, Paul wrote about putting away the “dead” man of sin (Colossians 2:11-13; cf. Ephesians 2:1), “buried with Him [Christ] in **baptism**, in which you also were **raised with Him** through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And you... He has made alive together with Him.... If then you were **raised with Christ**, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God” (Colossians 2:12-13; 3:1). If the Colossians were “raised with Him” when they were “buried with Him in baptism,” and if the Romans were raised to walk a new life with Christ when they were baptized into Christ, then it is reasonable to conclude that the Ephesians were also “raised up together” by the grace of God when they submitted to water baptism by faith. Why

not allow Paul to explain himself, rather than take the word of modern-day skeptics or fallible theologians?

Do critics really expect us to believe that the apostle Paul was so incompetent and so prone to mistakes that he would pen such a beautiful statement as Ephesians 2:8-9 and then repeatedly contradict it throughout the same brief letter with implied and explicit references to repentance and baptism? Could it be (like many of our denominational friends who misunderstand these verses) that Paul's teachings on faith, grace, repentance, baptism, and works are in perfect harmony with one another and that any perceived contradictions are mere misunderstandings on the part of the reader?

## **So What Does Ephesians 2:8-9 Mean?**

### **“By Grace”**

Just as it is humanly impossible to will oneself to return from physical death (once the soul has departed the body—Genesis 35:18), it is spiritually impossible to come back on one's own accord from spiritual death. At one time the Ephesians were “dead in trespasses and sins” (2:1). They had “no hope” (2:12). Like all lost sinners, they were separated from God (Isaiah 59:2), on the path to eternal destruction (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9), and utterly **incapable** of devising and enacting a plan to save themselves—to bring themselves back into fellowship with God and have eternal life with him. **“But God**, Who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)... 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 2:4-5,8-9).

Jesus did what no human being ever could do for himself: Jesus became the perfectly holy sacrifice Who voluntarily chose to take the just punishment for our sins (“death”—Romans 6:23) upon Himself in order to appease the infinite holiness and justice of God. Indeed, we are saved “by grace”! We are saved **by God!** There **was** no and **is** no “manmade” or “woman-willed” way to save ourselves. Salvation is not of human ingenuity. It is not the result of some great accomplishment on the part of mankind. The plan of salvation from spiritual death is **God’s** plan, accomplished in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ! Plain and simple: **salvation is undeserved and unearned.** It is “not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.”

A saved sinner no more “earned salvation” than a drowning man “earns a rescue.” I know a man who was once swept out to sea without a life jacket, a life preserver, or even a piece of floating wood to hold on to—and without any way to communicate to anyone. He repeatedly tried to swim the long way back to shore, but the strong wind and outgoing tide kept taking him farther and farther away. At last, he gave up trying to swim back to shore. At this point, he was exhausted and knew that his life was in someone else’s hands. If he was going to be saved from drowning in the open ocean, it would be the result of someone else’s work and not his own.

Thankfully, only a few hours later, this helpless man’s life was saved by the U.S. Coast Guard. His physical salvation was “not of himself” and “not of his works.” Even if asked

to “hold on to the life preserver,” “put on the life jacket,” or “step up into the boat,” he would simply be following the instruction to be saved. He did not celebrate his rescue by boasting in “how he saved himself.” He acknowledged **his rescuers**, who used their time, money, energy, and talents to graciously save him from certain death. Similarly, spiritual salvation is “by grace,” “the gift of God.”

### **“Through Faith...Not of Works”**

Although critics of Scripture often make the “contradiction” claim about Ephesians 2:8-9, most people seem unaware of what actually constitutes a real contradiction. The Law of Contradiction is one of the most fundamental principles of logic. It states, as Aristotle noted, “that the same attribute cannot at the same time belong and not belong to the same subject and in the same respect.”<sup>10</sup> In other words, if the same thing is said both to be and not be (1) for the same person, place, or thing, (2) at the same time, and (3) in the same sense (or respect), then a genuine contradiction exists. **However**, if one of the three aforementioned variables is untrue or is unknown, a person cannot logically contend that a contradiction necessarily exists.

So what does this have to do with Ephesians 2:8-9? Simply this: most people seem to **assume** that the word “works” (Greek *ergon*) is used in one (and only one) sense in the Bible; however, the word is used in at least four different ways in the New Testament.

There are “sinful works,” which Paul calls “works of darkness” in Ephesians 5:11 and “works of the flesh” in Galatians 5:19. The Ephesians obviously are not saved by “works of darkness.”

Paul often refers to “works” in the sense of “works of the

Law” of Moses (Romans 3:28, NASB; Galatians 2:16)—the old, annulled Law of Moses (Hebrews 8:7-13), which Paul mentions in Ephesians 2:15 as having been abolished.<sup>11</sup>

Paul occasionally addresses meritorious works by which we are **not** saved (Titus 3:4-7), since, as noted earlier, sinful man could never “earn” salvation and spiritual blessings from our perfectly holy and just God.

Then there are works resulting from obedience of faith (James 2:14-24; Acts 26:20; Luke 17:10). These “works” are the active responses of those who trust in the gracious, saving plan and power of God.

### ***Which “Works”?***

In addition to Christians not being saved by the works of the Jewish law (Ephesians 2:15), Paul said in Ephesians 2:8 that salvation was “**not of yourselves.**” The apostle stressed this to Titus when he wrote that we are saved, “not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy” (3:5). Then he highlighted to Timothy the fact that we are saved by the “power of God,” and “not according to our works” (2 Timothy 1:8-9). Man neither orchestrated nor carried out God’s one, acceptable scheme of redemption from sin. We don’t earn salvation; it’s impossible. The overall and immediate context of Ephesians seems clear that these meritorious works (and possibly the works of the law of Moses) are the kinds of works Paul was referring to in Ephesians 2:8-9.

### ***Self-Contradictory?***

Many skeptics assume that the “not-of-works” salvation of Ephesians 2:8-9 is an indictment on **all** Christian “works” or “actions,” including faith, repentance, and baptism. Skeptic

Dennis McKinsey called Ephesians 2:8-9 “contradictory within itself” because (a) salvation is not of works, yet (b) salvation is through faith. He asked: “How...can it be called a gift completely divorced from any works on your part?... How can it be a gift when it must be earned?... [Y]ou must do something...in order to receive” salvation.<sup>12</sup> McKinsey is exactly right that “you must **do something**” to receive salvation, but **that “something” is not the kind of negative works Paul alluded to in Ephesians 2:8-9.** McKinsey (like many others) simply confuses two different “senses” of the word “works,” and in the process wrongly assumes that there is a contradiction where none exists.

The first three aforementioned works certainly do not lead to salvation, but the last category (works resulting from obedience of faith; cf. Romans 1:5; 16:26) can be rightly called the “works of God.” This phrase does not mean works **performed by** God; rather, the intent is “works **required and approved by** God.”<sup>13</sup> Consider what Jesus taught in John 6:27-29: “Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life....’ Then they said to Him, ‘What shall we do, that we may work the **works of God?**’ Jesus answered and said to them, ‘This is the **work of God**, that you believe in Him whom He sent.’” Within this context in John 6, 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 you **believe** in Him whom He sent”). Thus, McKinsey is correct that “faith” is a **type** of “work,” just not the type Paul mentions in Ephesians 2:9.

### *Is “Doing” “Earning”?*

The gift of salvation is not, as McKinsey asserts, “completely divorced from any works on your part.” We must “do” something—but the “doings” (or “works”) are a part of the approved, trusting-in-God, obedient acts that Paul and the other New Testament writers consistently addressed—in perfect harmony with one another. Think about it: when Paul (the non-Christian) looked up to Jesus and asked, “What shall I do, Lord?” (Acts 22:10), Jesus did not respond by saying, “Do? There is nothing to do.” On the contrary, Jesus said there were things “**to do**” (Acts 22:10), including being “baptized” (22:16). Later, when Paul was imprisoned in Philippi and was asked by the jailor, “What must I **do** to be saved?” (Acts 16:30), Paul told him to “do” something: to “believe on the Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 16:31).

But how can a person “do” anything to receive the gift of salvation and it not be “earned”? Even if the works resulting from obedience of faith are not the kind of works Paul alludes to in Ephesians 2:9, doesn’t any kind of “work” (including “faith”) nullify the idea of salvation being a gift? Not at all. Think about it: If a friend wanted to give you \$1,000,000,000, but said that in order to receive the billion dollars you had to pick up a check at his house, take it to the bank, sign it, and cash it, would any rational person conclude that this gift was **earned**? Of course not. Even though **some effort was exerted** to receive the gift, the effort was not a work of merit, but an action of compliance—a joyful work of obedience.

Many scriptures indicate that man’s efforts are often **not** categorized as works of merit. For example, God graciously **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). 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). Israel did not “earn” the land of Canaan (it was a **gift**—Deuteronomy 6:10-12,23), 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). These Old Testament examples clearly teach that **something can be a gift from God, even though conditions must be met in order for the gift to be received.**<sup>14</sup> That is, people must “do” something to receive the gift—namely, obey (2 Thessalonians 1:8; 1 Peter 4:17).

### **Conclusion**

When Ephesians 2:8-9 is given a fair hearing, one discovers that it is neither self-contradictory nor inconsistent with any other statement of Scripture. Man is saved, not by works of merit, but by God’s grace through a trusting, obedient faith.

## **JOHN 3:16**

Several years ago I asked a gentleman if he would be interested in a personal Bible study. He responded to my question by asserting that he knew John 3:16 very well and that John 3:16 was all the Bible he needed. He seemed confident that he was saved by Jesus because he “believed” in Jesus. I have received this same basic response from various individuals through the years. They have read or

heard the beautiful, awe-inspiring, truthful words of John 3:16, perhaps many times. And they seem convinced that, since they acknowledge (or mentally accept the factuality of) the existence of Jesus as the Son of God, then they are saved from their sins and will receive eternal life at the end of time. Enough said. Case closed. That's it: "God is a loving God. And since I 'believe' in Jesus, I'm not going to perish, but will receive eternal life."

### **An Awe-inspiring Verse...But God Gave Us More Than One**

John 3:16 has undoubtedly been a favorite verse of millions of Christians through the centuries—and rightly so! It is a tremendous statement from our omnibenevolent God. John 3:16 beautifully encapsulates the theme of the entire Bible: God loved humanity (His willfully wayward offspring) so much that He gave the greatest gift He could possibly give, and the only gift that has the power to save man from sin—the perfect sacrifice, the Son of God—and anyone who believes in Him will be saved from punishment and will receive eternal life.

I love John 3:16. And it is a beautiful summary of the Gospel of Christ. But it is not the only verse God gave to man. It is not the only verse the Holy Spirit inspired man to write. It is not the only soul-saving truth that Jesus ever uttered or that John ever wrote.<sup>15</sup> The psalmist proclaimed: "The **entirety** of Your word is truth, and **every one** of Your righteous judgments endures forever" (Psalm 119:160). Paul wrote that "**all** Scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2 Timothy 3:16). Jesus said that the Spirit of truth would guide the apostles "into **all** truth" (John 16:13), which they

subsequently preached and penned (Ephesians 3:1-5). Paul declared “the **whole** counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). Both Moses and John warned about adding to or **taking away from** God’s Word (Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:32;<sup>16</sup> Revelation 22:18-19). When a person emphasizes only one sentence of Scripture to the exclusion of all others, he is, in essence, disrespecting and rejecting everything else that God revealed for man’s eternal benefit, including many truths that help to interpret other divine statements correctly.

What father is pleased with his son who listens only to 1% of what he says? What teacher will pass a student who completes only 1% of the assigned readings? What employer will tolerate workers content with knowing only 1% of what they need to know—even if that 1% included the most fundamental knowledge of the business?

If John 3:16 was “enough,” why did Jesus teach so much more? Why did John write so much more (in the Gospel of John, as well as 1, 2, and 3 John, and Revelation)? And if the Holy Spirit was content with man only knowing John 3:16, why did He inspire men to pen thousands of other eternally beneficial statements (2 Peter 1:20-21)? Both logic and the Bible demand more than a “one-verse Christian.”

## **The Folly of One-Word and One-Verse Interpretations**

### **One Word...Without Context?**

Whether you consult an English dictionary or a Greek lexicon, most words have more than one meaning, and some words have a plethora of meanings.<sup>17</sup> In fact, according to Guinness World Records, “The word with the most meanings in English is the verb ‘set’, with **430 senses** listed

in the Second Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary.... The word commands the longest entry in the dictionary at **60,000 words.**”<sup>18</sup> Some words can function as both a noun and a verb, depending on how they are used within a given context.<sup>19</sup> Other words can be used as almost total opposites. For example, the word “overlook” can mean “to inspect,” or it can mean “to ignore.”<sup>20</sup> The **only** way to understand words correctly is to understand them **in their context.**

This fundamental truth of interpretation certainly applies to Scripture. Even **very basic words**, which the Bible writers used hundreds or thousands of times, must be carefully considered. The English verb “know”<sup>21</sup> (from the Hebrew *yada* and the Greek *ginosko*) is found well over 1,000 times in the New King James Version. Many times it is used in the sense of merely being aware of something or someone. At other times, it is used in the more intensified sense of being very informed about, and even experienced.<sup>22</sup> Sometimes it is even used to refer to sexual relations (Genesis 4:17; Matthew 1:25). One simply cannot know what “know” means without context. “One-word interpretations”<sup>23</sup> (with all due respect) are dumb and dangerous.

### **One Verse...Without Context?**

“Judge not, that you be not judged.” “I can do all things through Christ Who strengthens me.” “Ask, and it will be given to you.” What do these verses<sup>24</sup> actually mean? Are we never to make judgments?<sup>25</sup> Can Christians expect to be so strong that we can lift 10 tons of weight if we so desired (for whatever reason)? Should we actually expect to receive anything that we desire from our “genie” in heaven?<sup>26</sup> The simple fact is, truly understanding one verse of Scripture to the exclusion of all others is as futile and perilous as thinking

we can understand a single word without any context. This is certainly true of John 3:16.

Indeed, John wrote “that whoever **believes** in Him [Jesus] should not perish but have everlasting life.” But what does it mean to “believe” in Jesus? That’s easy, right? Everyone knows what it means to “believe in” something or someone. And if not, a person can quickly consult a dictionary and discover that believing can mean merely “to consider to be true or honest,” or “to hold as an opinion,” or to “suppose” or “think.”<sup>27</sup> These are some of the leading modern definitions and common usages of the English word “believe.” Thus, many conclude, without further knowledge of the Scriptures, or without giving further thought even to other definitions of the modern English term “believe,”<sup>28</sup> that all a person must do to receive eternal life is simply to “consider,” “suppose,” or “think” that Jesus is the Son of God.

### **“Believing” and the Purpose of the Gospel of John**

We certainly do not want to diminish the necessity and eternal importance of a sinner learning about Jesus and moving from (a) not knowing anything about Him, to (b) coming to understand and accept the evidence for His divinity. A sinner simply cannot be saved by the perfectly just and holy God without “considering” the sinless, loving, sacrificial Savior<sup>29</sup>—“The Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). Over the last 2,000 years, billions of people have tragically dismissed the fact-based, soul-saving Gospel of Christ. Yet John affirms that **Jesus** is “God,” “the word,” “the lamb,” “the bread of life,” “the

light of the world,” “the door,” “the good shepherd,” “the resurrection and the life,” “the way, the truth, and the life,” “the true vine,” and “the Christ, the Son of God.”<sup>30</sup>

John doesn’t merely suggest that Jesus is divine, he writes for the stated purpose of **proving** such. “And truly 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). John arranged his account of the Good News around seven of Jesus’ miracles,<sup>31</sup> including His walking on water, healing of a man born blind, and raising Lazarus from the dead. Jesus performed miracles (and John recorded them) in order **to prove** that **Jesus** was (and is) the Son of God. 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... 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 10:25,37-38).

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). While on Earth, Jesus was “attested... by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him” (Acts 2:22, NASB). As would be expected from the One Who claimed to be God incarnate (John 1:1-3,14; 10:30), Scripture records (and John especially so) that Jesus performed miracles throughout His

ministry in an effort to provide **sufficient proof** of His divine message and nature.

For any of the billions of atheists, agnostics, skeptics, Jews, and Muslims around the world to be saved from their sins, they must first **listen** to and **learn** of (John 6:45) the powerful defense (*apologia*) John penned—that “Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God” (20:31). “He who has ears to hear, let him **hear!**” (Matthew 13:9). But not just “hear,” let him **“believe.”** But what does it mean to “believe”?

### **Let the Bible Explain “Believing”**

What do **you** think it means “to believe”? In one very real sense, it doesn’t matter what you or I think; it only matters what **God** says and what **God** means. The actual, true explanation of the text is ultimately all that matters. If there is a right interpretation, then that particular, correct explanation should be the only interpretation we seek. And such a correct understanding is far from hopeless. Similar to most everyday conversations we have with family members, coworkers, classmates, and clerks, where we generally easily understand what the words in conversations mean, we **can** properly understand the words of Scripture (especially as we diligently and carefully interpret them). But again, we must allow Scripture to interpret itself (as much as possible) and not be deceived by our own preferences and preconceived ideas.

Like most words, the noun “faith”/“belief” (from the Greek *pistis*) and the verb “to believe” (from the Greek *pisteuo*) are used in Scripture in different senses. The words “believe” and “not believe” can certainly refer merely to acknowledging something as being true (evident) or untrue.

In Romans 14:2, in a discussion about liberty and matters of opinion, Paul referred to one who “**believes** he may eat all things.” This particular “faith” or “belief” was an **understanding** of the fact that Christians are not bound by the dietary laws of the Old Testament. The apostle John detailed the Pharisees’ interrogation of the blind man whom Jesus healed and noted that “the Jews did **not believe** concerning him...until they called the parents” (John 9:18). These interrogators did not **think** or **consider** that he was telling the truth or that the thing was possible. Recall that when Saul went to Jerusalem after becoming a Christian and “tried to join the disciples” that “they were all afraid of him, and did **not believe** that he was a disciple” (Acts 9:26). These individuals did not **think** that such a prominent persecutor of Christians had actually become a Christian.

James 2:19 provides perhaps the clearest example of the need to carefully consider the terms “belief” (*pistis*) and “believe” (*pisteuo*), and not to assume that a real, saving “belief” in Jesus is merely an “understanding” or “acknowledgment” of Him. James wrote: “You **believe** that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons **believe**—and tremble!” Notice that James parallels the “belief” of demons with the “faith” of some “believers.” Individuals who acknowledge the fact that “there is one God...do well,” since such recognition is the most foundational pillar of Christianity.<sup>32</sup> However, the mere intellectual recognition of the existence of the one true God is an **insufficient** faith. (A “faith alone” type of “faith” will not save.) Mark records one unclean spirit that even confessed that Jesus was “the Holy One of God” (Mark 1:24). Indeed, he **acknowledged** the truth about Jesus. He had a **type** of “faith,” but certainly **not** a **saving**

faith. Therefore, as James effectively argued, any person who assents to the existence of God and Jesus “believes” in one respect—but only in the sense that “**demons** believe.” Yet demons are not saved. Thus, it logically follows, neither are those who “merely believe” (i.e., “consider” or “think”) that Jesus is the Son of God.

Recall also that many of the rulers of the Jews “**believed**” in Jesus, “but because of the Pharisees **they did not confess Him**, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God” (John 12:42-43). Did these men “believe”? In one sense, yes: they **considered** Jesus to be the Messiah. But did they have a real, God-approved, saving faith? Surely not, since Jesus had earlier asked, “**How can you believe**, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that comes from the only God?” (John 5:44). “Believers” who prefer the approval and praise of men are showboating charlatans, not faithful believers in Christ (Matthew 23:5; 6:1-4). A “belief” in Jesus that is not confessed is a shallow, shameful “faith,” not the commendable faith of the saved.<sup>33</sup>

### **Allow John Chapter 3 to Explain “Believing” in John 3:16**

If a man says “Shoot!” is he using the word as an imperative statement (a command) or as a frustrated exclamation? If we discover that it is a command, what does he mean? Does he mean to shoot a gun, or shoot heroine, or shoot a ball? And even if we discover that the command is more specific: “Shoot the ball!” does that mean to shoot a basketball, a soccer ball, or a billiard ball? If the statement is still more specific, “Shoot the ball toward the correct goal,” we

still do not know if the instruction has to do with a basketball or a soccer ball. Without more information, without context, we simply cannot know.

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.**"<sup>34</sup> Many make the assumption that God always means what **they** think He means rather than what **He** said (and explained) He meant. In particular, it seems many people within Christendom consider the "believing" of John 3:16 that saves man from his sins is a mere acceptance of the fact that Jesus is the Son of God and "my personal Savior." Yet, without more information than is provided in this one sentence, and especially without context, a person simply cannot know for sure.

The best place to begin to ensure we have a more thorough and proper understanding of the term "believe" in John 3:16 is John 3. The 36 verses in this chapter can be read in three minutes, and yet the deep, life-changing, soul-stirring truths found therein can be meditated upon for a lifetime.

### **John 3:14-15**

In the immediate, previous statement to John 3:16, Jesus referred back to a moment in Israelite history when God punished the ungrateful, complaining Israelites with venomous snakes (Numbers 21). After many died from being bitten by the serpents, the people of Israel confessed their sins and asked Moses to pray to God and intercede on their behalf. "Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone

who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live.’ So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived” (Numbers 21:8-9).

Jesus compared Moses lifting up the bronze serpent in Number 21 with the Son of Man being “lifted up,” adding “that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life” (John 3:14-15, ESV). Carefully consider that the afflicted Israelites in Number 21 could **learn** of the critically important, life-saving truth of the bronze serpent and yet still not be healed. They could even “**believe**” (in the sense of mentally assenting to the truth) that if they looked upon the bronze serpent they could be healed, and yet still **not be healed**. Unless they **believed in a deeper sense**, and (a) actually left the comfort of their tent dwelling, (b) walked (or were carried) through (at least a portion of) the vast camp (which was comprised of hundreds of thousands of Israelites—cf. Numbers 1:46), (c) opened their eyes, and (d) looked in the direction of and literally upon the bronze serpent, they would **not** be physically healed by the Great Healer of their deadly condition.

Similarly, anyone who is spiritually “dead in trespasses and sins” (Ephesians 2:1) and who is “without Christ” (2:12), must look upon the Son of Man and “believe” in Him. This “belief” is no more a mere mental acknowledgment of Jesus being the only answer to the sin problem, than it was for the Israelites to merely acknowledge that the bronze serpent was the answer to their deadly physical disorder. God is the Healer, but He only heals those who faithfully follow His approved prescription.

### John 3:5

Interestingly, in this same conversation with Nicodemus, only 10 brief verses earlier, Jesus stated, “Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). Notice that Jesus required something of those who desire entrance into the soul-saving, spiritual kingdom of God (cf. Matthew 25:34): they had to be born again—of water and the Spirit. Jesus doesn’t say that one merely mentally “believes” an important truth for entrance into God’s kingdom. He certainly doesn’t say to repeat “the sinner’s prayer” for entrance into the kingdom of heaven. Jesus stresses a serious requirement: “**unless**” one follow His directions, “he **cannot** enter the kingdom of God.”

So what does it mean to be “born of water and the Spirit”? Perhaps the better question to ask is, “Did God give us any indicators in Scripture to further explain Jesus’ instructions to Nicodemus?” Could it be that the inspired apostle John was referring to water baptism? He previously noted three times that John the baptizer immersed sinners in **water** (John 1:26,31,33) as he preached about the coming **Kingdom** (Matthew 3:2). John highlighted the fact that, after Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus in John 3:1-21, Jesus and His disciples went to Judea and “baptized” (3:22). John then immediately referenced John the baptizer again, this time noting that he was “baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much **water** there” (3:23). Finally, John the apostle remarked at the very beginning of the next chapter that “Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John (though Jesus Himself did not baptize, but His disciples)” (4:1-2). Given the fact that so many Jews in Jerusalem and in “all the land of Judea” were being baptized by John the

baptizer (Mark 1:5), as well as Jesus' disciples (John 4:2), and considering the apostle John's frequent mention of immersion in water, not to mention the dozens of times that water baptism is mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament, doesn't it make sense that Jesus was referring to water baptism in John 3:5? What other action in the New Testament involving water is associated with entering the Kingdom of God?

Paul indicated that Christians have been sanctified and cleansed “with the washing of water by the word” (Ephesians 5:26). He also taught that “by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body” (1 Corinthians 12:13). Peter noted that we have been “**born again**, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, **through the word of God**” (1 Peter 1:23). James wrote that God “**begat**” (KJV) or “**brought us forth by the word of truth**, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures” (1:18). And Jesus said we must be “born of water and the spirit” (John 3:5). It seems biblically consistent to conclude that the **Holy Spirit's** divine “seed” (i.e., His Word/Gospel—Luke 8:11) is planted into the minds of men and works powerfully in their hearts to produce a life-changing understanding of Christ, as well as his own life, which leads to **immersion in water** in order to enter **God's kingdom**.

Still, even if a person concludes that he simply does not understand Jesus' statement to Nicodemus, he surely must admit that Jesus' instructions in John 3:5 do not harmonize well with the shallow, life-**unaltering**, mere acknowledgment-like view of “belief” in John 3:16.

### **John 3:36**

In the final verse of the chapter, John makes a very reveal-

ing contrast that helps to elucidate further the saving-faith of John 3:16. Unfortunately, the specific contrast is unclear in some versions. For example, the NKJV reads: “He who **believes** in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does **not believe** the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him” (John 3:36). The KJV likewise contrasts “believing” with “not believing.” The underlying Greek terms, however, are actually different. John did **not** contrast *pisteuo* and *ouk pisteuo*—“believing” and “not believing” (cf. John 9:18). Instead, John actually contrasted *pisteuo* and *apeitheo*—one who “believes” in Jesus with the person who “does **not obey**” Him (ESV, ASV, NASB, RSV). Thus, to really “believe” in Jesus is to fully submit to Him—to obey Him. The Greek lexicographer Joseph Thayer appropriately commented on the verb *pisteuo* (“to believe”) and explained that when it is used “especially of the faith by which a man embraces Jesus” it means “a conviction, full of joyful trust, that Jesus is the Messiah—the divinely appointed author of eternal salvation in the kingdom of God, **conjoined with obedience to Christ.**”<sup>35</sup>

The apostle Peter similarly contrasted the “believing” with the “disobedient,” saying, “This precious value, then, is for you who **believe** (*pisteuo*). But for those who **disbelieve** (*apisteo*), ‘The stone which the builders rejected, this became the very corner stone,’ and, ‘A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense;’ for they stumble because they are **disobedient** (*apeitheo*) to the word, and to this doom they were appointed” (1 Peter 2:7-8, NASB). The Hebrews writer also used these terms (or derivatives thereof) in an enlightening manner when explaining that the Israelites were not allowed into the Promised Land because they “did **not**

**obey**” (3:18; *apeitheo*). Yet the next verse states: “So we see that they could not enter in because of **unbelief**” (3:19; *apistia*). And then six verses later, in Hebrews 4:6, the writer declared that they “did not enter because of **disobedience**” (*apeitheia*). When the Bible is allowed to explain itself (both in John 3 and elsewhere),<sup>36</sup> we learn that a real, trusting, saving faith in God is an **obedient** faith.<sup>37</sup>

### John 3:18-21

A fourth indicator in John 3 that “believing” and “obeying” are closely linked (and that a mere internal conviction is not intended) is found in verses 18-21:

He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.

He who does “not believe” in Jesus loves the darkness and practices evil and does not follow the light. He who really “believes,” on the other hand, “**does** the truth” and so “**comes** to the light, that his **deeds** may be clearly seen, that they have been **done** in God.” Elsewhere the apostle John wrote: “Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, ‘I know Him [God],’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (1 John 2:3-4).

The irrationality of the position that a person is saved from his sins by “faith alone” (apart from any act of obedience) is apparent in the fact that God **commands** man to believe in Him. And thus to believe in God is to be obedient to a command of God. As John wrote in 1 John 3:23: “And this is His **commandment**: that we should **believe** on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us **commandment**.” So, to not believe is to disobey God, and to believe is to obey. In fact, Jesus stated in John 6:29, to “believe in Him whom He sent” is “the **work** of God.”<sup>38</sup>

## A Critical Figure of Speech

If Bible students fail to recognize the inspired writers’ use of various figures of speech, it will be impossible to correctly understand many sections of Scripture. Just as English-speaking Americans are expected to properly interpret metaphors (“Life is a rollercoaster”), sarcasm (“You don’t say”), and hyperbolic expressions (“I’m so hungry I could eat a horse”), Bible students must also be aware that Scripture contains many figures of speech—“They’re everywhere!”<sup>39</sup>

One common figure of speech (which has a not-so-common name) is known as synecdoche: where a part is put for the whole, or the whole for the part. A person showing off his car might say, “Check out my wheels.” The term “wheels” is a relatively small part of the car yet is used to refer to the entire car. A military leader might refer to how many “boots they have on the ground,” when he is actually emphasizing the soldiers in the boots.

Bible writers also used synecdoche. For example, to

“break bread” was a common ancient synecdoche where “bread” (“a part”) was put for **all** of the food and drink that would be consumed at a common meal (“the whole”).<sup>40</sup> After the establishment of the Church, “the breaking of bread” also came to stand for the **entirety** of the Lord’s Supper (where consumption of both the unleavened bread **and** the fruit of the vine is actually meant—Acts 2:42; 20:7).

So what does all of this have to do with “believing”? Simply that the verb “believe” and the nouns “belief” and “believer” are often used as synecdoches. A real, saving faith certainly **begins** with the critically important step of coming to “to consider” or “to think” (i.e., “to believe”)<sup>41</sup> Jesus is truly the Son of God, but a biblical, God-approved complete “belief” in Jesus **means so much more** than merely coming to the mental conclusion that Jesus is the Divine Savior. A biblical believer confesses His belief in Jesus (Romans 10:9-10; 1 John 4:15). He repents of His sins (Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38). He is baptized into Christ (John 3:5; Acts 2:38; 22:16). A real believer “obeys”—both on his way to becoming a complete “believer” (i.e., a Christian) and after he becomes a child of God (John 3:36; Hebrews 5:9; 11:6; 1 John 2:3-5; 5:1-5; Revelation 2:10). Though all these elements are involved in faithfully following Jesus, true followers of Christ are often referred to as just “believers.”

When thousands of non-Christians in Acts 2 heard the Gospel preached by the apostles and were “cut to the heart,” they asked, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37). “Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins’” (vs. 38). “Then those who gladly received his word were baptized.... And they continued steadfastly

in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers" (2:41-42). What word did the Bible writer use to describe these who (a) repented, (b) were baptized, and (c) continued in the apostles doctrine, etc.? What were these obedient followers of Christ called? They are referred to as those "who **believed**" (2:44). Were they mere "consenters" to Christ? No. They **became** "believers," and were "**continuing**" to remain "believers" (2:42-47). That is, they were actively following Christ. They were obedient to Him.

When a pagan Philippian jailor once asked Paul and Silas, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30), God's spokesmen replied: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household" (vs. 31). Is coming to "believe" (i.e., "know about") Jesus necessary? Absolutely. Nothing else matters if a person doesn't first come to recognize Who Jesus is and what He has done for them. Thus, the apostles then "spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house" (vs. 32). Then, "he and all his family were baptized" (vs. 33). Interestingly, as in Acts 2, the Bible does not refer to them as actually "having believed in God" until **after** they were baptized (vs. 34).

A synecdoche is a very real figure of speech that has been used throughout history, including in Bible times. The fact is, regarding the salvation of sinners, the sum total of the God-given conditions to be saved are oftentimes indicated by the use of one or two.<sup>42</sup> And, as D.R. Dungan noted, "Generally the first is mentioned—that of faith—because without it nothing else could follow."<sup>43</sup> The Bible writers could have referred to God's children as "repenters," "confessors," or "immersed ones," but much of the time they reasonably referred to them simply as those who "believed."<sup>44</sup>

## **Conclusion**

In one respect—in the preliminary sense of the word—to “believe” in Jesus means to mentally acknowledge that He is the Son of God and man’s one and only Savior. A John 3:16-type of saving-faith certainly includes this sense of believing, but it also comprises much more. It includes trusting in the lifted-up Savior (3:14-15), rejecting darkness, coming to the light, and doing deeds of truth (3:19-21), being “born again...of water and the Spirit” (3:3,5), and obeying the Son (3:36). Becoming a “believer” in the full sense of the word is to completely put one’s trust in the Savior: not merely to “acknowledge” Him, but to **follow** Him wherever He leads—including to confess Him publicly, to repent of sin, to be immersed in water, and then to live daily as an obedient servant of the King, “even to the point of death” (Revelation 2:10, NIV). As Jesus said in John 12:25-26: “He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves Me, let him **follow Me**; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone **serves Me**, him My Father will honor.”

# Chapter 6



## **ANSWERING ATTACKS UPON THE GODHOOD AND GREATNESS OF CHRIST**

### **JESUS, “SAVIOR-GOD STORIES,” AND THE PROPHETS OF OLD**

Periodically, critics of Jesus question why there are so many stories of “savior-gods” (outside of Judaism and Christianity) that sound somewhat similar to the story of Jesus. Why would various civilizations (e.g., Egyptians, Greeks, etc.), which existed centuries before the time of Christ, have “legends” about god-like characters who worked miracles, conquered death, and were revered by their followers? What logical answer can be given as to why stories similar in some ways to the Gospel story existed hundreds or

thousands of years **before** Jesus? Was Jesus really God, or merely a mishmash of various pagan tales?

First, the similarities between (a) the biblical account of the historical person of Jesus Christ and (b) all the so-called “savior gods” of mythology and pagan religions have been **highly** exaggerated. The comparisons between Christ with Adonis, Dionysus, Hercules, Krishna, Mithras, Osiris, etc. are mostly contrived.<sup>1</sup>

Second, one logical, biblical explanation for the presence of any possible similarities in these pagan myths and stories revolves around the biblical prophets of old. When Jesus rebuked the Pharisees and lawyers for their hypocrisy, He mentioned their unrighteous ancestors and made the following statement:

Therefore the wisdom of God also said, “I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they will kill and persecute,” that the blood of all the prophets which was shed **from the foundation of the world** may be required of this generation, **from the blood of Abel** to the blood of Zechariah who perished between the altar and the temple. Yes, I say to you, it shall be required of this generation (Luke 11:49-51).

According to Jesus, God used prophets as far back as “the foundation of the world,” specifically from the time of Abel, Adam’s second son. The apostle Peter made a similar statement while preaching to thousands of Jews in Solomon’s Portico.

Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send

Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, **which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began** (Acts 3:19-21).

“Since the world began,” God has revealed messages to mankind via His prophets. Sometimes these messages were regarding the coming physical destruction upon a particular nation (e.g., Jonah 3:1-10; Nahum 1-3). At other times, they were about one particular person or tribe of people (e.g., Genesis 40; 49). But no prophecies were more important (nor more prevalent in Scripture) than those concerning Christ. And, God’s spokesmen have been foretelling His Coming specifically **since the earliest of times**. Luke recorded how, after the birth of John the Baptizer, his father, Zacharias, “was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying,”

Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David, as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, who **have been since the world began** (Luke 1:67-70).

God’s prophets have not foretold the coming of a great Redeemer only since the Mosaic period, nor were prophecies concerning the Savior of the world limited to the Jewish people. Zacharias rejoiced that God was sending the Redeemer and Savior of Whom the prophets had spoken **“since the world began.”** Admittedly, most all of the Messianic prophecies recorded in Scripture appear after God revealed to Abraham that through his seed “all the nations

of the world shall be blessed” (Genesis 22:18; 12:1-3; 49:10; etc.). Yet, one recorded messianic prophecy goes back centuries before Abraham—all the way to Adam and Eve’s tenure in the Garden of Eden. There God informed the serpent following his deception of Eve: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel” (Genesis 3:15). In this very first messianic prophecy, a suffering, but victorious, Redeemer is pictured.

Thousands of years later, hundreds of similar prophecies about the Christ were given to the Israelites. **It is logical to conclude, however, that similar messianic prophecies would have been delivered by other prophets outside of Judaism.** The patriarch Enoch, just seven generations from Adam, “walked with God three hundred years” and “prophesied” (Genesis 5:22; Jude 14). His great-great-grandson Noah, whom the apostle Peter described as “a preacher of righteousness” (2 Peter 2:5), very likely knew of the Messianic prophecies during patriarchal times, and may very well have received direct revelation from God on the matter (similar to how God spoke to him regarding the Flood—Genesis 6:13-21). Centuries later, non-Jewish, God-fearing men such as Melchizedek, king of Salem, “the priest of God Most High” (Genesis 14:18; Hebrews 7:1), Job, and others worshipped and served the one true God.

We have no way of knowing how many of God’s spokesmen through the centuries have prophesied about the coming of a Savior. We do know, however, that some prophecies about Christ are virtually as old as the world itself, **and** the Bible nowhere pretends to contain **every** Messianic prophecy **ever** spoken.

One may reasonably conclude that a chief reason nations outside of Israel may have possessed various stories of savior-gods who share certain commonalities with Jesus is because **they either had heard inspired prophets foretell the Redeemer's coming, or the prophecies made "from the foundation of the world" had been passed down to them by word of mouth.** Similar to how ancient civilizations all over the world passed down "legends" of a worldwide, catastrophic flood (because there actually was such a Flood—Genesis 6-8), ancient civilizations may have also passed down certain prophecies about the coming of a Messiah, because such a Savior **was coming** and **did** come.

Interestingly, some of the first people on Earth to recognize the arrival of the Messiah were men the Bible calls—not Jews—but "wise men (magi, NASB) **from the East**" (Matthew 2:1). From where did these men receive such knowledge? How did they know that a particular "star in the East" (Matthew 2:2) would indicate the Messiah's entrance into the world? At least part of the answer lies in the fact they received Divine direction (cf. Matthew 2:1-12).

Truly, God's scheme of redemption through a "hero" that would save the world from sin and death has been revealed since the fall of man. Simply because civilizations from the past (outside of Judaism and Christianity) may have possessed a few similar "redemption" stories and/or knowledge of a Redeemer should not be troubling or surprising. They likely were based (at least partly) on messages preached by the prophets of old.

## WHAT DID JESUS THINK ABOUT THE MESSIAH BEING THE SON OF DAVID?

Mark 12:35-37; Matthew 22:41-46; Luke 20:41-44

The genealogies of Jesus in Matthew 1:1-16 and Luke 3:23-38 testify that Jesus was the “Son of David.” In fact, the book of Matthew begins with these words: “The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, **the Son of David**, the Son of Abraham” (1:1). The New Testament is also abundantly clear that this Son of David is “the Christ” or “the Messiah.” When the Samaritan woman at the well said to Jesus, “I know that Messiah is coming’ (who is called Christ). ‘When He comes, He will tell us all things.’ Jesus said to her, **‘I** who speak to you **am** He” (John 4:25-26). What’s more, just before Jesus’ crucifixion, when the Jewish high priest asked Him directly, “Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?” Jesus said, **“I am.”** (Mark 14:61-62). Thus, the New Testament clearly affirms that Jesus was both “Christ” and the “Son of David.” [NOTE: The term “Christ” is transliterated from the Greek term *Christos*, while “Messiah” is transliterated from the Hebrew/Aramaic term *Meshiach*. Both have as their meaning, “the anointed One.”]

In a 2008 issue of *Biblical Archaeology Review*, Hebrew University professor Israel Knohl alleged that Mark 12:35-37 (cf. Matthew 22:41-46 and Luke 20:41-44) “blatantly clashes” with New Testament references of Jesus being “the Son of David.”<sup>2</sup> When Jesus asked, “How is it that the scribes say that the Christ is the Son of David?” (Mark 12:35), Jesus supposedly “rejects the idea that the Messiah is the son of David.”<sup>3</sup> Knohl claimed:

To demonstrate that **the Messiah is not the son of David**, Jesus quotes Psalm 110, attributed in the Hebrew Bible to David himself. As the text of Mark (12:36) recites, David speaks in the psalm: “David himself, inspired by the Holy Spirit, declared...” Jesus then recites a passage from the psalm: “The Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand, till I put thy enemies under thy feet.” Jesus then uses this passage to prove his point: “David himself calls him [the Messiah] ‘Lord,’ so how is he his son?” That is, David speaks of the Messiah as “my Lord,” rather than as “my son.” **The Messiah therefore cannot be a son of David. Using Psalm 110 as his proof text, Jesus here refutes the scribes’ view that Christ, the Messiah, should be a son or descendant of David.**<sup>4</sup>

Knohl went on to state that Psalm 110 is “historically reliable,” and Mark 12:35-37 “must be authentic.” The implication is that those Bible passages which designate Jesus as the “Son of David” (Matthew 1:1-16; Luke 3:23-38) are unreliable.

Knohl is correct that Psalm 110 and Mark 12:35-37 are “historically reliable” and “authentic,” but he has failed miserably in his interpretation of Mark 12:35-37 (and parallel passages in Matthew 22:41-46 and Luke 20:41-44). When Jesus asked the Pharisees “how is He [the Messiah] then his [David’s] Son,” if David calls Him “Lord,” He was neither denying His credentials to be the Messiah nor the fact that the Messiah would be a “Son of David.” On the contrary, Jesus was trying to get His hearers to understand that the Messiah, though David’s Son, is **greater** than David, for King David called Him “my Lord.” It was self-evident to first-century Jews that the Messiah would

be a descendant of David (Psalm 89:3-4; 132:11-12; Isaiah 9:6-7; Matthew 1:1-16; 12:23; 21:9,15; Luke 3:23-38). Jesus was not denying that fact. Rather, He wanted his hearers to reach the same conclusion that Peter previously reached after Jesus asked a similar question: “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” (Matthew 16:13, NASB). Peter confessed to Jesus: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16). How could the Messiah be a descendant of David as well as be the One to whom David **1,000 years earlier** called “Lord”? Answer: **He was deity Who put on flesh.** This is the truth with which Jesus confronted the Pharisees, and “no one was able to answer Him a word” (Matthew 22:46), because

they believed not in the divinity of Christ. They supposed that he would be only a man.... By propounding the question, Jesus gained two important points: he showed that the promised Christ was to be divine, and he showed that his own claim to be the Son of God was in perfect harmony with his claim to be the Christ. If he is the Christ, then he is David’s Lord.<sup>5</sup>

Jesus, the Son of David, is greater than any man who ever lived, including the greatest king Israel had ever known. He was his “Lord.” Jesus is superior. Interestingly, even the writer of Hebrews referred to Psalm 110:1 as he impressed upon his readers Jesus’ superiority over the angelic realm (1:13).

Knohl’s alleged contradiction, between Jesus’ reference to Psalm 110 in the synoptic gospels and the biblical references of the Messiah being the “Son of David,” is easily resolved when the Bible is “rightly divided” (2 Timothy 2:15). Jesus rejected neither His being the “Son of David,” nor “the Messiah.” In truth, He was both.

## WHO IS “THE ONLY TRUE GOD”?

John 17:3

The Bible is full of scriptures that, when quoted without any consideration of the immediate and remote contexts, a person can misuse in all sorts of ways. As proof that we do not have to work to provide for our family’s material needs, some may quote Jesus’ statement, “Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life” (John 6:27). In order to show that Jesus was a liar, the Bible critic might quote Jesus’ acknowledgement: “If I bear witness of Myself, My witness is not true” (John 5:31). Those who exclude baptism from God’s plan of salvation often quote John 4:2: “Jesus Himself did not baptize, but His disciples.” When the Bible reader is “rightly dividing” (2 Timothy 2:15) or “handling accurately the word of truth” (NASB), however, he will remember that “the **sum** of thy [God’s] word is truth” (Psalm 119:160, ASV). Since the Bible teaches “if anyone will not work, neither shall he eat” (2 Thessalonians 3:10; cf. 1 Timothy 5:8), Jesus never implied that working to help feed one’s family is wrong (John 6:27). “He simply was saying that spiritual food is more important than physical food, and as such, should be given a **higher** priority.”<sup>6</sup> Jesus did not confess wrongdoing in John 5:31, He simply acknowledged that, in accordance with the law (cf. Deuteronomy 19:15), His testimony apart from other witnesses would be considered invalid or insufficient to establish truth (cf. John 8:13-20). Likewise, Jesus never taught that baptism was unnecessary for salvation. In fact, He taught the very opposite (cf. John 3:3,5; Mark 16:16; Matthew 28:18-20).

Consider another proof text from the Gospel of John regarding the nature of Christ. Some contend that Jesus was not deity since, on one occasion, He prayed to the Father: “And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (John 17:3).<sup>7</sup> Allegedly, by calling the Father, “the only true God,” Jesus excluded Himself from being deity. Such an interpretation of John 17:3, however, contradicts numerous other passages within John’s gospel account. From beginning to end, John bore witness to the deity of Christ. Some of the evidence from the Gospel of John includes the following:

- In the very first verse of John, the apostle testified: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and **the Word was God**” (cf. 1:14,17).
- Two verses later the reader learns that “[a]ll things came into being by Him [the Word], and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being” (John 1:3, NASB).
- Still in the first chapter of John, the apostle testified that John the Baptizer was the one whom Isaiah foretold would “prepare...the way of Jehovah” (Isaiah 40:3, ASV; John 1:23). For Whom did John the Baptizer come to prepare the way? Isaiah called Him “Jehovah.” The apostle John, as well as John the Baptizer, referred to Jehovah as “Jesus” (John 1:17), “the Christ” (3:28), “the Word” (1:1), “the Light” (1:7), “the Lamb” (1:29), “the Truth” (5:33), etc.
- When the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well told Jesus, “I know that Messiah is coming” (John 4:25), Jesus responded, “I who speak to you am He” (vs. 26). Isaiah foretold that the Messiah would be called “Mighty God” (9:6) and “Jehovah” (40:3). Thus, by claiming to be the Messiah, Jesus was claiming to be God.

- In John chapter nine, Jesus miraculously healed a man with congenital blindness (vs. 1). When this man appeared before various Jews in the synagogue and called Jesus a prophet (vs. 17), he was instructed to “give God the glory,” not Jesus, because allegedly Jesus “is a sinner” (vs. 24). Later, after the man born blind was cast out of the synagogue, he confessed faith in Jesus and **worshiped** (Greek *proskuneo*) Him (vs. 38). In the Gospel of John, this word (*proskuneo*) is found 11 times: nine times in reference to worshiping the Father (John 4:20-24), once in reference to Greeks who came to “worship” in Jerusalem during Passover (12:20), and once in reference to the worship Jesus received from a man whom He had miraculously healed, and who had just confessed faith in Jesus. Indeed, by accepting worship Jesus acknowledged His deity (cf. Matthew 4:10; Hebrews 1:6).
- While at the Feast of Dedication in Jerusalem, Jesus claimed: “I and My Father are one” (John 10:30). “Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him” (vs. 31). Why did Jesus’ enemies want to stone Him? The Jews said to Christ: “For a good work we do not stone You, but for **blasphemy**, and because **You, being a Man, make Yourself God**” (vs. 33; cf. 5:17-18).
- After Jesus rose from the dead, the apostle Thomas called Jesus, “My Lord and my God” (John 20:28). Jesus responded: “Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (vs. 29). Notice that Jesus did not deny His deity, rather He acknowledged Thomas’ faith and commended future believers. Believers in what? In that which Thomas had just confessed—that Jesus is Lord and God.

It was in the overall context of John’s gospel account, which is filled with statements testifying of Jesus’ deity, that

the apostle recorded Jesus' prayer to His Father the night of His betrayal (John 17). But how can Jesus' statement about His Father being "the only true God" (17:3) be harmonized with statements by Jesus, the apostle John, John the Baptizer, Thomas, etc. affirming the deity of Christ? When a person understands that Jesus' statement was made in opposition to the world's false gods, and not Himself, the reference to the Father being "the only true God" harmonizes perfectly with the many scriptures that attest to the deity of Christ (including those outside of the book of John; cf. Matthew 1:23; Colossians 2:9; Hebrews 1:5-13). On the eve of Jesus' crucifixion, it was completely natural for Him to pray that "all flesh/people" (John 17:2, NKJV/NIV), many of whom were (and still are) pagan idolaters, would come to know "the only true God" and receive eternal life (17:3). Thus, Jesus contrasted Himself not with the Father, but "with all forms of pagan polytheism, mystic pantheism, and philosophic naturalism."<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, if Jesus' reference to the Father being "the only true God" somehow excludes Jesus from being deity, then (to be consistent) Jesus also must be disqualified from being man's Savior. Jehovah said: "Besides Me there is no Savior" (Isaiah 43:11; cf. Hosea 13:4; Jude 25). Yet, Paul and Peter referred to Jesus as our "Savior" several times in their inspired writings (Ephesians 5:23; Philippians 3:20; 2 Timothy 1:10; 2 Peter 1:1,11; 2:20; etc.). Also, if Jesus is excluded from Godhood (based on a misinterpretation of John 17:3), then, pray tell, must God the Father be excluded from being man's Lord? To the church at Ephesus, Paul wrote that there is "**one** Lord" (4:5), and, according to Jude 4 (using Jehovah's Witnesses own *New World Translation*) "our **only** Owner and Lord" is "Jesus Christ." Yet,

in addition to Jesus being called Lord throughout the New Testament, so is God the Father (Matthew 11:25; Luke 1:32; Acts 1:24) and the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:17).

Obviously, when the Bible reveals that there is only one God, one Savior, one Lord, one Creator (Isaiah 44:24; John 1:3), etc., reason and revelation demand that we understand the inspired writers to be excluding everyone and everything—other than the members of the Godhead. As former Jehovah’s Witness David Reed explained: “Jesus’ being called our ‘only’ Lord does not rule out the Lordship of the Father and the Holy Spirit, and the Father’s being called the ‘only’ true God does not exclude the Son and the Holy Spirit from deity.”<sup>9</sup>

## JESUS “COULD DO NO MIGHTY WORK THERE”?

Mark 6:5; Matthew 13:58

According to Mark 6:5, while Jesus was in His hometown of Nazareth, “**He could do no mighty work there**, except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them.” Based upon this statement, some have concluded that Jesus must have lacked the power to work all manner of miracles in His hometown.<sup>10</sup> Allegedly, Jesus was not God and the Bible’s depiction of Him is contradictory.

Are skeptics correct? Does Mark’s statement pose a problem for Christians who believe the Bible is the inspired, inerrant Word of God and that Jesus is divine?

### **A Matter of Inability or Circumstance?**

Have you ever made the statement, “I couldn’t do it”? Perhaps you repeatedly attempted to open up a tightly sealed jar, but “just couldn’t do it.” Maybe you tried to run

a marathon, but stopped from exhaustion midway through the race. Later, you reflected on the race and told someone, “I simply couldn’t do it.” Statements made in such contexts clearly indicate that a person is physically unable to accomplish the tasks at hand.

It is also possible, however, to make the statement “I couldn’t do it” yet mean something very different. Suppose a football coach is beating a team 50-0 at halftime and certain fans are begging him to “hang a hundred on them.” But the coach responds: “I couldn’t do that.” Though it is likely within his power to score 80 or 100 points, the situation demands that he not attempt to follow through with his normal game plan. The coach chooses to adjust his strategy and win in a more gracious manner.

Consider also the wealthy grandfather who travels to visit his grandson on the boy’s 12<sup>th</sup> birthday. Though he had planned to give his grandson \$50, after seeing how disrespectful, ungrateful, and spoiled rotten the boy has become, he chooses not to give him anything. When he departs, the grandfather says to his daughter, “I simply could not give such an insolent offspring anything.” Obviously, this statement does not mean that the grandfather was literally unable to give his grandson something, but that the circumstances made it so that he could not allow himself to do anything other than show up for the boy’s birthday party.

The simple fact is, when something “cannot be done” it may very well have to do with the circumstances at hand and not one’s inability to actually perform the action. In truth, not only are skeptics **unable** to prove that Jesus actually lacked power and ability in Nazareth, the immediate

context and the parallel passages in Matthew and Luke indicate that the restraint Jesus willingly displayed was a result of the particular situation in his hometown.

Consider the many amazing miracles of Jesus that Mark reports in chapters five and six of his gospel account. In Mark 5, Jesus heals a demon-possessed man as well as a woman with a continual bleeding issue. He then raises a 12-year-old girl from the dead. In Mark 6:7-56, Jesus gives the 12 apostles power over unclean spirits, so that they “cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick, and healed them” (6:7,13). Later, Jesus miraculously feeds 5,000 men (plus the women and children; Matthew 14:21), with only five loaves of bread and two fish. He then walks on water. Mark 6 concludes with these words: “Wherever He [Jesus] entered into villages, cities, or the country, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged Him that they might just touch the hem of His garment. And as many as touched Him were made well.”

Mark’s account of Jesus’ limited miracles in Nazareth is immersed in an overall context of Him working all manner of miracles, including raising someone from the dead. What’s more, Jesus was actually “able” to heal a “few sick people” in Nazareth (6:5). Given all of these facts, one should, at the very least, seriously question the critics’ conclusion that Jesus was simply not powerful enough to work more miracles in His hometown. The overall context of the passage implicitly testifies to a different conclusion: that is, Jesus chose not to work more miracles in Nazareth because of the circumstances.

Even though Jesus spoke astonishing words of wisdom (Mark 6:2) like “no man ever” (John 7:46; Matthew 7:28-

29), and though He performed “mighty works” (Mark 6:2), including healing some of Nazareth’s sick (6:5), overall, the town disbelieved that He was the prophesied Messiah (Luke 4:16ff.). The inhabitants not only rejected Him (despite the wonders that He had already worked), but they were so enraged by His teachings that they “thrust Him out of the city” and “led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw Him down over the cliff” (Luke 4:29). At such hard-hearted unbelief, Jesus “marveled” (Mark 6:6).

Jesus knew that more miracles was not the answer. He had provided sufficient evidence for those of His hometown to come to the rational conclusion that He was not **merely** the son of Joseph and Mary; rather, He was One on Whom Isaiah prophesied “the Spirit of the Lord” would rest (Luke 4:18). Yet, they kicked Him out of the city anyway. He was the miracle-working, prophesied Messiah, yet it appears that no amount of evidence would change Nazareth’s unbelief.

In short, the **circumstances** of unbelief in Nazareth made it so that “He could do no mighty work there” (Mark 6:5). Perhaps no more than a few people even bothered to come to Jesus for healing. Or perhaps others came to Jesus, but they approached Him in a disingenuous, mocking manner. Whatever the case may have been, Jesus **chose** to work no more miracles in Nazareth than He did (before being thrown out of the city). Thus, the problem in Nazareth was not one of powerlessness on the part of Christ, but the inhabitants’ strong unbelief (and all that went along with it).

## DID JESUS PERFORM MIRACLES OR NOT?

Matthew 12:39; 16:4; Mark 8:12; Luke 11:29

A gentleman who was struggling with his beliefs in the inerrancy of the Bible contacted our offices some time ago questioning why Jesus told the scribes and Pharisees that “no sign shall be given to this generation” (Mark 8:12; cf. Matthew 12:39; 16:4; Luke 11:29). Since other scriptures clearly teach that Jesus worked “many signs” (John 12:37; 20:30-31; 3:2; Acts 2:22), how could Jesus truthfully and consistently say, “no sign shall be given to this generation”? According to certain Bible critics, Jesus was a false prophet since His “prediction that no sign would be given to that generation is clearly false.”<sup>11</sup> How can a Christian reasonably and biblically respond to such an assertion?

Sadly, Bible critics (and some Christians) are fond of disregarding the context in which biblical statements are found. Yet, no statement can be understood properly without some kind of background or contextual information. Words mean different things depending on how, when, and where they are spoken. Figures of speech abound in all cultures around the world. Truthful people, for example, have been joking, exaggerating, and using sarcasm for millennia (cf. Job 12:2; 1 Kings 18:27; Psalm 58:3), all the while rightly expecting their listeners to interpret their language accurately, and without accusation of lying. Unfortunately, skeptics of the Bible’s inspiration often ignore much of the necessary information needed to properly understand Scripture.

When Jesus first made the statement, “no sign will be given” to this generation (Matthew 12:39; Luke 11:29), He had just healed a person who was blind, mute, and

demon-possessed (Matthew 12:22; Luke 11:14). Notice that, rather than acknowledging that the great miracle Jesus worked was proof of His deity (John 20:30-31), the hard-hearted Pharisees alleged that His power came from the devil (Matthew 12:24). They did not simply turn **away** from Jesus; they turned **180 degrees** away from the direction that such miracles led the honest and good-hearted truth-seekers. And Jesus' enemies had not simply seen one miracle. Earlier in Matthew 12, Jesus had healed a man with a withered hand (vss. 9-13). How did the Pharisees react then? Rather than acknowledge the power of Christ, they "plotted against Him, how they might destroy Him" (vs. 14). The fact is, by this time in Jesus' ministry He had already worked a number of miracles (Matthew 11:4-5), and many of the scribes and Pharisees absolutely refused to believe in Him (cf. Matthew 9:32-34). Regardless of what Jesus did or said, some of His enemies would never be convinced (cf. Matthew 12:31-32).<sup>12</sup>

So what did Jesus mean when He said on two different occasions that "no sign" would be given to "this generation" except "the sign of the prophet Jonah" (Matthew 12:39; 16:4; Mark 8:12; Luke 11:29)? Jesus was responding to the Pharisees' desire to see a sign. But they had already witnessed and heard about many of Jesus' miracles. They wanted something "more." They sought "a sign **from heaven**" (Luke 11:16; Matthew 16:1; Mark 8:11). **Exactly** what Jesus' enemies meant by this, we may not know. The Bible indicates that while on Earth Jesus manifested His power over nature, disease, demon, and death, yet the Pharisees said they wanted **more**. It seems, as Burton Coffman noted, they "meant some spectacular wonder without

moral value but which would appeal sensationally to man's curiosity."<sup>13</sup> Jesus, however, always rejected doing such miracles. He refused to turn stones to bread or to jump from the temple's pinnacle simply because Satan challenged Him to do so (Matthew 4:1-7). Jesus could have performed any miracle that He wanted—whether when tempted by Satan, prodded by Herod (Luke 23:8-12), or tested by the Pharisees. 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 commanded that it literally rain cats and dogs. He could have lit the robes of the Pharisees on fire with the snap of His fingers and told them that hell would be ten times as hot. He could have done any number of wonders. But the insincere Pharisees would see none of that (i.e., “no sign [like these] will be given”).

What sign would be given? Other than the kinds of miracles that Christ's enemies had already rejected, the only other sign Jesus prophesied was “the sign of the prophet Jonah” (Matthew 12:39; 16:4; Luke 11:29)—Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection.

Most certainly, Jesus performed miracles. And though Jesus “humbled Himself...taking the form of a bondservant” (Philippians 2:8,7), He refused to get on the lowly, perpetually defiled spiritual level of His enemies. He worked no miracle of the kind that the Pharisees wished to see. But make no mistake, He worked plenty of the kind that provide honest-hearted people sufficient evidence to come to the conclusion that He is, indeed, “the Christ, the Son of God” (John 20:30-31).

## DID JESUS LOOK UPON WICKEDNESS?

Habakkuk 1:13; Matthew 4:1-11

The prophet Habakkuk once spoke to God, saying, “You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on wickedness” (1:13). Some wonder how this statement could be true, since, according to the Bible, God put on flesh and became man (John 1:1-5) and “dwelt among us” (1:14), and saw all sorts of wickedness. In fact, Jesus was in the very presence of “the evil one” (Matthew 6:13) when He was tempted by Satan in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11). What’s more, the Old Testament contends that God allowed the diabolical devil to come before His presence on the “day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord” (Job 1:6). If God can be in the presence of “the wicked one” (1 John 3:12), both in heaven and on earth, how can He simultaneously not be able to “look on wickedness”?

Consider, first of all, the fact that the Bible repeatedly testifies to God’s omniscience and omnipresence. “[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). Neither the righteous nor the wicked can flee from God’s presence (cf. Psalm 139:7-8). He fills heaven and Earth (Jeremiah 23:23-24). Indeed, God is the all-knowing, ever-present One. Thus, given the Bible’s overall teaching about the nature of God, it should be obvious that Habakkuk 1:13 means something other than “God does not know or see what the wicked are doing.”

Second, that Habakkuk meant something other than “God cannot literally look upon wickedness” is also evident

from the very chapter and verse in which he makes this statement. After declaring, “You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on wickedness” (1:13a), he asked, “**Why do You look on those who deal treacherously**, and hold Your tongue when the wicked devours a person more righteous than he?” (1:13b). Those who “deal treacherously” certainly are engaged in wickedness, and yet, God looks on them. Consider also verse two where the prophet asked, “[H]ow long shall I cry, and **You will not hear?**” What did he mean by “hear”? He explained in his next statement: “Even cry out to You, ‘Violence!’ and **You will not save.**” Thus, to “hear” in verse two meant “to save.” Similarly, in verse 13 the prophet was not suggesting that God cannot see the wicked. He does, in fact, see them and often even allows them to continue in their existence for a time in order to fulfill His purposes.

In context, Habakkuk was bewildered by the fact that God was using a wicked nation like Babylon to punish Judah. The prophet was undoubtedly aware of Judah’s perverse ways (1:1-4), but did not understand why God would “look” toward the extremely wicked nation of Babylon in order to punish the Jews. The truth is, however, God neither approved of nor ignored Babylon’s sins. After He providentially used them to punish the Jews, He likewise brought judgment upon the Babylonians. Just as He predicted (Jeremiah 50-51; Isaiah 21; 45:1; etc.), Babylon was soon destroyed in the sixth century B.C.

God’s perfectly holy, just, divine nature will not allow Him to “look on wickedness”—meaning, He cannot delight, accept, or ignore iniquity. He hates sin (Proverbs 6:16-19). He “is against those who do evil” (1 Peter 3:12). Jesus may

have faced Satan on Earth, and God may have allowed Satan to come into His presence with the sons of God in heaven, but God never **looks upon** wickedness **with pleasure and approval**.

## DID JESUS LIE TO HIS BROTHERS?

John 7:8,10

If Jesus never sinned (2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15), and specifically never lied, some wonder why Jesus told his brothers, “I do **not** go up to this feast [the Feast of Tabernacles]” (John 7:8, NASB), yet later, “when His brothers had gone...He Himself also went” (7:10, NASB)? Some allege that, in this instance, Jesus “broke his word” and “lied,”<sup>14</sup> and thus was not the Son of God as He claimed. What is the truth of the matter?

First of all, several early manuscripts of the gospel of John, including p<sup>66</sup> and p<sup>75</sup> (believed to be from as early as the late second and early third centuries), have Jesus saying, “I am not **yet** [*oupo*] going up to this feast,” rather than “I do **not** [*ouk*] go up to this feast.” Thus, it may be that the correct rendering is found in the KJV, NKJV, and NIV, rather than the ASV, NASB, and RSV.

Second, even if Jesus did say at one point to His brothers, “I do not go up to this feast,” but later He went, that still does not mean that He lied. Suppose a co-worker saw me leaving the office at 2:00 p.m. and asked me, “Are you going home?” and I said, “No,” but later went home that day at 5:00 p.m. Have I lied? Not at all. When I left the office at 2:00 p.m., I went to run a quick errand—I did not go home. When I departed the office at 5:00 p.m., however, I went home. “No” is often truthfully used in a time-sensitive manner.

Simply because at 2:00 p.m. I said I was not going home, does not mean I could not go home at 5:00 p.m. My “no” meant “I’m not going home **at the present.**” Similarly, if Jesus used the term “not” [*ouk*] rather than “not yet” [*oupo*], He could just as easily been implying the same thing: “I am not going to the feast **at the present.**”

**At the proper time**, after Jesus “remained in Galilee” for a while (7:9), He **did** go to the feast. The proper time was **not** when his unbelieving brothers told Him to “depart” (John 7:3-5), but when the Son of God said it was time—a God-appointed time. Furthermore, His attendance at the feast was **not** for the purpose that His brothers envisioned (to show Himself to the world—7:3-4), rather Jesus went to the feast “not openly, but as it were **in secret**” (7:10).

Just as we often say, “I am not going,” but mean “I am not going **yet**,” Jesus had every right to use that same kind of language. Although Jesus embodied truth (John 14:6) and always told the truth (1 Peter 2:22), He still used figures of speech and language men commonly understood—some even today.

## WAS JESUS MISTAKEN ABOUT 1 SAMUEL 21?

Mark 2:25-26; 1 Samuel 21:1

Critics of Christ 2,000 years ago once saw His disciples walking through a field plucking heads of grain on the Sabbath and accused them of doing that which the Law of Moses forbade (Matthew 12:1-8; Mark 2:23-28). As was often His practice, Jesus responded to His enemies with a question (cf. Matthew 12:10-12; 15:2-3; 21:23-25). He asked: “Have you never read what David did when he was in need

and hungry, he and those with him: how he went into the house of God in the days of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the showbread, which is not lawful to eat except for the priests, and also gave some to those who were with him?” (Mark 2:25-26). Nearly twenty centuries this side of the Pharisees’ criticisms, Christ’s critics today allege that He erred in His response. In an article titled, “Tough Questions for the Christian Church,” skeptic Dennis McKinsey stated:

How can it be that Jesus contradicts the Old Testament (1 Samuel 21:1-2), saying that Abiathar gave David the showbread instead of Ahimelech, and saying that David had men with him, when he was actually alone (Mark 2:25-26)? Does the church expect me to rely upon the teachings of a “son of God” who is demonstrably mistaken about what God’s Word says?<sup>15</sup>

Supposedly, Christ mistakenly spoke of Abiathar when He should have said Ahimelech (1 Samuel 21:1), and referred to David’s companions when he allegedly had none at that time. Are these accusations justified? Was Jesus wrong?

Admittedly, 1 Samuel 21:1 does speak of David visiting “Ahimelech the priest,” rather than Abiathar. However, when Jesus spoke of this event 1,000 years later, He did not say that “Abiathar gave David the showbread,” as McKinsey alleged. Jesus referred to the event as occurring “**in the time of** Abiathar the high priest” (NASB; Greek *epi Abiathar archiereos*) or “**in the days of** Abiathar the high priest” (cf. KJV, NKJV, NIV), and not necessarily while Abiathar was the high priest. According to Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich in their *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, the word *epi* can function simply as a “marker of temporal associations,” meaning simply “in the time of, at, on,

for.”<sup>16</sup> The phrase “in the time/days of” may be intended to modify Abiathar’s entire life, rather than just his priesthood. And, his “priesthood” could have been mentioned merely to clarify the person to whom Jesus was referring. The fact is, Abiathar was a son of Ahimelech, and served as high priest during the reign of King David (cf. 1 Kings 1:7). What’s more, based upon how much more information the Bible gives us about Abiathar, he was probably much more well known among the Jews than his father.

If someone today were to speak of how many Christians were imprisoned “in the days of Paul, the apostle,” it may be that he actually was referring to the time before Paul became an apostle, yet still referred to him as “Paul, **the apostle.**” Such language would not force one to conclude that the reference to the imprisonment of Christians must be confined to the time **when** Paul was an apostle. Similarly, since Jesus did not specifically say that Abiathar was the high priest who ministered to David, but simply that the event occurred during the lifetime of Abiathar (who later became the high priest), the allegation that Jesus erred is superfluous.

But what about the accusation that while “David...was actually alone” during his visit with Ahimelech, Jesus indicated that he had men “with him” (Mark 2:25-26)? Did Jesus err in this regard? This charge is simply another instance where skeptics refuse to treat the biblical text fairly in hopes of finding a genuine mistake. Consider the situation where a colonel in the army might visit a general’s quarters “alone” to discuss provisions for his men, while instructing his men to wait for him at a nearby designated location. In one sense, the colonel was alone with the general, yet in another sense, the colonel **and his men** had traveled to the general’s

location in order to request essential provisions that would have been used for both the colonel **and those who were with him**.

No doubt, McKinsey based this second accusation upon what Ahimelech first asked David when the future king of Israel came unto him: “Why are you alone, and no one is with you” (1 Samuel 21:1)? If one were to stop at this point without considering subsequent verses, he may very well come to the conclusion that Jesus blundered in His reference to the events in 1 Samuel 21:1. However, following Ahimelech’s question (“Why are you alone?”), David informed him, “I have directed my young men to such and such a place” (21:2). Thus, although David may have entered the presence of Ahimelech without his men, he informed Ahimelech that he had directed them elsewhere while he visited with him. Ahimelech obviously understood David to mean that the men were not too far away, and were hungry, because he informed David that although he had no common bread to eat, there was holy bread, “if **the young men** have at least kept themselves from women” (21:4). David responded by saying, “Truly, women have been kept from **us**.... And the vessels of the **young men** are holy” (21:5).

To assert that Jesus erred in these two instances is to claim that which cannot be proven. The truth is, Jesus referred to this Old Testament event in a way very similar to how we converse today about various matters—whether using a figure of speech, called prolepsis, where we assign a name or title to a time that precedes it, or where we refer to someone being alone in one sense, and a part of a larger group at the same time. Such accusations appear to say more about the heart of the critic than the truthfulness of Jesus and the Bible writers.

# Chapter 7



## ALLEGED PROPHETICAL MISTAKES

### DID CAIN BECOME A “WANDERER” OR A “SETTLER”?

Genesis 4:11-17

After Cain killed his brother Abel, the Lord punished the first recorded murderer saying, “So now you are cursed from the earth, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you. **A fugitive and a vagabond you shall be on the earth**” (Genesis 4:11-12). Critics have accused God of error in His sentencing of Cain. According to Dennis McKinsey, Genesis 4:12 represents “**one of the earliest false prophecies**” in the Bible. “Instead of becoming a vagabond as was forecast, Cain

took a wife, built a city, established a line of descendants and seems to have led a settled life.”<sup>1</sup> Skeptic Steve Wells contends Genesis 4:16-17 indicates that “Cain will **settle down**,” but “[t]his is not the activity one would expect from a fugitive and a vagabond.”<sup>2</sup> So which is it? Did Cain become a wanderer or a settler?

Moses recorded fewer than 30 words (in Hebrew) regarding what Cain did after God conversed with him and sentenced him to being a vagrant and a wanderer. All we know about the rest of Cain’s life is that he “went out from the presence of the Lord and dwelt in the land of Nod on the east of Eden. And Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch. And he built a city, and called the name of the city after the name of his son—Enoch” (Genesis 4:16-17).

Sadly, skeptics (once again) have assumed the worst about God and the Bible writers. They assume that the few words recorded about Cain in Genesis 4:16-17 must mean Cain could not have been a drifter the rest of his life. Yet a man can still be a wanderer while also having a wife and son. A vagabond may “settle” in various places for brief periods of time. What’s more, a man could work to build various structures that become part of a “city” without settling down for a long period of time in the city.

Of interest is the fact that the Hebrew of Genesis 4:17 does not indicate that Cain completed the city. The text actually says that he “was then building a city” (NIV).<sup>3</sup> And the “city” may very well have been nothing more than “a walled enclosure with a few houses” or tents.<sup>4</sup> Bible writers frequently used the Hebrew term *iyir* to refer to a city “in the widest sense (even of a mere encampment or post).”<sup>5</sup> Thus, Cain very easily could have worked for a few months

on building an encampment, post, or walled enclosure of some kind before drifting to another area of the world, or at least to another part of the land of Nod.

The fact is, nothing in Genesis 4:16-17 indicates that God's prophecy failed. The skeptic may **wish** it had failed, but he cannot **prove** that it did. And if he cannot prove that it failed, then it cannot be justly assumed that it did. Indeed, God and the Bible writers are innocent until proven guilty.

## “HE OPENED NOT HIS MOUTH”

Isaiah 53:5,7

In what many consider to be the most well-known prophecy concerning the coming of the Messiah, the prophet Isaiah foretold of the sufferings that Christ would endure amid His trial and crucifixion, saying (as if it had already happened):

But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.... He was oppressed and He was afflicted, **yet He opened not His mouth**; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, **so He opened not His mouth** (53:5,7).

According to Isaiah, not only was the Messiah going to suffer cruel punishment on His way to the grave, but He would do so without opening His mouth. He would be as silent as a sheep is before its shearers.

The problem that some have with this passage is that the gospel writers indicate that Jesus **did** open His mouth before His accusers, and also later while hanging on the cross.

After Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, the high priest questioned Jesus, saying, “Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?” Jesus responded, not with silence, but with two statements that infuriated the Jewish council. He said: “I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven” (Mark 14:61-62). Jesus was then sent to Pilate where He was asked another question about His identity, “Are You the King of the Jews?” As he had done earlier that night, He did not keep silent, but answered Pilate with these words: “It is as you say” (Mark 15:2). Even while hanging on the cross a few hours later, Jesus made several statements, including, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do” (Luke 23:34), and “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Mark 15:34). So how could the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 be referring to Jesus, since He did, in fact, “open His mouth,” both during His trial, and while hanging on the cross?

Obviously, if the phrase, “He opened not His mouth,” meant that the Messiah would never speak one word while being oppressed and afflicted, then Jesus could not have been the prophesied suffering servant, and the inspired writers, preachers, and prophets of the first century who applied this passage to Him were mistaken (cf. Acts 8:32-33). A proper understanding of this phrase, however, reveals that it does not literally mean the accused “did not open his mouth.” First, not even the skeptic would interpret this verse to mean that the suffering servant literally kept his mouth closed—that if he ever separated his lips so as to allow air, water, or food to enter his mouth, then the prophecy would be annulled. Such would be a ridiculous interpre-

tation of the phrase “He opened not his mouth,” because in this passage Isaiah clearly used the word “mouth” to refer to what the mouth **does**—it aids in speaking—a figure of speech known as metonymy (of the cause). Second, the phrases “open the mouth” and “do not open the mouth” are Hebrew idioms (appearing both in the Old and the New Testaments), which frequently are used to refer more to the length, freedom, and/or kind of speech, rather than whether one or more words actually are (or are not) spoken.

When Jephthah (the ninth judge of Israel listed in the book of Judges) spoke to his daughter following the victory that the Lord had given Israel over the Ammonites, He said: “Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low! You are among those who trouble me! For **I have given my word to the Lord**, and I cannot go back on it” (Judges 11:35). The phrase “I have given my word to the Lord” in the New King James Version is literally “I have **opened my mouth** unto the Lord” (KJV; see ASV). Jephthah had earlier made a vow to the Lord, saying, “If You will indeed deliver the people of Ammon into my hands, then it will be that whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the people of Ammon, shall surely be the Lord’s, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering” (Judges 11:30-31). The reason that Jephthah was so distraught after returning home from war and seeing his daughter was not simply because he “opened his mouth” and prayed to God, but because included in this prayer was a **promise** to God—one that caused himself and his daughter great sadness. Jephthah could have spoken to God all day without making such a significant and life-changing statement, and it might not have been described as a time in

which Jephthah “opened his mouth.” The phrase “opened my (thy) mouth” (Judges 11:35,36, KJV) meant that something extremely noteworthy was stated; a promise to God was made that could not be broken.

Notice also how the idea of “opening one’s mouth” is used on occasion in the New Testament. Sometime after Philip had spoken with the eunuch from Ethiopia about the passage of Scripture from which he was reading (Isaiah 53 ironically enough—see Acts 8:30-33), the text states: “Then Philip **opened his mouth**, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to Him” (Acts 8:35). Notice that Philip already had been speaking with the eunuch (8:30), and most likely had made other introductory comments to this stranger that are not recorded by Luke in the book of Acts. However, it was not until Philip began to speak **at length** to the eunuch, and to **preach to him** the good news of Jesus, that Philip was described as one who “opened his mouth.”

In chapter ten of the book of Acts, Luke recorded Peter’s visit with a Gentile named Cornelius. After being summoned by the Spirit of God (10:19-20) to travel to the city of Cornelius (i.e., Caesarea), Peter departed on the next day. Upon his arrival, Peter spoke to Cornelius about several things (Acts 10:25-29). He first rebuked Cornelius for worshipping him, saying, “Stand up; I myself am also a man” (10:26). He proceeded to speak with him about other things not specifically mentioned in the text (10:27). And then he revealed to Cornelius and his household that God had shown him (a Jew) that Gentiles should no longer be considered unclean. After several minutes (or perhaps even

a few hours) of conversation between Peter and Cornelius (10:24-33), Luke then recorded that “Peter **opened his mouth**” (10:34) and gave a defense of the Christ and the Christian faith. Had Peter’s mouth been “open” before this time? Yes. Had he already spoken to Cornelius about several things? Certainly. Now Peter **really** begins to speak. He had already been speaking, but now he “opens his mouth.” Now he **preaches** the Gospel of Christ.

In writing to the church at Corinth, Paul once made the comment: “Our **mouth is open** unto you, O Corinthians” (2 Corinthians 6:11, ASV). This statement obviously carries more meaning than simply, “Paul **spoke** to the Corinthians.” Certain modern versions translate this verse using such words as “openly” (NKJV) or “freely” (NIV) to describe how Paul and Timothy spoke to the Corinthians. Rather than suppressing various truths that would be beneficial to the church at Corinth (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:2-3), they spoke openly and without restraint. They **unreservedly** commended themselves and their ministry to the Corinthians in order that they might accept their message (cf. 2 Corinthians 6:1-2).<sup>6</sup> This is how Paul used the phrase “to open the mouth.”

When the prophet Isaiah wrote that the suffering servant “opened **not** His mouth” while being oppressed and afflicted (Isaiah 53:7), He did not mean that Jesus never uttered a word from the time He was arrested in the garden until His death on the cross. The thought behind this phrase is that Jesus would not speak **freely** and **unreservedly** in defense of Himself. Whereas Jesus could have responded to His accusers with “an opened mouth” and given a

strong, lengthy defense of His innocence (similar to how Philip, Peter, and Paul testified of both Christ and their own ministry with “an opened mouth”), Jesus chose to restrain Himself before His accusers and tormentors. Rather than calling twelve legions of angels to fight this battle for Him (cf. Matthew 26:53), Jesus humbly submitted to His enemies. Rather than performing some notable miracle before Herod so as to gain His freedom (cf. Luke 23:8), and instead of striking the high priest with blindness in an attempt to convince the Sanhedrin that He truly was the Son of God, Jesus suppressed His powers. Less than twenty-four hours earlier, Jesus had healed Malchus’ severed ear, yet Jesus did nothing to lighten His **own** affliction during His trial and crucifixion—not even mentioning this miracle so as to defend His deity. In light of what Christ **could** have done to His accusers and what oral defense He **could** have given before them on His own behalf, Christ’s passive submission before them is remarkable. Truly, “when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously” (1 Peter 2:23).

To prophesy that the suffering servant “opened not His mouth,” is to use a Hebrew idiom and hyperbolic expression which means that Jesus refrained from giving an exhaustive legal defense on His own behalf. During much of His affliction and oppression He was completely silent (cf. Matthew 26:62-63; 27:12-14). At other times He spoke only a few words—none of which comes close to being the kind of defense He could have offered on His own behalf had He been trying to avoid persecution and crucifixion.

## WHY DID MARY AND JOSEPH NOT CALL JESUS “IMMANUEL”?

Matthew 1:22-23; Isaiah 7:14

Approximately 700 years before the birth of the promised Messiah, Isaiah prophesied about a virgin who would “conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel” (7:14). Years later, the apostle Matthew referred to Isaiah’s prophecy, specifying once again that, “they shall call His name Immanuel” (1:22-23). Many have wondered why, if the promised Son of Mary was supposed to be called “Immanuel,” this name is never used in the New Testament aside from Matthew’s quotation of Isaiah 7:14. Why do we never read of Mary, Joseph, John the Baptizer, Peter, Paul, or others calling the Messiah “Immanuel”?

Thankfully, as so often is the case with God’s Word, the Bible is its own (and best!) commentary. To better understand what Isaiah meant by the **name** Immanuel, it is helpful to consider what the prophet wrote two chapters later. In prophesying about the Messiah, Isaiah wrote: “His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (9:6). Did Isaiah mean by this that the Messiah would literally have as His given name “Wonderful,” “Counselor,” or “Everlasting Father”? Surely, to ask is to answer. These names were given to describe the **nature** of the Messiah, not to serve as literal, given names. As commentator Albert Barnes noted:

His [the Messiah’s—EL] attributes shall be such as to make all these applications appropriate descriptions of his power and work. To be called, and to be, in the Hebrew, often mean the same thing.... Such a use of a verb is not uncommon in Isaiah. “One calls him,”

is, according to the usage in Isaiah, as ranch as to say [the equivalent of saying–EL], he will justly bear this name; or simply, he will be.<sup>7</sup>

By **nature**, the son of Mary was “Immanuel” (John 1:1-3; 10:30,33; 20:28), but by **name**, He was “Jesus.”

A similar distinction between a person’s nature and name is found as early as Genesis chapter two. Following God’s creation of Eve from Adam’s rib, the first man said, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; **she shall be called woman**, because she was taken out of man” (Genesis 2:23). Although Adam said, “she shall be called woman,” one chapter later Moses recorded how “Adam called his wife’s name Eve” (3:20). Obviously, Adam meant that **by nature** the one whom God created from his rib was a female human, “a helper comparable to him,” but **by name**, she would be known as “Eve.”

Gabriel’s conversation with Mary prior to her miraculous conception is also helpful in gaining a proper understanding of Jesus’ name and nature. Although Gabriel did not use the term “Immanuel,” notice how he distinguished between Jesus’ given name and the titles by which He would be known as a result of His divine nature:

Then the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and **shall call His name Jesus**. He will be great, and **will be called the Son of the Highest**; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.... The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also,

that Holy One who is to be born **will be called the Son of God**" (Luke 1:30-35).

Finally, Matthew further clarifies God's use of the "name" Immanuel in the very same passage he quotes Isaiah 7:14. Immediately before and after Matthew reminds his readers of the prophecy regarding the Messiah's name being "Immanuel" (1:23), he noted how Joseph **would** call (1:21) and **did** call (1:25) the Messiah by "His name Jesus." The fact that Matthew wrote of the Messiah's "name" being "Immanuel" in verse 23, but "Jesus" in verses 21 and 25, clearly shows that Matthew understood that one name (Jesus) was a given, literal name, while the other (Immanuel), similar to Jesus' title "Christ," characterized His essence.

## WHERE WAS JESUS CALLED A NAZARENE?

Matthew 2:23

In addition to the unfounded criticism surrounding Nazareth's existence early in the first century, skeptics are also fond of denying the fulfilled prophecy of Jesus being called a Nazarene. At the close of Matthew chapter two, the inspired tax collector recorded that Jesus' family "came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, **that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, 'He shall be called a Nazarene'**" (2:23). However, the words "He shall be called a Nazarene" are nowhere to be found in the Old Testament, nor is Jesus ever called "a Nazarene" in the New Testament apart from Matthew 2:23. For these reasons, Bible critics often include Matthew 2:23 in lists of Bible "contradictions" or "inconsistencies" that supposedly disprove the inspiration of the Bible.<sup>8</sup>

So what are Christians to do with Matthew 2:23? Do we concede it as a contradiction, or is there a reasonable explanation? How could Matthew truthfully write that Jesus' family moved to Nazareth "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, 'He shall be called a Nazarene'"?

First, Bible students must keep in mind that quotation marks were foreign to the Bible writers, as well as all authors of antiquity. As Wayne Jackson noted: "[A]ncient writers did not use the same literary devices employed today. Quotation marks, colons, ellipsis marks, brackets, etc., were unknown to them. In view of this, we may not always know just how they were utilizing the language of the former Scriptures."<sup>9</sup> Could it be that Matthew did not intend for His readers to understand this statement as a direct quotation from the Old Testament, but rather a more generalized truth?

What underlying truth could Matthew possibly have been trying to convey by the statement, "He shall be called a Nazarene"? Before answering this question, consider how the names of cities have occasionally been used to represent a particular idea. From a negative standpoint, a homosexual may be referred to as a **sodomite** (cf. 1 Corinthians 6:9; 1 Timothy 1:10, NKJV, RSV). In the first century, the inhabitants of Corinth were so sexually immoral that the verb *korinthiazō* ("to **Corinthianize**" or "act like Corinthians") meant to commit sexual immorality.<sup>10</sup> In regards to Nazareth, the city had a reputation of being rather insignificant. It was in a partially Gentile-settled region (Galilee) that the Pharisees looked down upon, as is evident by their erroneous assertion that "no prophet has arisen out of Galilee" (John 7:52). [NOTE: Jonah was from Gath Hopher

in the southern part of Galilee (2 Kings 14:25).] What's more, recall that when Philip informed Nathanael that he had found the Messiah, "Jesus of Nazareth" (John 1:45), Nathanael responded: "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (vs. 46). "To come from Nazareth, therefore, or to be a Nazarene, was the same as to be despised, or to be esteemed of low birth."<sup>11</sup> The fact is, the Old Testament prophets foretold that the Messiah would be a "despised... root out of dry ground" with "no form or comeliness" (Isaiah 53:3,2; cf. Psalm 22:6-7). Similar to how cities such as Sodom and Corinth have been used to describe a particular activity (albeit wicked), Matthew likely assigned the term Nazarene to Jesus to adequately express the prophets' predictions of His lowly, despised origins (cf. Acts 24:5).

Still, some might wonder why Jesus was never actually called a Nazarene anywhere in the New Testament (outside of Matthew 2:23). The answer is quite simple (although perhaps foreign to many in the 21<sup>st</sup> century): in Scripture, to "be called" often meant the same as "shall be." As noted previously, when Adam said that Eve would "be called woman," He did not mean that "woman" would be her name, but that **by nature** she was a woman (Genesis 2:23; 3:20). When Matthew quoted the Messianic prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 and testified that the people "shall call His name Immanuel" (Matthew 1:23), he meant that **by nature** the son of Mary was Immanuel, meaning "God with us" (whereas the literal **name** He wore was "Jesus"—Matthew 1:1:25; Luke 1:30-35; cf. Isaiah 9:6). Likewise, when Matthew used the word "Nazarene" one chapter later, he was most likely describing the lowliness of Jesus' life (i.e., He "made Himself of no reputation"—Philippians 2:7).

## “THERE ARE SOME STANDING HERE WHO WILL NOT TASTE DEATH...”

Mark 9:1; Matthew 16:28; Luke 9:27

According to *The Skeptics Annotated Bible*, in Mark 9:1, “**Jesus falsely prophesies** that the end of the world will come within his listeners’ lifetimes.”<sup>12</sup> Skeptic Dennis McKinsey calls this prophecy<sup>13</sup> “one of those classic predictions that has haunted his supporters ever since, forcing them to concoct an endless number of rationalizations to explain its failure.”<sup>14</sup>

What exactly did Jesus predict in Mark 9:1? Jesus said, “Assuredly, I say to you that there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power.” Jesus prophesied that some of His listeners on that occasion (including His disciples—Mark 8:34) would still be alive to “see the kingdom of God come with power” (NIV).

Skeptics contend that the coming kingdom Jesus mentioned in this passage is a reference to “the end of the world,”<sup>15</sup> when Jesus returns (Matthew 24:36-25:46; 2 Peter 3:10-13) and when “an entrance will be supplied... abundantly **into the everlasting kingdom** of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:11). The same eternal, “heavenly kingdom” (2 Timothy 4:18) that Peter and Paul eagerly anticipated is supposedly the same kingdom about which Jesus prophesied in Mark 9:1. Are skeptics correct?

As is the case with so many so-called “contradictions,” skeptics have once again **assumed** a sense (or definition) of a word, which cannot be proven. They have chosen a meaning that contradicts the passage rather than con-

sidering a logical sense of the word “kingdom” which perfectly fits with Jesus’ prophecy.

Admittedly, **at times** God’s kingdom is rightly understood in its **future sense**. After all, Jesus taught: “When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him.... Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the **kingdom** prepared for you from the foundation of the world’” (Matthew 25:31,34). **This “kingdom”** is the heavenly phase of God’s kingdom, which the righteous will “inherit” at the end of time (1 Corinthians 15:50).

However, there is a real, biblical sense in which God’s Kingdom exists **in the present**—and has been in existence since the first century. In fact, long before Jesus correctly prophesied of this coming Kingdom, the Old Testament prophets did so. Isaiah and Micah prophesied of “the mountain<sup>16</sup> of the Lord’s house” being established in Jerusalem “in the latter days” (Isaiah 2:1-4; Micah 4:1-4). About 200 years later, in the sixth century B.C., Daniel recorded a divinely revealed, prophetic dream of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon (Daniel 2:1-45). According to Daniel, the king dreamed of a great image with a head of gold, a chest and arms of silver, a belly and thighs of bronze, legs of iron, and feet partly of iron and partly of clay. In the dream, a stone was cut out of a mountain without hands and struck the image. The clay, iron, bronze, silver, and gold were crushed and became like dust, carried away by the wind. But, “the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth” (Daniel 2:35). Daniel revealed to Nebuchadnezzar that the image he saw represented various earthly kingdoms. Babylon was the head of gold, while the other

elements of the image stood for future empires that would rise up after Babylon. History has shown that the chest and arms of silver represented the Medo-Persian Empire. The belly and thighs of bronze were for the Grecian Empire. And the legs of iron and feet of both iron and clay stood for the Roman Empire.

Daniel informed Nebuchadnezzar that it would be during the days of this fourth kingdom<sup>17</sup> (the Roman Empire) that the God of heaven would “set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed;...it shall stand forever” (Daniel 2:44). Its beginning would be small, like the stone that was cut out of the mountain without hands, but it eventually would consume all other kingdoms and become a great mountain filling the whole Earth.

What is this kingdom of which Nebuchadnezzar dreamed, and Daniel spoke? What is this great kingdom that would eventually fill the whole Earth? It’s the spiritual Kingdom of Christ—the Church. More than 500 years before the Church was established, God revealed to King Nebuchadnezzar in a prophetic dream that a Kingdom made “without hands”—a spiritual Kingdom of divine origin—would be established during the days of the Roman Empire.

This entity is the Kingdom that Jesus prophesied would come during the lifetime of His first-century hearers. Jesus not only prophesied of this Kingdom in Matthew 16:28 (as well as in the parallel passages in Mark 9:1 and Luke 9:27), He also predicted it just a few verses earlier in Matthew 16:18-19. To the apostle Peter, Jesus said: “I will build **My church**, and the gates of hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the **kingdom of heaven**...” Jesus promised to establish His Church and then equated

the Church with the Kingdom of heaven, to which He gave Peter “the keys.” What do keys do? They unlock doors, thus allowing entrance. When did Peter open the doors to the Kingdom? Only a few months later in Acts 2 when Peter and the apostles were “filled with the Holy Spirit” (2:4), preached the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, and about 3,000 souls became Christians (2:41), submitting to the authoritative lordship of Jesus Christ—the King of kings (1 Timothy 6:15-16; Ephesians 1:21). On that day, the Day of Pentecost, the Kingdom of God (in its present sense) came “with power” (Mark 9:1), just as Jesus had prophesied.

From Acts 2 onward, God’s Kingdom has existed, and New Testament Christians have been servants in this Kingdom. To the church at Colosse, Paul noted how God “**has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom** of the Son of his love” (Colossians 1:13). With the Christians in Asia Minor, the apostle John declared that he shared “**in the tribulation and kingdom** and patience of Jesus Christ” (Revelation 1:9). Indeed, the Christians in Asia Minor nearly 2,000 years ago were **already** fellow citizens in the **Kingdom** of Christ.

The simple fact is, Christians are not “haunted” by Mark 9:1 as some skeptics suggest, nor do we have to “concoct an endless number of rationalizations to explain its [alleged] failure.”<sup>18</sup> A rational, biblical, easy-to-understand explanation exists: words have different meanings, and Jesus used the word “kingdom” in this verse in reference to His Church—God’s spiritual Kingdom in the present. Indeed, those who heard Jesus’ prophecy of Mark 9:1 saw Christ’s Kingdom come in their lifetime.

## “THIS GENERATION WILL BY NO MEANS PASS AWAY...”

Matthew 24:34

What did atheistic author Mike Davis allege was the “smoking gun” that proved to him once and for all that “Christianity could not possibly be true”?<sup>19</sup> What (in his words) “sealed the issue” and led him to believe “Jesus was wrong...and no more deserving of our belief than any other guy”?<sup>20</sup> When did the case against the Bible and Christianity become “closed”?<sup>21</sup> On page one of his book, *The Atheist’s Introduction to the New Testament: How the Bible Undermines the Basic Teachings of Christianity*, Davis explained that Matthew 24:34 was the deciding factor.

In Matthew 24:34, Jesus stated: “Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.” According to Davis, since “Jesus tells his listeners that the judgment day will come before the generation he’s speaking to passes away,” and since that generation passed away 1,900 years ago, Jesus “could not have been divine” and the Bible is “untrustworthy.”<sup>22</sup>

In actuality, what Davis confesses ultimately “proved” to him that the Bible and Jesus are unreliable is nothing more than a misinterpretation of Scripture. Jesus was **not** mistaken in His comments in Matthew 24:34—Jesus’ generation did not pass away prior to witnessing the things Jesus foretold in Matthew 24:4-34. But, Jesus did **not** foretell in those verses what Davis assumes He foretold. Davis and many others believe that, prior to verse 34, Jesus was describing events that would take place shortly before Judgment Day at the end of time. The fact of the matter is, however, **Jesus was prophesying about the coming destruction upon**

**Jerusalem in A.D. 70, not the final Judgment.**

When the disciples went to show Jesus the Temple buildings (Matthew 24:1), Jesus said, “Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down” (24:2). Later, when Jesus was on the Mount of Olives, the disciples asked Him three questions, beginning with “when will these things be?” (24:3). In verses 4-34, Jesus revealed several signs that would indicate Rome’s destruction of Jerusalem, including the Temple, was near. [NOTE: “The fall of the Hebrew system is set forth in the sort of apocalyptic nomenclature that is characteristic of Old Testament literature, e.g., when the prophets pictorially portray the overthrow of Jehovah’s enemies (cf. Isaiah 13:10-11; 34:2ff; Ezekiel 32:7-8).”<sup>23</sup> In verses 35-51 (and all of chapter 25), Jesus answered the disciples’ last two questions: “what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?” (Matthew 24:3). To summarize, in Matthew 24:4-34 Jesus foretold of the coming destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70,<sup>24</sup> while in 24:35-25:46 He commented on His future return and final Judgment of the world.

How sad it is that so many atheists and skeptics believe they have disproven the Bible and Christianity, when, in reality, they (like many religionists, sadly) have simply twisted the biblical text to mean something God never intended. The fact that Mike Davis highlights Matthew 24:34 as the verse that once and for all proved to him the Bible is unreliable should tell us something about the extreme weakness of the skeptic’s case against Christianity.

# Chapter 8



## ALLEGED MISTAKES BY PAUL

### DID PAUL MISQUOTE JESUS?

Acts 20:35

Near the close of his words of exhortation to the Ephesian elders recorded by Luke in Acts 20, the apostle Paul reminded them of something Jesus once said: “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). The problem that many have with Paul’s quotation of Jesus, however, is that it nowhere appears in the gospel accounts, or anywhere else in Scripture outside of Acts 20. According to one Bible critic, “One of the great misquotes of Paul is found in Acts 20:35 where he says: ‘...ye ought to support the weak and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, **It is more blessed to give than to receive.**’ Nowhere in the New Testament did Jesus make such a statement.

Paul's oratory apparently got away from him."<sup>1</sup> Did Paul really make a mistake? Did he misquote Jesus? What logical explanation can be given as to why these words are not recorded in the gospel accounts?

First, there is no indication that the apostle Paul even possessed the gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John during his ministry, nor did he need them in order to know what Jesus taught. In fact, they likely were written some years **after** Paul had already begun his missionary journeys, and probably **after** he reminded the Ephesian elders of Jesus' statement about giving. The truth is, Paul did not rely upon the gospel accounts for his knowledge of Jesus. Rather, Paul received supernatural revelation directly from God. Jesus spoke directly to Paul on the road to Damascus (Acts 9; 22:8), "the Spirit of Jesus" kept him from preaching in Bithynia (Acts 16:7, ASV), and "the Lord spoke to Paul...by a vision" in Corinth (Acts 18:9). Paul was an inspired apostle (cf. 1 Corinthians 14:37; 2 Peter 3:15-16). The message that he preached came directly from God. To the churches of Galatia, he wrote: "But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but **it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ**" (1:11-12). As important as the gospel accounts are to Christians in the twenty-first century, the apostle Paul did not need to consult them in order to know if Jesus ever taught, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Second, Bible students must recognize that not everything Jesus said or did was recorded by the gospel writers. In

fact, near the end of John's gospel account, he commented on this truth twice, saying, "[T]ruly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book.... [T]here 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" (John 20:30; 21:25). What's more, none of the gospel accounts is exactly alike. What one writer recorded, another may have omitted. For instance, Luke noted that Jesus told the penitent thief on the cross, "[T]oday you will be with Me in Paradise" (23:43), yet Matthew, Mark, and John omitted this saying. Does this somehow discredit Luke's account? Not at all. The fact is, all four accounts are independent witnesses to the life of Christ, and some contain more (or less) information on a particular subject than the others.

Is it possible for Paul to have cited a saying of Jesus (that may have even been fairly well known in the first century), but that was not recorded by the gospel writers? Certainly. Does this in any way discredit him as an inspired writer or mean that he "misquoted" Jesus? Not at all.

### **"I, NOT THE LORD, SAY"**

1 Corinthians 7:12

What did Paul mean by the statement, "But to the rest I, **not the Lord**, say..." (1 Corinthians 7:12)? Does this phrase indicate that what Paul subsequently wrote was uninspired?

Considering how many times Paul claimed to write and preach by inspiration of God, it is irresponsible to conclude

that he was denying inspiration when addressing marriages between Christians and non-Christians (1 Corinthians 7:12-16). Earlier in this letter, Paul noted that while in Corinth, his preaching was “not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God” (2:4-5). Paul contrasted human wisdom with the wisdom and power of God, and declared that he had the latter. Later, in this same epistle, Paul wrote: “If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that **the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord**” (14:37; cf. 7:40). Paul also claimed inspiration in his other epistles (Galatians 1:12; 1 Thessalonians 4:8,15). Even Peter alluded to Paul’s writings as being a part of Scripture, and thus inspired (2 Peter 3:15-16).

When Paul wrote that he (rather than the Lord) was addressing a particular marriage relationship, he did not mean that he was speaking without authority from God. He simply meant that he was making application of marital truths that the Lord did not specifically expound upon while on Earth. Jesus most certainly was the Master Teacher (cf. Matthew 7:28-29; John 7:46), but He obviously did not specifically address every subject under the Sun. Thankfully, through His inspired apostles and prophets, more specific truths and applications eventually were revealed. Christians have every reason to believe that such truths originated with “the Spirit of truth,” Who guided Paul and the rest of the Bible writers “into all truth” (John 16:13).

## IS GOD THE AUTHOR OF CONFUSION?

1 Corinthians 14:33; Genesis 11:1-9

One of the many criticisms that skeptics have levied against the Bible writers is that the Scriptures paint a contradictory picture of God, specifically regarding whether or not God “authors confusion.” Since God confused the language of man at Babel (11:1-9; apparently in the days of Peleg—Genesis 10:25), then, allegedly, Paul’s claim that “God is not the author of confusion” (1 Corinthians 14:33) must be erroneous. How could He purposefully confuse mankind, while at the same time not be the “author of confusion”?

Certainly, God punished mankind for his disobedience at Babel by confusing their language (i.e., He brought into existence additional languages). After the Flood, God had instructed man to “[b]e fruitful and multiply, and **fill the earth**” (Genesis 9:1). At Babel, however, humanity rebelled against God’s will, saying, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens;...**lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth**” (Genesis 11:4). What’s more, the descendants of Noah at Babel also were guilty of attempting to “make a name” for themselves (11:4; cf. 1 John 2:16). Thus, God chose to “confuse [their] language” that they might be “scattered... over the face of all the earth” (Genesis 11:9).

This kind of confusion, however, was not the same kind that Paul had in mind when he wrote 1 Corinthians. When Paul wrote, “God is not the author of confusion” (14:33), he was addressing problems that the Corinthian Christians were having in the worship assembly. He gave spe-

cific instructions about how those with spiritual gifts (e.g., tongues, prophecies, interpretations) were to conduct themselves in the assembly. Those with the gift of tongues were to speak “in turn” (14:27), and if no interpreter was present they were to “keep silent in the church” (14:28, NASB). Those with the gift of prophecy were to “prophecy **one by one**, that all may learn and all may be encouraged” (14:31). Paul concluded this section of his letter by encouraging the church to “[l]et all things be done decently and in order” (14:40). In short, God desires worship that is free from the kind of chaos and confusion caused when (among other things) various individuals are speaking at the same time.

Consider the teacher who tells his class that he is not a person of confusion (i.e., he likes order and wants an orderly class). Later, however, this same teacher coaches a football team and desires to “cause confusion” among the opposing team’s players by implementing a complex game plan on both offense and defense. Might this man still be considered a man of integrity, whose personality is one that others would describe as the antithesis of chaotic? Certainly. Simply because a person initiates confusion in one particular setting, does not mean that his very nature is chaotic.

Attempting to equate the dispersion God caused among sinful people at Babel with the confusion God condemned in Corinth is both unjustified and unreasonable. Remember, for there to be a legitimate contradiction, one must make sure that the words (or concepts) under discussion are used in the same sense. In Genesis 11:9 and 1 Corinthians 14:33, they are used in totally different senses.

## DID PAUL WANT CHRISTIANS TO COME TOGETHER ON SATURDAY OR SUNDAY?

1 Corinthians 16:1-2; Acts 13-18; 20:7

For nearly two millennia, Christians have been gathering together on the first day of the week to worship God. Both inspired Bible writers and uninspired early Christians viewed Sunday as the day to eat the memorial feast as well as engage in other acts of worship. The apostle Paul instructed the Christians in Corinth (as he had earlier taught the churches of Galatia) to lay a portion of their income aside “**on the first day of every week**...that no collections be made when I come” (1 Corinthians 16:1-2, NASB). Luke later wrote how the disciples in Troas came together “**on the first day of the week**” to break bread in remembrance of the Lord’s death (Acts 20:7; cf. 1 Corinthians 11:17-26). Ignatius wrote in his letter to the Magnesians (believed to be penned around A.D. 110) how Christians “have come to the possession of a new hope, no longer observing the Sabbath, but living in the observance of **the Lord’s Day**.”<sup>2</sup> And, in chapter 67 of his *First Apology* (written around A.D. 150), Justin Martyr noted how Christians would gather together “on the day called **Sunday**” to read the writings of the apostles and prophets, instruct, pray, give, and eat of bread and wine.<sup>3</sup>

Still, despite the testimony of these men, some who claim to be Christians are not convinced that Sunday is the set day for Christians to come together and worship God (including, but not limited to, partaking of the Lord’s Supper). One argument set forth by these individuals (who still seek to

keep the Sabbath) is that Paul worshiped on Saturday rather than on Sunday. They teach:

It was Paul's custom to use the Sabbath for preaching (Acts 17:2). He did so in synagogues and elsewhere (Acts 13:14-15; 16:13). Gentile believers observed the Sabbath (Acts 13:42,44). For a year and a half in Corinth, Paul worked during the week and reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, teaching the Word of God (Acts 18:4,11).<sup>4</sup>

Allegedly, since Paul frequented the Jewish synagogues on the Sabbath day, Christians have no scriptural authority for arguing that the church should meet on the first day of the week. If he consistently met with the church on the Sabbath throughout his lifetime, why don't we?

The problem with such reasoning is that Paul's preaching in the "synagogues and elsewhere" on the Sabbath was an attempt to win souls to Christ, not to engage in corporate worship with the church. It was Paul's "custom" to offer salvation first to the Jews, and then to the Greeks (cf. Acts 17:2; Romans 1:16). Thus, he frequented Jewish synagogues on a day when a greater number of Jews would be assembled there—the Sabbath. In Acts 13, Paul preached of the death and resurrection of Christ (vss. 27-37) and offered his hearers salvation "through this Man [Jesus]" (vss. 38-39). In Acts 16, Paul gathered with non-Christians again on the Sabbath, taught them the Gospel, and baptized them (vss. 13-15). He was not meeting with Christians on this day to partake of the Lord's Supper. Paul found individuals who were worshiping God and taught them the way more perfectly, just as he did on many Sabbaths throughout his ministry (cf. Acts 17:2-4; 18:4-8; 13:27-41).

Some time ago I was asked why those to whom Paul and Barnabas preached the Gospel in Antioch of Pisidia did not just show up on Sunday to hear Paul and Barnabas' message. After all, if Sunday is truly the day in which Christians "came together to break bread" (Acts 20:7—which entailed, or at least included, the eating of the Lord's Supper),<sup>5</sup> then supposedly the people whom Paul and Barnabas taught should have simply shown up on that day rather than on the Sabbath. The reason, however, that Paul preached to non-Christian Jews on the Sabbath, instead of the first day of the week, is two-fold: (1) If they were unbelieving Jews and proselytes, they would not have been accustomed to meeting on the first day of the week; (2) Instead of inviting them to attend the worship of the church on the first day of the week (cf. Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2), Paul chose to go where the greatest number of Jews would be gathered. Paul knew that he could reach more lost souls this way than by doing anything else. He used the **Jewish** day of rest and worship to advance the cause of Christ and spread **Christianity** among the Jews.

Truly, the day on which Jesus defeated death (Matthew 28:1) is the day Christians gather "to break bread" (Acts 20:7). The law of the Sabbath passed away with the Old Law (cf. Colossians 2:14-17; 2 Corinthians 3:3-13). Although Paul continued to enter the synagogues on the Sabbath after his conversion to Christ, it was not for the purpose of worshiping with the church, but to reason with the lost from the Scriptures. In truth, his method of evangelizing is one that all Christians should emulate: go where the lost are and teach them, rather than staying put and hoping they come to you.

## BEAR ONE ANOTHER'S BURDENS, OR JUST YOUR OWN?

Galatians 6:2-5

How do Galatians 6 verses two and five harmonize? According to the apostle Paul, Christians are to “[b]ear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2). However, only three verses later, he writes: “For every man shall bear his own burden” (6:5, KJV). Skeptic Steve Wells, author of the popular *Skeptic’s Annotated Bible*, categorizes Galatians 6:2 and 6:5 as contradictory verses.<sup>6</sup> Bible critic Dennis McKinsey comments on these verses, saying, “Gal. 6:2 says that we should bear one another’s burdens to fulfill the law of Christ, while three verses later we are told that everyone should bear his own burden. So who is to bear our burdens?... One can’t help but ask why people would be obligated to aid the poor if every man is supposed to bear his own burden.”<sup>7</sup> So are Christians to “bear one another’s burdens,” or is the child of God to “bear his own burden”? Did Paul contradict himself...within three verses?

First of all, though skeptics generally seem rather unconcerned for the original language in which the Scriptures were written, oftentimes consulting the Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek gives the reader a better understanding of the text. In Galatians 6:2 and 6:5, though the same English word [“burden(s)"] is used in the King James translation, the fact is, different Greek words were used in the original manuscripts. In verse 2, “burdens” is translated from *baros*, meaning “weight,” or figuratively, an “experience of someth[ing] that is particularly oppressive.”<sup>8</sup> In verse 5, “burden” is from *fortion*, meaning “that which constitutes a **load** for transport,” or “that which is carried and constitutes

a burden.”<sup>9</sup> Many modern versions have attempted to show readers the difference in the two words by translating *baros* as “burden(s)” in 6:2 and *fortion* as “load” in 6:5 (NKJV, NASB, ESV). Though further explanation to the alleged conundrum is still necessary, noting the difference in the Greek should cause skeptics to reconsider their KJV-based accusations.

Second, Galatians 6:2 and 6:5 do not represent an either/or command. If it is possible for the Christian both to (1) bear his own burden/load, while at the same time (2) help bear another’s burden, then both commands must be followed, without assuming that one command must be obeyed to the exclusion of the other. Consider how the Bible writers condemned laziness (Proverbs 6:6-11; 10:5; 21:25). Paul even went so far as to say, “If anyone will not work, **neither shall he eat**. For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and **eat their own bread**” (2 Thessalonians 3:10-12). At the same time, the child of God is to give to the poor (Proverbs 28:27; Luke 3:11). Paul instructed the penitent thief to “labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something **to share with anyone in need**” (Ephesians 4:28, ESV). Are we to work to take care of our families and ourselves? Yes. Are we to help others who are genuinely in need (i.e., who have burdens that they are unable to bear alone)? Yes. Should lazy busybodies expect to receive physical help from Christians? Not necessarily. (They should “work in quietness and eat their own bread.” If anyone is capable of working, yet willfully chooses laziness instead, “neither shall

he eat.”) In short, the Christian takes his personal responsibilities seriously (he “bears his own”). At the same time, for those whose burdens of life are more than they can carry, the Christian joyfully comes to their aid to provide them various kinds of physical and spiritual assistance.

There are some responsibilities that no one can carry for us. No one can become a Christian for someone else. No one can worship for another. And no one will be able to “appear before the judgment seat of Christ” for someone else. Rather, “**each one**” will receive “the things done in the body, according to what **he** has done, whether good or bad” (2 Corinthians 5:10). Therefore, “Let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another” (Galatians 6:4). Just as a soldier is expected to carry his own “load” in battle, the servant of Christ the King recognizes his individual responsibilities to the Lord. At the same time, as soldiers assist fallen comrades on the battlefield in hopes of saving their lives, dedicated servants of Christ look to “bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the Law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2).

### PAUL’S (IM)PERFECTION?

Philippians 3:12,15

Many alleged Bible contradictions can be answered logically by noting that two or more passages of Scripture may refer to the same word (or idea), but use the words in different senses. If a man leaves home during the middle of flu season and tells his wife, “I am thankful **I’m not sick**,” but then turns to his son, who just ransacked the living room while looking for his toy light saber, and says, “**I am sick** of seeing such a mess,” no one would accuse the father of

being dishonest. He obviously used the word “sick” in two different senses. English-speaking Americans living in the twenty-first century understand the flexibility of language. American use of the word “bad” is a prime example of the elasticity of our language. Bad literally can mean “bad” (as in the “bad dog” who ate a student’s homework), or it can mean the very opposite: bad can mean “good.” A basketball fan watching a player make ten 3-pointers in one game may truthfully say: “That guy is bad!”—meaning, he is a very good basketball player. Unfortunately, critics of the Bible’s inspiration accept the freedom of language in today’s world (and they often take such freedom themselves), but they will not allow the ancient biblical writers the same liberty.

Instead of trying to understand the flexibility of the ancient languages and their figures of speech, skeptics are quick to cite what they feel are blatant contradictions. For example, in Philippians 3:12, the apostle Paul wrote that he had not yet been “made perfect” (ASV), but then, just three verses later, he indicated that he was “perfect” (3:15). It is alleged that Paul contradicted himself while encouraging his brethren to persevere through this life. The truth is, however, Paul used similar Greek words—translated as “perfect”—in different senses. The former “perfection” is a faultlessness and excellence that cannot be expected in this life. Paul had not yet attained a state of **total holiness and dedication** where no additional progress would be possible or needed. The “perfection” or “maturity” of Philippians 3:15 was “used to mean mature in mind, as opposed to one who is a beginner in a subject.”<sup>10</sup> Paul had not begun the Christian race only recently; rather, he had been running courageously for some time. He thus was “perfect” or “mature” in this sense.

A second reason such a charge can only be based upon ignorance (or lack of concern for the facts) is because when Paul denied that he had been “made perfect,” he used the **perfect tense** of the Greek verb *teteleiomai*. The perfect tense suggests an action in the past with permanent completed results. The apostle therefore was affirming that he had **not yet arrived** at a permanent state of perfection. Within the context of Philippians 3, his comment that he had “not yet become perfect [*ouch hoti ede teteleiomai*]” likely “means that he has not yet attained the final thing, the victor’s prize of the heavenly calling in Christ Jesus.”<sup>11</sup> In verse 15, however, Paul employed the adjective *teleioi*, which means “full-grown” or “mature.” According to Greek scholars Moulton and Milligan, this word is used in the Greek papyri of those who have obtained maturity.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, Paul used this word in 1 Corinthians 14:20 and in Ephesians 4:13, in obvious contrast to immaturity. So, while Paul **denied** that he had completely attained perfection, he **affirmed** his spiritual maturity. There is no contradiction. Although the same stem (or “root word”) is used (*teleios*), he was using the word in different senses—as is evident not only from the context, but also from the tense in which the words are found.

## DID PAUL MAKE A MISTAKE REGARDING THE RESURRECTION?

1 Thessalonians 4:14,16

Near the close of his first letter to the church at Thessalonica, the apostle Paul addressed the subject of Christ’s Second Coming. He indicated that “the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an

archangel, and with the trumpet of God” (4:16). The Christians in Thessalonica were not to be concerned with what would happen to Christians who had passed from this life prior to Jesus’ return. Departed Christians were not going to miss the Second Coming; God would take care of them. Paul noted that those “who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep” (vs. 15). “[T]he dead in Christ will rise first” (vs. 16). However, some question if 1 Thessalonians 4:16 contradicts what Paul wrote just two verses previously where he indicated that “God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus” (vs. 14). How can those who will be the first to rise also be brought back with Jesus when He returns? Did Paul make a blunder?

There are at least two possible, logical, scriptural interpretations to 1 Thessalonians 4:14,16. First, it is very likely that verse 14 is **not** a reference to Jesus’ **coming** with those “who sleep in Jesus,” but rather an allusion to Christ taking the once-dead-but-now-resurrected saints “with Him” to be with God the Father forever. Such an interpretation coincides with other references Paul made to Christ taking (or bringing) the saints before God. In his second letter to the church at Corinth, Paul wrote: “He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and **will present us** with you” (4:14). What’s more, when the end comes, “He [Christ] delivers the kingdom **to** God the Father” (1 Corinthians 15:24). Thus, 1 Thessalonians 4:14 may simply mean that “the Christians who are to be resurrected as Christ was, will be acted upon by ‘God’ who will cause Christ to ‘bring’ these resurrected Christians ‘with Him,’ that is, with Christ.”<sup>13</sup>

Second, even if Paul was alluding to the same individuals in 1 Thessalonians 4:14 and 16, skeptics still would not be justified in asserting that the passages are contradictory. The fact is, the Bible indicates that when God's faithful servants pass away (i.e., "fall asleep" in Jesus), their spirits are taken to "paradise" or "Abraham's bosom" (Luke 23:43; 16:19-31). When Christ returns to raise the dead and judge the world, God will cause the dwellers of paradise to reunite with their bodies, which will then be raised and changed "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.... [T]he trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality" (1 Corinthians 15:52-53). Thus, 1 Thessalonians 4:14 may refer to the moment when "Jesus will bring the faithful departed with him when he comes back."<sup>14</sup>

Regardless of which interpretation of 1 Thessalonians 4:14 is correct, both views are scriptural beliefs based upon other Bible passages (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:14; 1 Corinthians 15:22-24; Luke 23:43; 16:19-31; etc.). Also, either explanation dispels any notion of a contradiction.

### **"AVOID...GENEALOGIES"?**

1 Timothy 1:4; Titus 3:9

As most Bible students know, Scripture, particularly the Old Testament, contains several genealogies. Genesis chapter five gives the genealogy of Adam to Noah. Genesis 10 lists many of the descendants of Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Genesis 11 gives the genealogy of Shem to Abraham. Genealogies make up the first nine chapters of 1 Chronicles. What's more, the New Testament opens with these words:

“The book of the **genealogy** of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham” (Matthew 1:1). In light of such extensive genealogies, some wonder why the apostle Paul instructed Timothy and Titus not to “give heed to... endless genealogies” (1 Timothy 1:4), but rather “avoid” them (Titus 3:9). One Bible critic has alleged that “if we follow this advice we would ignore most of the Bible.”<sup>15</sup> Just how is it that we can trust a book that says to “avoid... genealogies,” when that same book contains several extensive genealogies? Is this a contradiction?

First, for one to interpret Paul’s commands to mean that it is sinful simply to read or discuss the biblical genealogies is indefensible. Paul obviously believed in the inspiration of the Old Testament. In fact, to the same individual whom he instructed not to “give heed to...endless genealogies,” he wrote: “**All** Scripture,” including the many Old Testament genealogies, “is given by inspiration of God” (2 Timothy 3:16). To conclude that an apostle who claimed to be guided by the Holy Spirit (cf. 2 Peter 1:20-21) would command Christians to avoid the words of the Holy Spirit (cf. 2 Samuel 23:2), even on the surface, is a forced interpretation.

Second, a closer look at Paul’s command to “avoid... genealogies” reveals that he was not alluding merely to the reading or study of biblical genealogies. Rather, in contrast to being peaceable, gentle, and humble (Titus 3:2), while at the same time engaging in good, profitable works (3:8), Paul wrote, “But avoid **foolish** disputes, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and useless” (3:9). In Greek, as in English, “All four nouns” [disputes, genealogies, contentions, and strivings—EL] are without the article,” which “stresses the quality of these

things.”<sup>16</sup> Just as the Ephesians were not to “give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification” (1 Timothy 1:3-4), Titus was to avoid “various ‘foolish’ or senseless inquiries,” including “speculations about the OT genealogies,” that “resulted in sharp dissensions and open quarrels.”<sup>17</sup> According to Paul, such foolishness is “unprofitable and useless” (Titus 3:9).

Third, genealogies were necessary under the Old Law in order to distinguish tribes, disseminate land, discern duties (e.g., the responsibilities of Levites were very different than other Israelites), and, most important, to disclose from which nation, tribe, and family the prophesied Messiah would come. Yet, those genealogies were not “endless.” Though several chapters of the Old Testament are comprised of genealogies, they certainly do not make up “most of the Bible,” as critic Steve Wells alleged. The genealogies that Paul likely had in mind were those the Jews kept, that through the centuries became “numerous, complicated, and extended—so that they might without much exaggeration be called ‘endless.’”<sup>18</sup> To these “[t]he Jews attached great importance...and insisted on their being carefully preserved.”<sup>19</sup>

Finally, by the time Paul wrote to Timothy and Titus, the Old Law had been replaced by a new law (Hebrews 8:7-13). There was no need for Jews to use genealogies to dispute over their identity as a nation, tribe, or family. In Christ “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’” (Romans 10:12-13; cf. Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:11). For first-century Christians to waste valuable time disputing over “foolish” matters, such as one’s ancestry, is “unprof-

itable and useless” (Titus 3:9). The only genealogy that ultimately matters to Christians is Christ’s. His genealogy serves as a proof of both the Bible’s inspiration and the deity of Christ.<sup>20</sup> The Messiah would come from the seed of Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3), the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:10), the family of Jesse (Isaiah 11:1), and the house of David (Jeremiah 23:5). Indeed, this is precisely what happened, as the New Testament writers, including the apostle Paul, reveal (Galatians 3:16; Matthew 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-38).

## DOES GOD *ALONE* POSSESS IMMORTALITY?

1 Timothy 6:16

The Bible repeatedly testifies to the fact that this life is not all there is. For the faithful, the best is yet to come (Luke 16:22; 23:43; 2 Timothy 4:8). For the unfaithful, the worst is yet to come (Luke 16:23-24). The unrighteous “will go away into **everlasting punishment**, but the righteous into **eternal life**” (Matthew 25:46).<sup>21</sup> At death, “the dust will return to the earth as it was,” but “the spirit will return to God who gave it” (Ecclesiastes 12:7; cf. Genesis 2:7). Jesus taught: “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, **he shall live**. And whoever lives and believes in Me **shall never die**” (John 11:25-26). In short, the soul of man **is** immortal (Romans 2:7; 2 Timothy 1:10; 1 Corinthians 15:53-54).

If the soul of man is immortal, however, some wonder how Paul could truthfully write to Timothy that God “**alone** has immortality” (1 Timothy 6:16)? If God alone has immortality, then how can man also be immortal?

Indeed, both God and man are immortal. God, by His

very nature, is eternal (Psalm 90:2), and thus He is not subject to death (Greek *thanatos*). Only when God, the Word, put on flesh and physically inhabited His natural world did He willingly subject Himself to death (John 1:1-5,14; 19:30; Philippians 2:5-8). Yet, even then, death had no power over Him (Acts 2:22-36; 1 Corinthians 15:21). He defeated *thanatos*; He is *athanatos* (immortal). He not only physically rose from the dead, but His Spirit never ceased to exist.

Still, how can God “alone” have immortality (Greek *athanasia*; 1 Timothy 6:16), if the soul of man is also immortal (1 Corinthians 15:53-54; cf. Matthew 25:46)? The answer is quite simple: The only reason man is immortal is because God **gives** man immortality. God created man differently than plants and animals; He chose to make man “in His own image” (Genesis 1:27). Among other things, one of the great blessings of being an image-bearer of God is that humans have an immortal soul.<sup>22</sup> However, in the sense that God’s everlasting **nature** is immortal, God alone possesses immortality.

Consider a parallel. According to Scripture, both God and His faithful children are pure and holy (1 John 3:3; Matthew 5:8; 1 Peter 1:16). They are pure and holy, however, on different levels. Whereas God is innately perfect (Isaiah 6:3; James 1:13), man can only **become** pure and holy **through** the grace of God and the blood of Christ (Hebrews 10:22; Ephesians 1:3-14). God **is** holy; man **becomes** holy. Likewise, God “alone [inherently] **has** immortality” (1 Timothy 6:16), but He has **given** it to man.

# Chapter 9



## MISCELLANEOUS OLD TESTAMENT ALLEGED CONTRADICTIONS

### WAS CAIN OR SETH ADAM'S FIRSTBORN SON?

Genesis 4:1; 5:3-4

Even the most casual of Bible students are aware of the fact that the first son of Adam and Eve mentioned in the Bible is Cain. After noting that God banished the first couple from the Garden of Eden following their sin, Genesis 4:1 indicates, “Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore **Cain**, and said, ‘I have acquired a man from the Lord.’” The births of Abel and Seth are also mentioned in Genesis 4 (though the amount of time that lapses is unknown). One thing that Genesis 4 clearly

teaches: Seth was born sometime **after** Cain and Abel. After Seth's birth, Adam stated: "God has appointed another seed for me instead of Abel, whom Cain killed" (4:25). Clearly, Cain had already murdered Abel by the time Seth was born.

In Genesis 5, however, in "the book of the genealogy of Adam" (from Adam to the patriarch Noah), Seth, not Cain, is listed as Adam's son. According to University of Houston Bible Professor Steven Dimattei, Genesis 5:3-4 "clearly implies that Seth was the first born."<sup>1</sup> Allegedly, in Genesis 5, "the genealogical list is enumerated from father to son; there is no mention of the female, and each son is depicted as the first son, who then further fathers a son.... [I]n this author's genealogy there is no mention of Cain and Abel," rather "Seth, like Enosh Kenan, Mahalalel, etc., is presented as the first son."<sup>2</sup>

As with so many "Bible discrepancies," Dr. Dimattei's assertion that there is "tension"<sup>3</sup> between the fourth and fifth chapters of Genesis is based solely on the **assumption** that the sons listed in Genesis 5 were all firstborn sons. The fact is, however, the text never explicitly states, nor does it imply, that the sons listed were the "firstborn" of their fathers. One would think the first obvious clue that Genesis 5 is not implying the births of firstborn sons would be that only four verses before noting "Adam lived one hundred and thirty years, and begot a son...and named him Seth" (5:3), the text mentions two of Seth's **older** brothers (Genesis 4:25). What's more, when Genesis 5 indicates that "Seth lived one hundred and five years, and

begot Enosh” (vs. 6), or that “Enosh lived ninety years, and begot Cainan” (vs. 9), etc., there is **nothing** in the text that proves these were firstborn sons. They may have been, but they may **not** have been. Interestingly, not only is the first son mentioned in Genesis 5 clearly not a firstborn son (5:3), the chapter concludes by mentioning that “Noah was five hundred years old, and Noah begot Shem, Ham, and Japheth” (5:32), yet Shem apparently was not Noah’s firstborn, though he is listed first (cf. Genesis 7:6; 8:13; 11:10). Nor is the text implying that Noah’s sons were triplets, anymore than Genesis 11:26 implies that Abraham was a triplet (cf. Genesis 11:32; 12:4; Acts 7:4).<sup>4</sup>

The fact of the matter is, the emphasis in Genesis 5 is on those who would “call on the name of the Lord” (4:26), including Enoch, who “walked with God” (5:22,24), and Noah, who was a “preacher of righteousness” (2 Peter 2:5) during a time when “the wickedness of man was great in the earth” (Genesis 6:5). Concurrently, Genesis 5 also emphasizes the Messianic lineage from Adam through Shem. [NOTE: Interestingly, many prominent sons in the genealogy of Jesus were **not** firstborn sons (e.g., Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, etc.).]

While some may see “tension” between Genesis 4 and 5, and while others may see a “clear contradiction” between the two chapters, when we carefully consider the biblical text, its truthfulness is clearly seen: (1) Cain and Abel were older brothers of Seth, and (2) the sons listed in Genesis 5 were not necessarily firstborn sons. Bible students must be careful making assumptions about the text.

## DOES GENESIS 4 INDICATE THAT GOD SPECIALLY CREATED OTHERS BESIDES ADAM AND EVE?

Genesis 4:12-17

If Adam and Eve were the only human beings that God miraculously created, where did all of the people come from who were of great concern to Cain? After God sentenced the murderous Cain to be “a fugitive and a vagabond” on the Earth (Genesis 4:12), recall that Cain said to the Lord, “My punishment is greater than I can bear” (4:13). Cain then said: “Surely You have driven me out this day from the face of the ground; I shall be hidden from Your face; I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond on the earth, and it will happen that **anyone** who finds me will kill me” (4:14). God then responded to Cain, saying, “Therefore, **whoever** kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him seven-fold.” So, “the Lord set a mark on Cain, lest **anyone** finding him should kill him” (4:15). Do the references to “anyone” and “whoever” in these verses suggest that God specially created others besides Adam and Eve?

Before answering these questions, one must keep in mind that Genesis chapters 1-11 cover approximately the first 2,000-plus years of human history. The following 1,178 chapters of the Bible tell us about the next 2,000 years. Although the first 11 chapters of Genesis are undeniably literal, historical language,<sup>5</sup> God chose to reveal to man only a few important facts about the first 2,000-plus years of man’s existence—and most of this revelation is about Creation, the Fall, and the Flood. What’s more, Genesis chapters 4-5 likely cover a period of more than 1,400 years. Thus, a lot of time can pass between events without the

text specifically expressing exactly how many decades or centuries elapsed.

How much time elapsed in Genesis 4:2? Immediately following the announcement of Cain's and Abel's births (4:1-2), the text says, "Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground" (4:2). Most likely, at least 20 years had passed by this time, and it could be that several more decades had expired before Cain and Abel finally settled on their respective vocations. (How many people today do not settle on a profession until they are 35 or 40 years old?)

How much time transpired when the Bible says, "**And in the process of time it came to pass** that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the Lord" (4:3)? How long was Cain angry with Abel before God spoke to Cain about his anger (4:6)? How long was it before Cain spoke with Abel (4:8)? (Have you ever known people, even family members, to hold in feelings of resentment for years or decades?) Genesis 4:8 says, "**It came to pass**, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him." Again, we cannot know exactly how much time transpired between the conversation that Cain had with Abel and the day that he actually murdered Abel (4:8).

The fact is, Cain could have been **100 years old** or more by the time he killed his brother. [Keep in mind that since the patriarchs often lived to be several hundred years old (e.g., Adam died at the age of 930), being 100 in that day, was somewhat comparable to being 20 today.] What's more, Adam and Eve may have had 50 children or more by the time Cain killed Abel (cf. Genesis 5:4). They may have had 300 grandchildren by then. There could have

been three or four generations of Adam's descendants on Earth by the time God sentenced Cain to be "a fugitive and a vagabond."

How many children, and possibly grandchildren, did Adam and Eve have when God said, "**Whoever** kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold"? How many people had descended from Adam by the time God "set a mark on Cain, lest **anyone** finding him should kill him"? Who were the "whoever" and "anyone" that both God and Cain mentioned? They were the dozens, hundreds, or possibly thousands of people on Earth by that time—all of whom were descendants of Adam, "the first man" (1 Corinthians 15:45) and Eve, "the mother of all living" (Genesis 3:20). In no way does reason or inspired revelation forbid a literal interpretation of Genesis; on the contrary, it demands such.

## WAS A KING ATTRACTED TO SARAH WHEN SHE WAS 89?

Genesis 20:1-18

By the time that Abraham and Sarah traveled toward the southern border of Canaan, to the city of Gerar (Genesis 20:1; cf. 10:19), it appears that Sarah was 89 years old (cf. Genesis 17:1,17; 21:1-5). Yet, despite her old age, Genesis 20 makes clear that Abimelech, king of Gerar, was quite interested in Sarah—so much so that he "took" her from Abraham, whom he thought was merely Sarah's brother.

A gentleman once wrote us about these recorded events, saying, "She [Sarah] is 90 years old and the **hard** part to believe is that a king would be that impressed with a 90 year old woman. Is there any knowable reason for this? It seems to be a fairytale and I just don't see how it's possible

and it could lean towards Genesis being a fable.”

Admittedly, when interpreting this account from strictly a 21<sup>st</sup>-century American’s perspective, Sarah’s age might seem quite strange. After all, the average life expectancy at birth for females in the United States is 81 years<sup>6</sup>—nearly 10 years less than when the Bible indicates that Sarah was pursued by a king. What’s more, we rarely, if ever, hear of local or national leaders around the world seeking to marry 90-year-olds in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. So would it be fair to write off Genesis 20 as merely a fairytale? Not at all.

First, we are not informed of the age of Abimelech. It could be that he was around the age of 90 himself. If some 400 years later, an 80-year-old shepherd (Moses) could lead hundreds of thousands of Israelites out of Egyptian bondage and serve as their leader until he was 120, perhaps in 2,000 B.C. Gerar had a 100-year-old king who was attracted to an 89-year-old woman. What’s more, one of the United States’ greatest presidents (Ronald Reagan) led the most powerful nation on Earth until he was nearly 80 years old. Again, who is to say that thousands of years earlier Gerar did not have a more aged leader who was attracted to a woman who may have been closer to his age. If 90-year-olds can still be attracted to, and marry, each other today, they certainly could have 4,000 years ago.

Second, and more important, ages of men and women in the Bible must be interpreted in light of the life spans that people were still living at a particular time in history. Though Abraham, Sarah, and Abimelech did not live as old as people in Noah’s generation (Noah lived to be 950, Genesis 9:29), Abraham was only separated from Noah by 10 generations (Genesis 11:10-26). Abraham’s dad died

at 205 (Genesis 11:32). Abraham lived to be 175 (Genesis 25:7). The point is: Sarah, at age 89, may have looked similar to a 45-55-year-old woman today. And, there are still plenty of 45-55+ year-old women today that kings and other world leaders find very attractive.

Finally, the Bible describes Sarah as “a woman of beautiful countenance” (Genesis 12:11,14). In fact, when Abraham and Sarah traveled to Egypt when she was in her late 60s, the Egyptians saw her as being so “very beautiful” that they commended her to Pharaoh (12:14-15). Clearly, the Bible implies that the next 25 years were good to Sarah, because, by the grace of God, her beauty did not fade [or at least not so much that she (even as a modest woman—1 Peter 3:1-6) at the age of 90, could not attract the attention of another king].

It should not surprise us that many people in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will read accounts of biblical events and have serious questions. As Christians, we welcome such sincere questions, as we seek to give consistent, biblical answers (1 Peter 3:15) in light of the overall historical and biblical context—which we must recognize was often very different than life on Earth today.

## **WHY WAS JACOB STILL CALLED JACOB AFTER HIS NAME WAS CHANGED TO ISRAEL?**

Genesis 32:28; 35:10

In the book of Genesis (32:28; 35:10), God changed the name of Jacob (meaning “supplanter” or “deceiver”)<sup>7</sup> to Israel (meaning “having power with God” or “God’s fighter”).<sup>8</sup> God even went so far as to say, “Your name

shall **not** be called Jacob **anymore**, but Israel shall be your name” (35:10). However, Jacob’s name was used by the inspired prophets dozens of times thereafter, including immediately following the accounts of Jacob’s name being changed (32:29-32; 35:14-15). Even when God instructed the patriarch to go down to Egypt many years later, He referred to him as “Jacob” (46:2). How is this usage consistent with the statement that Jacob would not be called anymore by that name?

First, when Moses used the name of Jacob multiple times immediately following the accounts of his name being changed to Israel (including in the very next sentence—Genesis 32:29), he provided commentary on Jacob’s name change. That is, he revealed that God’s statement, “your name shall no longer be called Jacob” (32:28), did not literally mean that the patriarch would never be called “Jacob” again. Recall that after Jesus gave Simon the new name “Cephas” (John 1:42), Jesus still often referred to him as “Simon.”<sup>9</sup>

So what did God mean when He informed the grandson of Abraham that he would no longer be called “Jacob”? There are at least two possibilities. First, the Lord may have meant that Jacob would no more be widely identified and recognized by the **meaning** of the name Jacob. Instead of being the deceitful, supplanting brother who lied to his father in order to steal his brother’s blessing (Genesis 27:1-40), he would forever become known as “God’s fighter,” or one who “has power with God.” “Jacob” was now “Israel” (even when his birth name was still used).

A second reasonable explanation is that the Lord meant Jacob would no longer be known **simply** by the name

Jacob—that is, by the name of Jacob **only**. Consider that when Jeremiah prophesied that “it shall **no more** be said, ‘The Lord lives Who brought up the children of Israel from the land of Egypt,’ but ‘The Lord lives Who brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north’” (16:14-15), he did not mean that the Jews would never again talk about Israel’s Divine deliverance from Egypt. (After all, they were expected to celebrate the Passover every year—Exodus 12.) The prophet Jeremiah meant that the Jews would **not only** talk about the exodus from Egypt, but also their (future) exodus from Babylonian captivity.

Consider another example of this type of language. The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians that “Christ did not send me to baptize” (1 Corinthians 1:17). Paul did not mean, however, that he was forbidden to baptize anyone or that he actually was not supposed to spend any time whatsoever baptizing individuals.<sup>10</sup> Paul meant that he was not **merely** sent to baptize. Paul was not denigrating immersion (cf. Romans 6:1-11), but his special purpose was to preach the Gospel of Christ (which would lead truth-seekers to submit to immersion in water for the remission of sins, **regardless of who actually baptized them**).

Although we may not know precisely why God and others chose to use the name of Jacob even after his name was changed to Israel, logical possibilities exist. It could be that he would no longer be thought of and called upon with the negative **meaning** of the name Jacob in mind. Or, it might also be that implied in the statement is the idea of “simply” or “only.” That is, the patriarch would no longer **only** be known as “Jacob,” but as “Israel.” Both of these possibilities are perfectly reasonable explanations,

especially in light of the fact that such types of language are used elsewhere in Scripture.

## WAS THE NAME OF GOD UNKNOWN TO THE PATRIARCHS IN GENESIS?

Exodus 6:3

Can you imagine if a friend whom you have known for years told someone else that you did not know him? Or, what if this friend, whose family name your family has known for generations, and whose first name you personally have known for at least two decades, indicated that you were not aware of his name? Such would likely make you wonder whether this “friend” was a liar or a lunatic. Similarly, some Bible students (and skeptics) have questioned why the Bible says that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob did not know God by His name Jehovah when the book of Genesis indicates that they did.

After Moses first visited Pharaoh regarding the release of the Israelites from bondage, God assured Moses that the Israelites would be liberated. He then added: “I am Jehovah: and I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, as God Almighty; **but by my name Jehovah I was not known to them**” (Exodus 6:2-3).<sup>11</sup> The difficulty that Bible students have with this statement is that the name “Jehovah” (Hebrew *Yahweh*; translated LORD in most modern versions) appears approximately 160 times in the book of Genesis. Furthermore, “Jehovah” is used between Genesis chapters 12-50 (which deal mainly with the families of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) more than 100 times.

After God provided a ram for Abraham to sacrifice (instead of his son, Isaac) on Mount Moriah, Genesis 22:14

says, “Abraham called the name of that place **Jehovah-jireh**: as it is said to this day, in the mount of **Jehovah** it shall be provided.” Years later, Isaac asked his son Jacob (who was deceiving his father in hopes of receiving a blessing), “How is it that thou hast found it so quickly, my son? And he said, because **Jehovah** thy God sent me good speed” (Genesis 27:20). How could God tell Moses that “by my name Jehovah I was not known to them” (Exodus 6:3), if Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were well aware of the name Jehovah, and even used it in their conversations? Is God a liar? Does the Bible contradict itself on this point? What reasonable answer can be given?

There is no denying the fact that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were aware of God’s name, Jehovah (*Yahweh*) [cf. Genesis 15:7; 22:14; 24:35,40,42,48,50,51,56; 26:22; 27:20; 49:18; etc.]. As John J. Davis wrote: “[I]n the book of Genesis...the name of Yahweh is introduced in a way which utterly precludes the supposition that it is used proleptically, or that it is anything but a correct account of the incident and the actual term employed.”<sup>12</sup> Based upon the number of times the word (*Yahweh*) appears in Genesis, and the various ways in which it was used, including being a part of compound names that have specific meanings (e.g., Jehovah-jireh, meaning “Jehovah will provide”), it is unwise to argue that the patriarchs in Genesis were unaware of the name Jehovah. So what is the answer to this alleged problem?

Although Bible critics and unbelievers may scoff at any attempt to explain Moses’ statement, which they believe is irresolvable, the fact is, a logical explanation exists. The expressions “to know the name of Jehovah” or simply

“to know Jehovah” frequently **mean more than a mere awareness of His name and existence.** Rather, “to know” (from the Hebrew word *yada*) often means **to learn by experience.** When Samuel was a boy, the Bible reveals that he “ministered before/unto Jehovah” (1 Samuel 2:18; 3:1), and “increased in favor both with Jehovah, and also with men” (2:26). Later, however, we learn that “**Samuel did not yet know Jehovah,** neither was the word of Jehovah yet revealed unto him” (1 Samuel 3:7). In one sense, Samuel “knew” Jehovah early on, but beginning in 1 Samuel 3:7 his relationship with God changed. From this point forward he began receiving direct revelations from God (cf. 1 Samuel 3:11-14; 8:7-10,22; 9:15-17; 16:1-3; etc.). Comparing this new relationship with God to his previous relationship and knowledge of Him, the author of 1 Samuel could reasonably say that beforehand “Samuel did not yet know Jehovah” (3:7).

According to Gleason Archer, the phrase “to know that I am Jehovah” (or “to know the name of Jehovah”) appears in the Old Testament at least 26 times, and “in every instance it signifies to learn by actual experience that God is Yahweh.”<sup>13</sup> In the book of Exodus alone, the expression “to know” (*yada*) appears five times in relation to Jehovah, and “[i]n every case it suggests an experiential knowledge of both the person and power of Yahweh. In every case the knowledge of Yahweh is connected with some deed or act of Yahweh which in some way reveals both His person and power.”<sup>14</sup> For example, in one of the passages that has drawn so much criticism, God stated: “I will take you to me for a people, and I will be to you a God; and **ye shall know that I am Jehovah your God,** who bringeth you out from

under the burdens of the Egyptians” (Exodus 6:7). Later, after God already had sent ten plagues upon the Egyptians (Exodus 7:14-12:30), parted the Red Sea (Exodus 14), and miraculously made bitter water sweet (Exodus 15:22-25), He said to Moses, “I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel: speak unto them, saying, At even ye shall eat flesh, and in the morning ye shall be filled with bread; and **ye shall know that I am Jehovah your God**” (Exodus 16:11-12). After several more weeks, God said to Moses on Mount Sinai: “And **they shall know that I am Jehovah their God**, that brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, that I might dwell among them: I am Jehovah their God” (Exodus 29:46). Did the Israelites not know Who Jehovah was by this time? Without question, they did. “They had already learned of Him as deliverer; now they would know Him as their provider.”<sup>15</sup>

Notice also what Isaiah prophesied centuries after the time of Moses.

Now therefore, what do I here, saith Jehovah, seeing that my people is taken away for nought? They that rule over them do howl, saith Jehovah, and my name continually all the day is blasphemed. Therefore **my people shall know my name**: therefore (they shall know) in that day that I am he that doth speak; behold, it is I (Isaiah 52:5-6).

More than 100 years later, following Judah’s entrance into Babylonian captivity, God foretold of their return to Judea and spoke to them through the prophet Jeremiah. He said: “Therefore, behold, I will cause them to know, this once will I cause them to know my hand and my might; and **they shall know that my name is Jehovah**” (Jeremiah 16:21).

Are we to gather from these statements that Israel and Judah were not aware of God's name (Jehovah) before this time in their history? Certainly not. Obviously, something else is meant by the expression "to know (or not know) the name of Jehovah." In truth, it is a Hebrew idiom that "generally signifies knowledge of some particular act or attribute of Yahweh as it is revealed in His dealing with men."<sup>16</sup>

Even in modern times it is possible for someone to know a person's name or office without **really** "knowing" the person (or understanding his/her office). Imagine a group of foreigners who had never heard of Michael "Air" Jordan before meeting him at a particular convention a few years after his retirement from the NBA. They might come to know his name in one sense, but it could also be said that by his name "Air Jordan" they really did not know him. Only after going to a gym and watching him dunk a basketball by jumping (or "flying" in the **air**) from the free throw line, and seeing him in his original "Air Jordan" shoes, would the group begin to understand the name "Air Jordan."

Admittedly, at first glance, the many references to "Jehovah" in the book of Genesis may seem to contradict Exodus 6:3. However, when one realizes that the Hebrew idiom "to know" (and specifically "to know" **a name**) frequently means more than a mere awareness of a person, then the difficulty disappears. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob knew God as Creator and sovereign Ruler of the Universe. But it would not be until centuries later, when God fulfilled the promises made to these patriarchs by delivering the nation of Israel from Egyptian bondage, that the full import of the name Jehovah would become known.

## A CATTLE CONTRADICTION IN EXODUS?

Exodus 9:6,19; 12:29

The fifth plague that God brought upon Egypt was the death of their livestock by means of a pestilence. After informing Pharaoh of God's decision to destroy Egypt's animals if he refused to let Israel leave the country, "the next day...**all** the livestock of Egypt died; but of the livestock of the children of Israel, not one died" (Exodus 9:6). Some question the reliability of this statement in light of later comments about Egypt's remaining livestock. Prior to the seventh plague, Moses warned Egypt to "send now and gather your livestock and all that you have in the field, for the hail shall come down on every man and every animal which is found in the field and is not brought home; and they shall die" (Exodus 9:19). Furthermore, the final plague that God sent upon Egypt was the death of the firstborn—of man **and livestock** (Exodus 12:29). According to skeptic Steve Wells, "[T]here shouldn't have been any cattle since God already killed them with a 'grievous murrain.'"<sup>17</sup> Additionally, in light of the fact that horses also were mentioned as dying by disease (Exodus 9:3), critic Dennis McKinsey has asked, "How...could the Pharaohs [sic] army have pursued the Israelites on horses and horse-drawn chariots" following the tenth plague (cf. Exodus 14:7)?<sup>18</sup> Are such biblical statements contradictory?

First, one must recognize that the term "all" frequently is used in Scripture (as well as in modern times) to mean "the greater part of" or "all of a particular category," and not necessarily "all" in the absolute sense. Earlier in the book of Exodus, Moses recorded that "**all** the Egyptians dug all

around the river for water to drink” following the first plague (Exodus 7:24). No sensible, fair-minded person believes that Moses meant that every single Egyptian, including infant, disabled, elderly, etc. was digging for water. Moses was using “all” in a relative sense. When Scripture says that “Absalom went in to his father’s concubines in the sight of **all** Israel” (2 Samuel 16:22), the inspired writer did not mean that every single Israelite on Earth witnessed the event, but that Absalom’s actions were public in nature and apparent for anyone to see. When Luke wrote that “**all** the tax collectors and the sinners” drew near to Jesus (15:1), he did not intend to communicate to his readers that every single tax collector and sinner in the world (or even in one area) gathered around Jesus. Rather, a great many of the tax collectors and sinners went to see Jesus.

A similar figurative use of “all” often is used in modern times. Consider the basketball broadcaster who comments on a player shooting two free throws with .5 seconds remaining in a tied game. “All eyes are on him,” the announcer says. Literally, **most** people in the arena would be watching the player, but not **all**, and certainly not everyone in the world. One might say that “all the world knows what happened in America on September 11, 2001,” and yet he means that **most** all the world is aware of the events, i.e., the event is common knowledge. In Exodus 9:6, Moses simply used a figure of speech, known as synecdoche, common in both ancient and modern times.

Second, a careful examination of Exodus nine reveals that God actually clarified which of the Egyptian livestock would perish. God instructed Moses to tell Pharaoh: “If you refuse to let them [Israel] go and continue to hold them

back, the hand of the Lord will bring a terrible plague on your livestock **in the field**—on your horses and donkeys and camels and on your cattle and sheep and goats” (vss. 2-3, NIV). Thus, not only is “all” frequently used in a relative sense, but in the very passage that supposedly is unreliable, God limited the livestock to those **“which are in the field”** (NASB). Undoubtedly, many horses, oxen, etc. would have been in stalls and escaped death, including Pharaoh’s war horses (cf. Exodus 14:6-7).

Third, following the fifth plague and prior to subsequent plagues, Pharaoh could have begun replenishing Egypt’s livestock by purchasing or confiscating animals from surrounding peoples, including the Israelites. The burden of proof is upon skeptics to show that such could not have happened.

Considering how detailed Moses was in recording God’s judgment upon Egypt, it is extremely frustrating to read the careless, condescending criticisms of modern-day skeptics. The same writer who carefully documented (1) that “the Egyptians dug all around the river for water to drink” following the first plague (Exodus 7:4), (2) how “[t]hick swarms of flies came into the house of Pharaoh” during the fourth plague (8:24), and (3) that “wheat and the spelt were not struck” when God rained hail from heaven, because “they are late crops” (9:32), supposedly forgot about every single cow, horse, etc. that died during the fifth plague? Although good evidence exists that exonerates Moses and dismisses assertions of discrepancy, even on the surface one should be taken aback by the skeptic’s overconfident, unsubstantiated criticisms.

## DID THE ISRAELITES COMPLETELY DESTROY THE CANAANITES OR NOT?

Joshua 10:40; 11:14-15; 17:18; Judges 1:28-35

Even though the Canaanites were “greater and mightier” than the Israelites (Deuteronomy 7:1), and although they were “strong,” even possessing “iron chariots” (Joshua 17:18), “Joshua conquered all the land: the mountain country and the South and the lowland and the wilderness slopes, and all their kings; he left none remaining, but utterly destroyed all that breathed, as the Lord God of Israel had commanded” (Joshua 10:40).<sup>19</sup> Similar statements are made in Joshua 11:8-23. The Bible reader learns later, however, that “Israel...did not completely drive them out” (the Canaanites, that is—Judges 1:28).<sup>20</sup> In fact, in some situations the text says, “they **could not** drive out the inhabitants” (in part because “they had chariots of iron,” Judges 1:19; Joshua 17:12-13). Instead, “the Canaanites dwelt among them, and were put under tribute” (Judges 1:30).

How are we to make sense of these differing statements? Are they contradictory, as skeptics allege, or are there logical explanations? Consider a few plausible reasons for the differences in the statements in Joshua and Judges regarding the conquering of the land of Canaan.

First, sometimes the statements are **contextually limited** to a particular region of Canaan. For example, Joshua 10:40 (“all the land” was conquered) is limited to the southern part of Canaan, as Joshua 10:28-43 indicates.<sup>21</sup>

Second, just as writers and speakers today use intended exaggeration “all the time,” Bible writers also used this figure of speech (known as hyperbole). Similar to Luke’s statement in Acts 2:5 that Jews “from **every nation under heaven**”

had journeyed to Jerusalem for Pentecost, or similar to Paul's statement that "**every creature under heaven**" (Colossians 1:23) had heard the Gospel, some of the conquering language in Joshua and Judges should likely be understood (at least in part) as hyperbolic—the description of something "that is better or worse than it really is"<sup>22</sup> for the sake of emphasis. If we had been at some of the battles led by Joshua against the inhabitants of Canaan where a weaker army (Deuteronomy 7:1) repeatedly and soundly defeated the stronger armies of Canaan, might we also have **truthfully** described the events as we read them portrayed in Joshua? If today, we can honestly tell others "we are starving" when we are very hungry (but not literally "starving"), or that one team "destroyed" another team (but actually just won the basketball game by 30 points), could Joshua not honestly, though hyperbolically, similarly describe the Israelites' impressive victories in Canaan?

Third, the conquering of the land of Canaan took approximately 10 years<sup>23</sup> (and a lot can happen in a decade!). Just as land has been won and lost through the millennia by various nations in rather short periods of time, could Israel not have conquered various regions one year and yet it be retaken by certain Canaanites (who had temporarily fled their homeland for fear of their lives) in subsequent months or years (cf. Joshua 10:36-39; 15:15-16)? No doubt, many statements in Joshua and Judges are referring to two different periods of time, including the time following Joshua's death when Israel severely digressed spiritually (Judges 2:7-10,21-23).

Fourth, one must be careful not to assume that everything in Joshua and (especially) Judges was written in pre-

cise chronological order. Just as the Bible as a whole is not a strict book of chronology,<sup>24</sup> nor are these two books.<sup>25</sup> Non-sequential examples are quite obvious at times. For example, after noting the death of Joshua in the first verse of Judges, the writer gives more details about his death and burial in Judges 2:7-9.

Finally, and perhaps most important, many fail to recognize the **conditional nature** of God's promise to give Israel all the land of Canaan. God was not going to give Israel the Promised Land if they failed to take it **obediently**. They obviously were not going to receive Canaan as their inheritance if they had never left Egypt or if they were going to be as fearful and unbelieving as was the generation that died in the wilderness (Numbers 13-14). Israel failed in their first attempt to defeat Ai because of sin in the camp (i.e., Achan's sin; Joshua 7:1-26). God said to Israel following this failure: "You cannot stand before your enemies **until** you take away the accursed thing from among you" (Joshua 7:13). Unfortunately, time and again Israel disobeyed Jehovah, which resulted in God withdrawing His helping hand from them (Judges 2:1-3), which led to repeated defeats, even after victory at one time was known (cf. Joshua 17:18; Judges 1:19).

Due to distrust, disloyalty, and disobedience, some parts of Israel were never fully and continually possessed by the Israelites in Joshua's day. Rather than stand in firm reliance on the promises of God, trusting in Him every day in every way, and possessing all the land for generations, Israel freely (and sadly) fulfilled the dismal prophetic warnings of God given in the days of Moses and Joshua.

[T]his people will rise and play the harlot with the gods of the foreigners of the land, where they go to be among them, and they will forsake Me and break My covenant which I have made with them. Then My anger shall be aroused against them in that day, and I will forsake them, and I will hide My face from them, and they shall be devoured. And many evils and troubles shall befall them, so that they will say in that day, “Have not these evils come upon us because our God is not among us?” (Deuteronomy 31:16-17).

When you have transgressed the covenant of the Lord your God, which He commanded you, and have gone and served other gods, and bowed down to them, then the anger of the Lord will burn against you, and you shall perish quickly from the good land which He has given you (Joshua 23:16).

## HOW COULD SAMUEL HAVE INHABITED THE TEMPLE?

1 Samuel 3:3

Although King David had desired to build a “house to the name of the LORD” (1 Chronicles 22:7; 2 Samuel 7:1-17), God chose David’s son, Solomon, to construct His holy temple. Around the year 950 B.C., after seven years of labor, King Solomon’s workers completed the magnificent temple of God in Jerusalem (1 Kings 6:38).

It might surprise some to learn, however, that more than a century before Solomon built the temple in Jerusalem, the inspired writer of 1 Samuel recorded that young Samuel slept “**in the temple** (*heykal*) of the Lord” in Shiloh (3:3, KJV). *Heykal* is the same Hebrew word used dozens of times in the Old Testament to refer to the temple of God

that Solomon built (1 Kings 6:5; 2 Chronicles 3:17). How could Solomon have built the first temple if one previously existed elsewhere?

Although the question of the “first temple” might be troublesome to some at first glance, the answer is really quite simple: the term for temple (*heykal*, which literally means “a large public building, such as a palace or temple”)<sup>26</sup> was used in Scripture prior to the days of Solomon to refer to the tabernacle. Though many may have erroneously concluded that the term “temple” was never used prior to the time of Solomon, several scriptures reveal otherwise.

Aside from learning in 1 Samuel 3:3 that Samuel slept “in the temple,” 1 Samuel 1:9 reveals that “Eli the priest sat upon a seat by a post of **the temple** of the Lord” (KJV). What’s more, David used this term multiple times in the Psalms prior to the building of Solomon’s temple. In Psalm 5:7, for example, he wrote: “But as for me, I will come into Your house in the multitude of Your mercy; in fear of You I will worship toward **Your holy temple**.” In his song of praise designated Psalm 65, he stated: “We shall be satisfied with the goodness of Your house, of **Your holy temple**” (vs. 4).

Though the temporary tabernacle (“tent curtains,” 2 Samuel 7:2) was a totally different building than the more permanent temple that Solomon constructed in Jerusalem, the fact is, God used some of the same names for both structures. Both were called “the house of God” (Judges 18:31; 2 Chronicles 4:11) and “the house of the Lord” (Exodus 23:19; 1 Samuel 1:7; 1 Kings 6:1,37). Likewise, both were referred to as the “temple” of God. Similar to how a woman might wear the name Johnson both before and after she is

married (because Johnson is both her maiden name and her newly acquired family name), the dwelling place of the Ark of the Covenant was occasionally referred to as God's "temple," even during the time of Samuel, long before Solomon's temple was constructed in Jerusalem.

## HOW DID GOLIATH DIE?

1 Samuel 17:48-51

Even individuals with only a nodding acquaintance of the Bible are aware of how Goliath died: "David killed the giant with a sling and a stone, of course." Indeed, that is what 1 Samuel 17:48-50 indicates:

David hurried and ran toward the army to meet the Philistine. Then David put his hand in his bag and took out a stone; and he slung it and struck the Philistine in his forehead, so that the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell on his face to the earth. So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone, and struck the Philistine and killed him.

Skeptics, however, are quick to point out that the above verses contradict what is stated in the very next verse: "Therefore David ran and stood over the Philistine, took his sword and drew it out of its sheath and killed him, and cut off his head with it" (17:51). How could David have killed Goliath with a rock and then have killed him with a sword? According to atheist Rayan Zehn, the question of how David killed Goliath is a "favorite," because "it contradicts itself in a single breath"—in back-to-back verses.<sup>27</sup> "So Bible believer tell me, exactly how did Goliath die?"

We first need to make the observation that few, if any, sane individuals are going to contradict themselves **in the**

**very next sentence** of what they are speaking or writing. Even liars rarely contradict themselves in the very next breath. Are we really to believe that the ancient individual who was intelligent enough to pen the book of Samuel was so ignorant that he actually thought at one moment David literally killed Goliath with a rock and the very next moment that David killed the giant with a sword? Such an allegation seems suspect at best.

Second, we need to keep in mind that there are many specific questions that Bible students cannot answer about things mentioned in Scripture. For example, God created light without the Sun on day one of Creation, but we are uninformed about the nature of that light.<sup>28</sup> Consider also how Luke mentioned that “**one** of the criminals” hanged with Jesus blasphemed Him (Luke 23:39), while Matthew mentioned that the “robbers” (**plural**) reviled Jesus (Matthew 27:44). Why the difference? The truth is, we can’t know for sure without more information. (One thing we can know is that the accounts have not proven to be contradictory; i.e., there are logical possibilities for the differences.)<sup>29</sup> Likewise, we do not know exactly why 1 Samuel 17 refers to David killing Goliath after sinking a stone into his forehead and again after using a sword to cut off his head. The writer does not elaborate further. However, at least one perfectly legitimate possibility exists for the difference.

The inspired writer of 1 Samuel could easily be indicating that David struck Goliath with an initial, unrecoverable blow to the forehead, and then quickly finished him off via decapitation. How many individuals have we truthfully spoken of as “dying” in an accident, yet they actually “died” in an ambulance or a hospital minutes, hours, or days later?

How many murderers have been convicted of “killing” someone who actually survived for several hours or days before being removed from life support? Is it fair or logical to conclude that the murderer didn’t actually kill the person, but the doctor did when he removed the still-living patient from the ventilator a week later? Would a just judge and jury accept this argument as valid? Certainly not.

It seems equally unjust to accuse the Bible of a contradiction for using words and phrases in ways not all that different from how we truthfully, understandably, and defensibly use them in 21<sup>st</sup>-century America. Why can’t we be as fair with Scripture as we are with each other? David dealt a crushing blow to Goliath with a sling and a stone, and then finished him off with the giant’s own sword.

### **DID KING DAVID BREAK THE LAW OR NOT?**

1 Samuel 21:1-22:23; Matthew 12:3-4;  
Mark 2:25-26; Luke 6:3-4

In response to the Pharisees’ accusation that Jesus’ disciples had broken the Law of Moses by plucking heads of grain on the Sabbath, the master Teacher called His critics’ attention to the time when King David was hungry and “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” (Matthew 12:4). Jesus was referring to the incident recorded in 1 Samuel 21 when David feared for his life, fled from King Saul, and ate the holy bread of the tabernacle. One questioner recently asked: “Was it not the case that David, in 1 Sam. 21-22, had divine authorization to eat the showbread which was not

otherwise lawful? Three times in chapter 22, it is said that the priest, who gave the showbread to David, ‘inquired of the Lord’ for him. Did David not acquire permission from God before getting the showbread?” If so, how could Jesus say that David’s actions were “unlawful” (Matthew 12:4; Mark 2:26; Luke 6:4)?

First, it certainly was the case that the consecrated showbread of the tabernacle was reserved for the priests. Moses specifically noted that “**Aaron and his sons** shall eat...the bread that is in the basket, by the door of the tabernacle of meeting... [B]ut **an outsider shall not eat them**, because they are holy. And if any...of the bread, remains until the morning, then you shall burn the remainder with fire. It shall not be eaten, because it is holy” (Exodus 29:32-34). “[I]t shall be for Aaron and his sons, and they shall eat it in a holy place” (Leviticus 24:9).

Second, simply because the treacherous and murderous Doeg and the incensed, unstable, and envious King Saul **accused** Ahimelech, priest of Israel, of inquiring of the Lord on David’s behalf does not mean that he did (1 Samuel 22:9-10,13). But didn’t Ahimelech himself confess to consulting the Lord in 1 Samuel 22:15? Admittedly, many English translations render the verse in such a way that certainly leaves the impression that Ahimelech asked something of the Lord on David’s behalf. (“Was that day the first time I inquired of God for him? Of course not!”—NIV.) However, could Ahimelech have actually meant that he did **not** inquire of God on David’s behalf? “Have I today begun to inquire of God for him? Be it far from me” (ASV). Could this statement possibly mean, “I have never inquired of God on David’s behalf, and I did not start doing so today”?

Third, even **if** Ahimelech **did** actually inquire of God on David's behalf, such mediation does not mean that he asked God if David and his men could eat the consecrated showbread, which the Law of Moses prohibited. Notice that King Saul accused Ahimelech of having "given him bread and a sword, **and have inquired of God for him**, that he should rise against me, to lie in wait, as it is to this day" (1 Samuel 22:13). To assume and to assert that David was not guilty of breaking a law of Moses because he received special permission to eat the showbread when the priest consulted the Lord on David's behalf, is to say much more than the text actually states. If Ahimelech did actually ask the Lord something on David's behalf (which 1 Samuel 21 does not record, and may have all been a lie started by Doeg), then it could have been about any number of things, including (and most likely) about where David should go and whether he should travel to the Philistine city of Gath in order to escape the grasp of King Saul. **Nothing** is stated in the text that Ahimelech inquired of God as to whether he should give David the showbread.

Fourth, though David was a great servant of the Lord, he was not without his sins. Did he eat the forbidden showbread? Yes. And in the same account, do we not also learn that David told a blatant lie? Indeed, he lied to Ahimelech when he claimed, "The king has ordered me on some business, and said to me, 'Do not let anyone know anything about the business on which I send you, or what I have commanded you.' And I have directed my young men to such and such a place" (1 Samuel 21:2). King Saul never ordered David on "some business." David was fleeing from Saul in order to save his life. If David was willing to lie to

save his life at a weak moment, we should not be surprised that he was also willing to consume forbidden food.

The fact is, Jesus rightly and masterfully pointed out the unlawful actions of David to a group of hypocritical Pharisees who apparently had overlooked their beloved David's blatantly sinful actions in 1 Samuel 21. Yet these same Pharisees wrongly criticized Jesus and His apostles for breaking the Sabbath. In truth, the only "law" Jesus' disciples broke (at least on this occasion) was the Pharisaical **misinterpretation** of the law (which seems to have been more sacred to the Pharisees than the Law itself).<sup>30</sup>

## DID ALL OF SAUL'S HOUSE DIE TOGETHER?

2 Samuel 2:8-10; 1 Chronicles 10:6

According to 1 Chronicles 10:1,6, when "the Philistines fought against Israel... Saul and his three sons died, and all his house died together." Second Samuel 2:8-10, however, indicates that Saul's son Ishbosheth was still alive after Saul's death, and, in fact, reigned over Israel for the two years following the death of his father. How are these accounts not contradictory?

The reason that some contend these passages are incompatible is because they **assume** that the phrase "all his house" (Hebrew *kaal beeytow*) must include every one of Saul's sons. However, such an assumption cannot be proven anymore than it can be proven that "all his house" included Saul's daughters, Michal and Merab. (Most people understand that his daughters would not have been fighting the Philistines on the battlefield and would not have been included in "all" of Saul's house.)

The parallel passage to 1 Chronicles 10:6 is 1 Samuel 31:6, which states: “So Saul, **his three sons**, his armor-bearer, and **all his men** died together that same day.” Saul actually had four sons (including Ishbosheth—2 Samuel 2:8), but the phrase “his three sons” is stated to specify the ones who were actually in the battle with their father against the Philistines. (We are not informed why Ishbosheth was not there.) Similarly, the phrase “all his men” obviously did not mean every servant of Saul’s in the Kingdom of Israel, but all of **those servants who were with him in the battle at that time and place**.

As is used “all the time” in 21<sup>st</sup>-century America, the Bible writers often used hyperbole. For example, Luke wrote that prior to the birth of Christ “a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that **all the world** should be registered.... So **all** went to be registered, **everyone** to his own city” (Luke 2:1,3). It should be obvious that Luke did not literally mean that every single person in every country on Earth was expected to be registered, but that **most people** in the Roman Empire (with surely at least some exceptions) were registered.

If I told someone that “all” of the Apologetics Press employees and their families came to a fish fry this past summer, would anyone accuse me of lying if the “all” did not include one of our employees who works from another location four hours away from our main office? Most likely, “everyone” would understand and accept the truthfulness and sincere intention of such a statement. One wonders, then, why 1 Chronicles 10:6 is so difficult for some to accept as a truthful declaration.

Finally, even if it could be proven that the chronicler literally meant that every single person who lived in Saul's physical house died on the same day Saul perished, such an interpretation still could not be proven to contradict the fact that Ishbosheth remained alive. Why? Because it could very well be that Ishbosheth, who was 40 years old at the time (2 Samuel 2:10), no longer lived in Saul's "house." If David's sons Amnon and Absalom had their own "houses" during David's reign as king (2 Samuel 13:7-8,20), could Ishbosheth not have had his own house during his father's reign? To ask is to answer.

Once again, an alleged Bible contradiction is demonstrated to be merely an unproven, unfair accusation. Why not be as fair with what the Bible writers penned as we are with what people write and communicate in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? One cannot legitimately charge the Bible with error when there are perfectly reasonable explanations for the alleged contradictions.

### **A THREE- OR SEVEN-YEAR FAMINE?**

2 Samuel 24:13; 1 Chronicles 21:12

Census-taking under the Law of Moses was not inherently evil. In fact, God actually commanded Moses to number the Israelite soldiers on two occasions—once in the second year after deliverance from Egyptian bondage, and again about 40 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, 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 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.).

Following David's sin, God instructed the prophet Gad to tell David: "I offer you three things; choose one of them for yourself, that I may do it to you" (2 Samuel 24:12). Gad then came to David and said, "Shall **seven years** of famine come to you in your land? Or shall you flee three months before your enemies, while they pursue you? Or shall there be three days' plague in your land?" (2 Samuel 24:13). The chronicler recorded that Gad said to David:

Thus says the Lord: "Choose for yourself, either **three years** of famine, or three months to be defeated by your foes with the sword of your enemies overtaking you, or else for three days the sword of the Lord—the plague in the land, with the angel of the Lord destroying throughout all the territory of Israel" (1 Chronicles 21:11-12).

For some Bible readers, 2 Samuel 24:13 and 1 Chronicles 21:12 pose a serious problem. Why does 2 Samuel 24:13 indicate that God gave David the option of a **seven-year** famine, while 1 Chronicles 21:12 specifies a **three-year** famine?

At least two feasible explanations exist for the difference in 2 Samuel 24:13 and 1 Chronicles 21:12. First, it is possible that the prophet Gad approached David twice. It may be that Gad gave David the option of a seven-year famine at their first meeting (2 Samuel), then later gave David the three-year option. There is, after all, a difference in the wording of the two passages. Second Samuel 24:13 is a question: “Shall seven years of famine come to you in your land?” First Chronicles 21:11-12 is a command with alternatives: “Choose for yourself, either three years of famine....” Why would God make such a change in the alternatives He presented David? Perhaps because of David’s confession of sin, contrite heart, and plea for mercy.

A second possibility is that an ancient scribe confused the Hebrew numeral letters. Similar to how printing companies today can make slight errors when printing copies of the Bible, and just as copyists’ errors can be found in various historical works (e.g., Tacitus, Josephus, etc.) without corrupting the overall integrity of the text, occasionally Bible readers come across numbers, names, etc. that are the result of a copyist’s errors—not mistakes by the original inspired writers. A scribe may have glanced down at the manuscript of 1 Chronicles with which he was working and mistakenly seen the “three” from “three months” (later in the verse) and thought it belonged to the “years of famine” figure earlier in the verse. [NOTE: For our chapter on copyists’ errors, please see *The Anvil Rings* volume 1, chapter 7.]

## A FLAWED ASSUMPTION MANY MAKE ABOUT KINGS AND CHRONICLES

1 Kings 14:19; 2 Kings 1:18;  
1 Chronicles 9:1; 2 Chronicles 16:11

Thirty-three times in 1 & 2 Kings<sup>31</sup> you will find the phrase “the book of the **chronicles** of the kings of” Israel/Judah.<sup>32</sup> Ten times in 1 & 2 Chronicles<sup>33</sup> you will discover the phrase “the book of the **kings** of” Israel/Judah.<sup>34</sup> Many Bible readers assume that “the book of the chronicles” mentioned in 1 & 2 Kings is a reference to 1 & 2 Chronicles, while “the book of the kings” mentioned in 1 & 2 Chronicles is a reference to 1 & 2 Kings.<sup>35</sup> Is such an assessment correct? Is “chronicles” in Kings a reference to 1 & 2 Chronicles, and is “kings” in Chronicles a reference to 1 & 2 Kings?

First, consider the matter from purely a common-sense perspective. How could each book be a reference to the other book? It makes sense that one of the books could possibly refer to the other or could prophesy about the future existence of the other, but how could **both** be referring to each other as already being in existence? If one book was written before the other, then the other book obviously was not yet written, and therefore the reference to it already being in existence would be impossible and nonsensical. (Imagine the original recipients reading over 30 times about a book that was not yet in existence. If such a thing happened with a written record today, we would call it “fiction,” not history.) Thus, on the surface alone, it should be evident that at least one of these books is not referring to the other.

Second, the evidence favors Chronicles being written a century or so after Kings. The final event recorded in

Kings is Jehoiachin's release from prison in the 37<sup>th</sup> year of Babylonian captivity (2 Kings 25:27-30), which would have been in **560 B.C.**<sup>36</sup>—the **earliest** date of the writing of Kings. On the other hand, Chronicles concludes in the first year of the Persian King Cyrus (in 538 B.C.),<sup>37</sup> when he wrote his public proclamation allowing all Jews in his kingdom to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple of Jehovah (2 Chronicles 36:22-23). Also, some of the Jewish descendants listed in the genealogies in Chronicles<sup>38</sup> pushes the **earliest** date of the writing of Chronicles easily back to about **500 B.C.** What's more, if Ezra, the "skilled scribe in the law of Moses" (Ezra 7:6), wrote Chronicles (as Jewish tradition reasonably contends),<sup>39</sup> the earliest date of Chronicles is moved back even further—to approximately **450 B.C.**<sup>40</sup> Thus, given the likely general time periods of the writing of Kings and Chronicles, it seems quite safe (and rational) to conclude that "the book of the **chronicles** of the kings" mentioned more than 30 times in Kings does not refer to Chronicles—a history written perhaps 100 years later.

Third, Kings appeals to "the book of the chronicles of the kings" for further details about various matters **that are not recorded in 1 & 2 Chronicles**. For example, regarding Nadab, the second king of Israel, 1 Kings 15:31 states: "Now the rest of the acts of Nadab, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?" However, none of Nadab's acts are recorded in 1 & 2 Chronicles. (In fact, the inspired chronicler records very little activity of the kings of the northern kingdom.) What's more, 1 Chronicles 9:1 refers to a vast amount of genealogical information (cf. 1 Chronicles 1:1-8:40) in "the book of the kings of Israel," which quite clearly **is not from 1 & 2**

**Kings.** (There simply is very little genealogical information in 1 & 2 Kings other than the overall, general succession of the kings of Israel and Judah. And there certainly is nothing like what the chronicler records in 1 Chronicles 1:1-8:40.)

Finally, consider the fact that Kings and Chronicles mention a number of different books about which the inspired writers (a) were aware and (b) used (by inspiration) as reference books. Kings documents the existence of “the book of the acts of Solomon” (1 Kings 11:41), while Chronicles mentions “the book of Nathan the prophet,” “the prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite,” “the visions of Iddo the seer” (2 Chronicles 9:29), “the chronicles of King David” (1 Chronicles 27:24), “the book of Jehu the son of Hanani” (2 Chronicles 20:34), etc.<sup>41</sup> Thus, it was quite natural for the inspired writers of Kings and Chronicles to reference non-canonical records in their historical writings. After all, if the inspired apostle Paul could occasionally quote from pagan poets (Acts 17:28; Titus 1:12), couldn’t the inspired prophets who penned Kings and Chronicles refer to any number of relevant sources in their histories? To ask is to answer.

Rather than go through life assuming the Bible teaches “this” or “that,” let’s resolve to **reason** through God’s inspired revelation and draw only those conclusions warranted by the evidence. In the case at hand, we learn that in addition to God’s inspired books of Kings and Chronicles, there were various relevant, historical, non-canonical writings to which the penmen of Kings and Chronicles alluded (which were not each other). Taking special note of these facts not only helps us in properly understanding the text, but it can also aid us in responding to Bible critics

who may assume contradiction on the part of the writers of Kings and Chronicles.

## ELIJAH AND THE DROUGHT

1 Kings 18:1; Luke 4:25-26; James 5:17-18

Twice in the New Testament one can read of the drought of Elijah's day that lasted for three and a half years. Jesus once referred to this famine while addressing fellow Jews in His hometown of Nazareth (Luke 4:25-26), while James mentioned it near the end of his epistle (5:17-18). Some have a problem with the drought of "three years and six months," because 1 Kings 18:1 says: "The word of the Lord came to Elijah, **in the third year**, saying, 'Go, present yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the earth.'" Soon thereafter, "there was a heavy rain" (18:45; cf. 18:15). The question is, did the rain come "**in the third year**" (1 Kings 18:1) or **after** "three years and six months" (Luke 4:25; James 5:17)?

Previously, in 1 Kings 17:1, Elijah had prophesied to Ahab that "there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word." Afterward, God instructed Elijah to "turn eastward, and hide by the Brook Cherith" (17:3). There he lived, eating the bread and meat that ravens brought him twice a day, until "the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land" (17:7). God then sent Elijah to Zarephath to live with a widow and her son. After the child became sick and died, Elijah raised him from the dead (17:17-24). Immediately following this event, the inspired historian wrote: "And it came to pass after many days that the word of the Lord came to Elijah, **in the third year**, saying, 'Go, present yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the earth'" (18:1).

Those who contend that Luke 4:25 and James 5:17 contradict 1 Kings 18:1<sup>42</sup> **assume** that “in the third year” refers to the drought. Yet, no proof exists for such an interpretation. First Kings 18:1 does not say, “...in the third year **of the drought**,” but only “in the third year.” Considering both the immediate context and the fact that originally there was no chapter break separating 1 Kings 17:24 and 18:1, the most natural reading is that Elijah was “in the third year” **of his residence in Zarephath**. Elijah, the widow, and her household ate of the miraculously replenished flour for “**(many) days**” (17:8-15, ASV). Some time later Elijah revived the widow’s son. Then, “**it came to pass after many days** that the word of the Lord came to Elijah” (18:1). It is reasonable to conclude that Elijah spent more than two years in Zarephath, since it was “in the third year” that God sent Elijah away from Zarephath to confront Ahab.

The “three years and six months” to which Jesus and James referred includes the two-plus years Elijah was in Zarephath and the several months Elijah lived at Brook Cherith. Although skeptics would rather assume guilt on the part of the inspired historian, Jesus, and/or James, once again they are unable to present real evidence for a genuine Bible contradiction.

## **DID ELIJAH SEND A LETTER TO KING JEHORAM YEARS AFTER THE PROPHET WAS ALREADY DEAD?**

2 Kings 2:1-12; 2 Chronicles 21:12-15

According to 2 Chronicles 21, during the reign of King Jehoram, the fifth king of Judah, “a letter came to him from Elijah” in which the prophet rebuked the wicked

king and predicted his painful disease and death (2 Chronicles 21:12-15). This account, however, has drawn criticism from some<sup>43</sup> since 2 Kings records Elijah being taken up into heaven in chapter 2—six chapters before Jehoram is mentioned as beginning his eight-year reign over Judah (2 Kings 8:16-24). Thus, inquiring minds want to know how Elijah could have penned a letter to a king if the prophet was no longer on Earth?

There are at least two possible, reasonable answers to this question. First, as with many other recorded biblical events,<sup>44</sup> it may be that the account of Elijah's miraculous translation into the spirit realm recorded in 2 Kings 2 was not placed in that particular section of Kings for strict chronological purposes. If the apostle John could place the account of Jesus cleansing the Temple at the beginning of His ministry (John 2:13-22),<sup>45</sup> and do so, as some contend, for thematic or theological purposes, rather than chronological reasons, could the inspired penman of Kings not have done something similar? We agree with Keil and Delitzsch, who concluded:

It is impossible to fix the year of Elijah's ascension. Neither the fact that it is mentioned after the death of Ahaziah of Israel, which he himself had personally foretold to that ungodly king, nor the circumstance that in the war which Jehoshaphat and Joram of Israel waged with the Moabites the prophet Elisha was consulted (ch. 3), warrants the conclusion that Elijah was taken from the earth in the interval between these two events. It is very obvious from ch. 3:11, that the two kings applied to Elisha simply because he was in the neighbourhood, and not because Elijah was no longer alive.<sup>46</sup>

Elisha had entered upon this relationship to Elijah long before Elijah's departure from the earth (1 Kings 19:19ff.). Elijah may therefore have still been alive under Joram of Judah.<sup>47</sup>

Interestingly, King Jehoram of Judah is actually mentioned in 2 Kings 1:17—**before** Elijah is translated into heaven. This verse certainly establishes the fact that Jehoram was alive during the time of Elijah and likely hints at the co-regency of Jehoram and his father King Jehoshaphat (cf. 2 Kings 8:16-24),<sup>48</sup> which admittedly may cause some confusion when attempting to make precise chronological judgments regarding certain events in Kings and Chronicles.

Even if the events in 2 Kings 1-8 are recorded in a stricter, chronological order, however, and Elijah had actually left Earth prior to Jehoram's independent reign as king began, there still is no proven contradiction between these passages and what the chronicler recorded about Elijah's letter to Jehoram. Second Chronicles 21:12 does state that "a letter came to" Jehoram "from Elijah the prophet," but notice that the text does not say that Elijah personally delivered the letter. One simply cannot prove that the text is implying that Elijah was still alive. It could very well be that the **prophet** Elijah wrote a **prophetic letter** about King Jehoram's future sickness and death, which was delivered to the king (perhaps by Elisha) years after Elijah left the Earth. If uninspired people who pass from this life can leave letters and other forms of communication for family members to read (or watch) **after** their deaths, could a divinely inspired prophet not have arranged for a letter, which he wrote long before, to be delivered at a particular time after his death? To ask is to answer.

Although some may become disturbed upon initially comparing 2 Kings 2 with 2 Chronicles 21, a fair and sober assessment of the text reveals logical explanations for the differences found therein. Perhaps the differences are the result of the events of 2 Kings 2 not being placed in a strict sequential order in the text. Or, it could very well be that Elijah wrote the letter of 2 Chronicles 21 as a prophetic letter before his departure from Earth and long before Jehoram became the sole King of Judah. One thing is certain: no justifiable contradiction has been proven.

### **AHAZIAH'S DEATH**

2 Kings 9:27-28; 2 Chronicles 22:8-9

Around 841 B.C., God anointed Jehu, the son of Jehoshaphat, as king of Israel and instructed him to “strike down the house of Ahab... For the whole house of Ahab shall perish” (2 Kings 9:7-8). Jehu proceeded to kill King Joram, the son of Ahab (9:24), Jezebel, the wife of Ahab (9:33), all seventy sons of Ahab who were living in Samaria, and “all who remained to Ahab in Samaria” (10:1-10,17).

God also used Jehu for “Ahaziah’s downfall” (2 Chronicles 22:7). Ahaziah was the king of Judah and “the son-in-law of the house of Ahab” (2 Kings 8:27). According to 2 Kings 9:27, Ahaziah witnessed Joram’s death, and “fled by the road to Beth Haggan” (“the garden-house,” ASV). Jehu, the newly anointed king of Israel, commanded his men to “shoot him [Ahaziah] also in the chariot.” It appears they succeeded in striking Ahaziah “on the way up to Gur near Ibleam” in Samaria (9:27, NIV). [NOTE: The phrase “and they shot him” (NKJV) or “they wounded him” (NIV) has been added by translators in an attempt to help the reader

connect Jehu's command to shoot Ahaziah with the phrase "on the way up to Gur."] Ahaziah then "fled to Megiddo, and died there" (9:27). Afterwards, "his servants carried him in the chariot to Jerusalem, and buried him" (9:28).

Some wonder how the account of Ahaziah's death as recorded by the chronicler coincides with 2 Kings 9:27-28. According to 2 Chronicles 22:8-9,

[W]hen Jehu was executing judgment on the house of Ahab, and found the princes of Judah and the sons of Ahaziah's brothers who served Ahaziah, that he killed them. Then he searched for Ahaziah; and **they caught him (he was hiding in Samaria), and brought him to Jehu. When they had killed him, they buried him,** "because," they said, "he is the son of Jehoshaphat, who sought the Lord with all his heart."

How does this information match up with Ahaziah being shot, fleeing to Megiddo, and dying there (2 Kings 9:27)?

First, one must remember that the biblical writers were not concerned with giving every piece of information that someone centuries later might desire to know about a particular event (cf. John 21:25). The Holy Spirit had specific purposes for what His inspired writers penned. Although Bible students might like to know exactly when, where, why, and how a particular event took place, students of Scripture must respect the marvelous brevity of God's Word.<sup>49</sup>

Second, a person cannot logically assume that two or more concise accounts contradict each other simply because there are differences within the accounts. In fact, differences should be expected when two **different** people tell the "same" story, especially when the stories are told at different times and for different reasons. In the case of Ahaziah's final

days, one writer focused on Ahaziah's eventual death in Megiddo (2 Kings 9:27), while the other stressed Ahaziah's arrest (2 Chronicles 22:9). It is very possible that the series of events unfolded in the following manner.

Ahaziah fled from Jezreel after Jehu killed Joram.

- Ahaziah escaped to Samaria and hid.
- Jehu's men caught Ahaziah and brought him to Jehu.
- Jehu commanded his men to "shoot him also in the chariot...by Ibleam."
- Once Jehu's men struck Ahaziah "in the chariot," Ahaziah "fled to Megiddo" (likely with one of his servants driving the chariot), where Ahaziah died.
- Jehu allowed Ahaziah's servants to carry his body back to Jerusalem in order to bury him with his fathers.

If the events leading up to the death of Ahaziah had been recorded one by one, an entire book likely could have been written. What we have, however, is one verse in 2 Kings and one verse in 2 Chronicles. From these accounts, the Bible student learns that Ahaziah was in Jezreel, Samaria, Gur by Ibleam, and Megiddo prior to his death. Exactly when and how he got from one place to another, one cannot be certain. Still, it is unnecessary to assume that the differences in the two accounts of Ahaziah's death represent a genuine contradiction. As it is with so many alleged Bible contradictions, the error is on the part of the skeptic who reads too much into the text. Does 2 Kings 9:27 disallow for Ahaziah's hiding in Samaria? No. Is there anything in 2 Chronicles 22:9 that would forbid Ahaziah from dying in Megiddo? No. As is seen so often in the Gospel accounts (cf. Matthew 14:21; Mark 6:44), the differences in these two verses can be explained simply by acknowledging that supplementation is not equivalent to a contradiction.<sup>50</sup>

## HOW COULD HAMAN BE A DESCENDANT OF KING AGAG?

Esther 3:1; 1 Samuel 15:2-8

The skeptic's argument goes something like this: (a) According to 1 Samuel 15, Saul (with a little help from Samuel) utterly destroyed all of the Amalekites, including Agag, king of Amalek. (b) Esther 3:1 indicates that Haman (prime minister of the Persian king Ahasuerus) was a descendant of Agag. Thus, (c) First Samuel 15 and Esther 3:1 cannot both be true: either the Amalekites were not completely destroyed, or Haman was not actually a descendant of Agag.

As with so many purported "discrepancies" in Scripture, this allegation assumes more than what can actually be proven. First, simply because Haman is called "the son of Hammedatha **the Agagite**" approximately 500 years after King Agag of Amalek died (Esther 3:1), does not necessarily mean that Haman was related to that **same** Agag mentioned in 1 Samuel 15. It is possible that he was, but such ancestry has never been proven. As Keil and Delitzsch observed in their commentary on Esther:

The name Agag is not sufficient for the purpose, as many individuals might at different times have borne the name *'agaag*, i.e., the fiery. In 1 Sam 15, too, Agag is not the *nomen propr.* of the conquered king, but a general *nomen dignitatis* of the kings of Amalek, as Pharaoh and Abimelech were of the kings of Egypt and Gerar.... We know nothing of Haman and his father beyond what is said in this book, and all attempts to explain the names are uncertain and beside the mark.<sup>51</sup>

Indeed, to assert that Esther 3:1 is referring to the same family that Saul and Samuel killed in 1 Samuel 15 is, simply put, to make an unproven (and unprovable) allegation.

Though it is necessary for the apologist to point out only one unsubstantiated premise in the skeptic's argument in order for the line of reasoning to be proven invalid, a second problem should also be noted for the record: namely, nothing in 1 Samuel 15 indicates that every single Amalekite on Earth died at that time. In fact, in addition to Saul's indifference toward God's command to utterly destroy the Amalekites, verse seven sets parameters on the actual Amalekites whom Saul attacked—those "from Havilah all the way to Shur." Could there have been Amalekites who were outside of this region during Saul's war against Amalek? Could it be that some of the Amalekites actually lived near the edge of the boundary and escaped the fighting just prior to Saul's attack? Could it be that just one of these Amalekites who survived was the ancestor of Haman? All of these questions may well be truthfully answered in the affirmative. In fact, just 12 chapters later, the inspired writer of 1 Samuel revealed that certain Amalekites were still alive and well, only a few years after King Saul had attacked them (1 Samuel 27:8; 30:1; cf. 1 Chronicles 4:43).

In short, neither premise in the skeptic's argument against 1 Samuel 15 and Esther 3:1 is valid. There is no verified contradiction between these texts—only another unproven allegation.<sup>52</sup>

# Chapter 10



## MISCELLANEOUS NEW TESTAMENT ALLEGED CONTRADICTIONS

### DID JOHN THE BAPTIZER KNOW JESUS OR NOT?

John 1:31-33; Matthew 4:13-17; 11:3

Early on in Jesus' ministry, John the Baptizer made one of the most beautiful and powerful declarations in all of Holy Writ about Jesus of Nazareth: "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). Following this glorious, redemptive statement, however, John makes two claims that have been problematic for some. He said about Jesus:

**"I did not know Him** [previously-EL]; but that He should be revealed to Israel, therefore I came baptizing with water.... 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’ (1:31-33).

Some wonder how John could not have known Jesus, if (1) he was a relative of the Messiah (Luke 1:36,57-60), and (2) he tried to deter Jesus from letting him baptize Him, saying “I need to be baptized by You, and You are coming to me?” (Matthew 3:14). Why would John say this if he did not already know Who Jesus was? Furthermore, why did John send disciples later in his ministry to ask Jesus, “**Are You the Coming One**, or do we look for another?” (Matthew 11:3). Did John the Baptizer know Jesus or not?

First, simply because Jesus’ and John’s mothers (Mary and Elizabeth) were relatives (Luke 1:36) does not necessarily mean that John had ever met Jesus prior to baptizing Him. I have first and second cousins that I don’t recall ever meeting, though I have heard my parents talk about them for many years. Just because people are related doesn’t mean they “know” each other. What’s more, when John “grew and became strong in spirit,” **he was “in the deserts till the day of his manifestation to Israel”** (Luke 1:80). Thus, John may have never met Jesus prior to His baptism. But, this does not mean he did not know various things about Jesus.

John obviously knew something about Jesus, or he would not have been hesitant to baptize Him. To “not know” Jesus then, likely had much more to do with not knowing him “officially, as the Messiah,”<sup>21</sup> than anything else. John seemed to believe that Jesus was the Messiah already, but,

as J.W. McGarvey noted, “he did not **know** it.”<sup>2</sup>

His language to the people shows this (John i.26). Many of the people must have known Jesus, but none of them knew him to be the Messiah. Moreover, when John denied that he knew Jesus as Messiah we must not take it that he was ignorant of the past history of Jesus. No doubt he knew in a general way who Jesus was; but as the official forerunner and announcer of Jesus, and as the heaven-sent witness (John i.6,7), it was necessary that the Baptist should receive, by personal revelation from God, as here stated, an indubitable, absolute knowledge of the Messiahship of Jesus. Without this, John would not have been truly qualified as a witness. That Jesus is the Son of God must not rest on hearsay evidence. John kept silent till he could testify of his own knowledge.<sup>3</sup>

Still, since it was “officially” declared to John at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry that He was “the Son of God” (John 1:34), many wonder why (much later) John sent disciples to ask Jesus, “Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?” (Matthew 11:3). Why would John ask this question if he already knew that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God? Is this not contradictory as skeptics allege?<sup>4</sup>

By supposing that John’s question to Jesus later in His ministry (Matthew 11:3) is somehow a discrepancy, skeptics unjustifiably assume two things. First, they assume that all questions are asked in order to obtain knowledge. But that simply is not the case. Questions can be asked for a variety of reasons. They may be asked to awaken someone’s slumbering conscience (e.g., “Did you do that?”). They may be asked to bring attention to something (e.g., “What are you wearing?”). They may be asked for the benefit of others

(e.g., “What is the right answer to this problem?”). The fact is, we cannot know for sure exactly why John sent disciples to ask Jesus this question, but there are legitimate possible explanations that exonerate John and the Bible writers.

Skeptics also assume that John’s faith never wavered. They fail to recognize (or accept) that, like other great men of faith who occasionally had doubts (e.g., Moses, Gideon, Peter, etc.), John may have asked this question to Jesus out of momentary unbelief. McGarvey appropriately reminded us that John’s “wild, free life was now curbed by the irksome tedium of confinement.... Moreover, he held no communion with the private life of Jesus, and entered not into the sanctuary of his Lord’s thought. We must remember also that his inspiration passed away with the ministry, on account of which it was bestowed, and it was only *the man John*, and not the prophet, who made the inquiry.”<sup>5</sup> John may also have wondered why, if Jesus was a worker of all manner of miracles, was he still in prison. Could Jesus not rescue His forerunner? Could He not save him from the sword of Herod? What was Jesus’ response to John? “And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me” (Matthew 11:6). John (or John’s disciples) may have needed to be reminded to stay the course, even if they did not understand all of the reasons why certain things happened the way they did (cf. Job 13:15). Whether having a “thorn in the flesh” (2 Corinthians 12:7) or suffering distressing imprisonment, God’s grace is sufficient. His “strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9). Even when, yes, **especially** when, we are suffering, Jesus reminds His servants, “Blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.”

Did John the Baptizer know Jesus? Certainly he did.

The statements John made that some consider conflicting have simply been misunderstood. John came to know Jesus officially as the Son of God when he baptized Him. John declared this Heaven-approved message throughout his ministry. Though John's faith in the Coming One may have wavered momentarily during his imprisonment, such questioning by the prophet is in no way evidence of discrepancy. Remember: the Bible writers penned a flawless, inspired book (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21; cf. John 10:35), which includes brief accounts of many faithful, but **imperfect**, men. Though "among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist" (Matthew 11:11), even he was not perfect.

### **WHEN DID JESUS CALL THE FIRST APOSTLES?**

John 1:35-42; Matthew 4:18-22;  
Mark 1:16-20; Luke 5:1-11

A gentleman once wrote our offices asking how to resolve the question skeptics occasionally raise concerning **when** Jesus called the first apostles. Allegedly, John's version of the calling (1:35-42) contradicts the synoptists' accounts (Matthew 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20; Luke 5:1-11). According to John, two disciples (one of which was Andrew—1:40) were following John the Baptizer. Then, after hearing Jesus, "the Lamb of God" (1:36), they followed Him "and remained with him that day" (1:39). Andrew also brought his brother Peter to meet Jesus at this time (1:40-42). Matthew, Mark, and Luke indicate, however, that Jesus called Peter, Andrew, James, and John while they were out fishing on the Sea of Galilee. Are these contradictory accounts of

Christ's calling of the apostles, or is there some rational explanation for their differences?

The reason for the disparities in these stories is not because they are contradictory (as Paul Carson alleged in his 1995 article, "New Testament Contradictions"),<sup>6</sup> but because John is describing a totally separate incident from the one the synoptists describe. John places Andrew, Peter, and the unnamed disciple (who very likely was John himself)<sup>7</sup> in Judea (cf. John 1:19,28), whereas the synoptists describe an event that took place in Galilee (Matthew 4:18; Mark 1:16; Luke 5:1). What's more, the call for Peter, Andrew, James, and John to become "fishers of men" (i.e., apostles) in the synoptics is absent in John 1. As Luther noted: "John's theme is not the calling of the apostles into office; it is their congenial association with Christ."<sup>8</sup> In John, "[t]he disciples of John [the Baptizer—EL] recognize the Messiah and spontaneously attach themselves to him."<sup>9</sup> In the synoptics, the disciples clearly were **called** to begin a life of service as apostles (Matthew 4:19; Mark 1:17; Luke 5:10). At least two other differences in these accounts are evident: (1) In John 1, Andrew is with an unnamed disciple, not Peter (whom he later finds and informs that he had "found" the Messiah), whereas in the synoptics, Peter and Andrew are called together; (2) James and John are called together in the synoptics, whereas in John 1, James is nowhere mentioned, while John is likely the unnamed disciple (John 1:37).

The skeptic's charge that John's account of Jesus' calling of the apostles contradicts the accounts of Matthew, Mark, and Luke is unwarranted. John actually referred to a different circumstance altogether. John records Peter and Andrew's first meeting with the Christ. The synoptists,

however, testify of a later meeting, when Jesus called them at the Sea of Galilee to become “fishers of men.”

### Another Question About the Calling

Still, another question lingers. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all record Jesus summoning Peter, Andrew, James, and John to leave their fishing nets behind and become fishers of men (Matthew 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20; Luke 5:1-11). However, whereas Matthew’s and Mark’s accounts of the event are nearly identical, Luke positions the account at a different location in his record and reports several other details that Matthew and Mark exclude.

Matthew and Mark both record the calling of Peter, Andrew, James, and John immediately **following** their accounts of the temptations of Christ and the beginning of His ministry (Matthew 4:1-17; Mark 1:12-15) and **before** His healing of the demon possessed and the afflicted, including Peter’s mother-in-law (Matthew 4:23-25; 8:14-15; Mark 1:21-31). Luke positions Jesus’ calling of these two sets of brothers **after** Jesus’ healing of Peter’s mother-in-law and a demon-possessed man (Luke 4:31-41). Furthermore, Luke includes several details in his record that Matthew and Mark omit: (1) The fishermen had left their boats and were cleaning their nets (Luke 5:2); (2) A multitude surrounded Jesus as He approached the fishermen (5:1); (3) Jesus taught the multitudes from Peter’s boat (5:3); (4) Jesus instructed the fishermen to go to the deep part of the lake (5:4); (5) The fishermen’s catch was great (5:6-7); (6) Peter confessed his sinfulness (5:8); etc.

Just as it is possible that Jesus cleansed the Temple twice,<sup>10</sup> it is very possible that Jesus may have told His disciples twice that they would be fishers of men: the first time recorded by

Matthew (4:18-22) and Mark (1:16-20), and then a second time recorded by Luke (5:1-11). Furthermore, as previously discussed, even prior to Matthew's and Mark's accounts of Jesus calling Peter and Andrew to become fishers of men, these two fishermen had already previously "followed" Jesus (John 1:35-42).

So what is the answer to the question? Did the synoptic writers all refer to the same calling in these passages? Although we lean toward these being two different callings, with Matthew and Mark recording an earlier encounter, and Luke a later one, one simply cannot be certain about the matter. Bible writers often times arranged things differently because of their different purposes in writing.<sup>11</sup> What's more, although Luke includes several more details in his account of the calling, it could be that he, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, was merely providing supplemental material. Whatever the answer is, we can be sure that no proven discrepancies exist among these accounts—only differences that we would expect to find from inspired, **independent** writers.

### **WHAT EXACTLY DID GOD THE FATHER SAY AT THE BAPTISM OF JESUS?**

Matthew 3:17; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22

Immediately following Jesus' baptism, Matthew, Mark, and Luke record how God the Father spoke from heaven. Most Bible students are likely familiar with the words, "My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." However, it may have never dawned on some that Mark's and Luke's accounts differ from Matthew's in that they record God

speaking directly to Jesus (“**You are** My beloved Son”—Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22), while Matthew records the Father speaking to others, saying, “**This is** My beloved Son” (3:17). Does this represent a legitimate Bible contradiction as some contend,<sup>12</sup> or is there a reasonable explanation to the different wordings?

First, it is possible that God made both statements. Similar to how someone officiating a wedding might say **to the bride and groom**, “I now pronounce you husband and wife, Mr. and Mrs...,” and then a moment later say **to the audience** something like, “I present to you Mr. and Mrs... husband and wife,” God could very well have spoken to Jesus at one moment and then to John the Baptizer (and others) at the next. It is unwise to think that every similar statement recorded by the gospel writers must refer to the exact same moment in time.

Consider an example from the very next major event that Matthew and Luke record in the life of Jesus—the temptations by Satan, and specifically Jesus’ response to Satan’s temptation to throw Himself down from the pinnacle of the Temple. 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 that Jesus said: “**It has been said** (*eiratai*), ‘You shall not tempt the Lord your God’” (4:12). Notice however that Jesus may have 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. Similarly,

it is very possible that just after Jesus' baptism, the Father directed the same truth at two different times to two (or more) different people.

Second, one must keep in mind that the message Matthew, Mark, and Luke recorded was one that literally came down from Heaven. The gospel writers were referring to a marvelous, miraculous event. It is very possible that the omniscient, omnipotent Father God spoke from heaven once: Jesus hearing, "**You are** my beloved Son" (Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22) and John the Baptizer (and others) hearing, "**This is** My beloved Son" (Matthew 3:17). This suggestion should not seem absurd for at least two reasons: (1) The infinitely powerful God was the One speaking (and if He desires that two or more individuals hear different things at the same time, He certainly could make that happen); and (2) Scripture records other instances of people hearing different things (at the same time) when God spoke from heaven. When Jesus spoke to Paul on the road to Damascus, Paul clearly understood the Lord's voice (Acts 9:4-6), while those around him heard a sound (Acts 9:7), but did not understand what Jesus said (Acts 22:9).<sup>13</sup> Similarly, following Jesus' statement, "Father, glorify Your name" (John 12:28), God spoke from heaven, saying, "I have both glorified it and will glorify it again" (12:28). Interestingly, the apostle John indicated: "[T]he people who stood by and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, 'An angel has spoken to Him'" (12:29). Given (1) Who God is, and (2) references to other occasions when bystanders heard two or more different things when God spoke from heaven, it should not be surprising why the accounts of

God speaking at Jesus' baptism in Matthew, Mark, and Luke are slightly different.

A final reason why this small difference exists among the synoptic writers may be the same reason why there are several other differences among their accounts: the writers' purpose was to record precisely what the **Holy Spirit** deemed necessary (cf. John 16:13), but not necessarily **exactly** what someone said. That is, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21), one writer may **summarize** a person's (e.g., Jesus') words, while another writer may quote the **exact** words.<sup>14</sup> Consider the accounts of Peter's denials and the rooster crowing. The differences among the gospel writers may very well be the result of Mark quoting the exact words of Jesus, while the other writers (under the guidance of the Holy Spirit) saw fit to employ the less definite style to indicate the same time of night—"the crowing of the rooster" (Mark 13:35).<sup>15</sup>

Throughout the gospel accounts, we find accurate statements that the Father, Jesus, and others made, but not necessarily the exact quotations. Inspired **summaries** or paraphrases of what someone said do not take away from the sacredness of the God-given Scriptures, nor our ability to apply those Scriptures to our lives. What's more, differences among statements recorded in the gospel accounts also may be the result of the statements being made **at different times**. Or, as in the case of God speaking directly from heaven, it may be that one or more heard one message (or noise), while others heard something different. In whichever category a difference among the gospel accounts falls, Bible students can be confident of the Scripture's reliability.

## HOW COULD THE LAWLESS WORK MIRACLES?

Matthew 7:22-23

Near the close of Jesus' masterful Sermon on the Mount, He reminded His hearers that they must be more than hearers of the Word of God (Matthew 7:21-27); they must be "doers" of God's Word (cf. James 1:22). Jesus said: "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). Jesus then went on to say, "Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, '**I never knew you**; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" (Matthew 7:22-23). Some time ago, a gentleman wrote our offices wondering how someone whom Jesus "never knew" could work miracles such as prophesying and casting demons out of the possessed. How could these individuals do such things without Jesus' knowledge or authorization?

First, we must keep in mind that the biblical phrase "to know" frequently means more than a mere awareness of something (cf. 1 Samuel 2:18,26; 3:1,7). As Deity (John 1:1-5; 20:28), Jesus certainly "knows" all men (cf. 1 John 3:20). Thus, when He said, "I will declare to them, 'I never knew you,'" He obviously did not mean that He literally does not know (or will not know) who someone is. Jesus was referring to knowing **spiritually** those "who are His" (2 Timothy 2:19) and are not His. That is, Jesus knows those who are saved and those who are not. In Matthew 7:23, Jesus "was asserting that the accused had never had a

saved relationship with Him. They had not followed Him and His teachings, but had refused to commit their lives to Him as Master and Lord.”<sup>16</sup>

But how could people who were never actually saved work miracles such as curing the demon-possessed? First, simply because God has used a person to work one or more miracles in the past to accomplish His will, does not mean that every one of those individuals were always (or perhaps ever) right with God. Though God gave the apostles power to “heal the sick” and “cast out demons” (Matthew 10:8; 17:21), one of them was a hypocrite (John 6:64-71). God used Balaam to prophesy (Numbers 22:5-24:25) even though he “loved the wages of unrighteousness” (2 Peter 2:15; cf. Numbers 31:16; Jude 11). Though divination was condemned under the Law of Moses (Leviticus 19:31; Deuteronomy 18:11), God allowed a medium from En Dor to see Samuel’s “spirit ascending out of the earth” (1 Samuel 28:11,13). The fact is, just as God providentially used wicked nations to accomplish His will (cf. Habakkuk 1:5-13), and similar to how He can use insincere and improperly motivated preachers to teach the Gospel (Philippians 1:15-18), God sometimes carried out His will by giving wicked people the ability to perform one or more miracles. Other than Jesus, no accountable human being has ever been perfect (Romans 3:10,23; Ecclesiastes 7:20), and yet God has continually used human beings to accomplish His will. Therefore, just because a person may have worked one or more miracles in Bible times, does not mean that that person was ever “known” (i.e., saved) by Christ.

Another explanation exists, however, for Matthew 7:22. Jesus said, “**Many will say to Me** in that day, ‘Lord, Lord,

have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?” Notice that **Jesus** never said that these lawless individuals (7:23) were working legitimate miracles in His name. He merely quoted what the **lawless** will say at the Judgment in their own defense. Many of the scribes and Pharisees were “great pretenders.” They acted as if they were sincere in their devotion to God, when they were actually very deceitful (cf. Matthew 6:1-18; 7:15-20). It may very well be that one of their many deceptions was **claiming** to work miracles, and even **acting** as if they cast demons out of the possessed. In reality, however, they were frauds, just as there are many frauds today who are so hypocritical and delusional that one day they may stand before Jesus and attempt to rationalize their wicked behavior, yet to no avail.

### WHO, EXACTLY, ASKED THE QUESTION?

Matthew 9:14; Luke 5:30,33; Mark 2:18

Why does Matthew 9:14 say that the disciples of John asked Jesus about fasting, while Luke 5 indicates that the Pharisees and their scribes asked Jesus this question? Isn't this a contradiction?

Indeed, Matthew specifically mentioned that “**the disciples of John** came to Him [Jesus], saying, ‘Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but Your disciples do not fast?’” (9:14). It also is true that Luke refers to “**the Pharisees and their scribes**” (5:30,33, NASB) as asking the question. But, the fact that two different Bible writers indicated that different groups of people asked Jesus the same question is not proof of biblical errancy.

Consider how often we make similar statements. Suppose that several students in a classroom ask a teacher why she is not married. Later, the teacher may report to Jimmy's parents that he asked why she is single. On another occasion, the teacher may inform Joe's parents that he asked the same question. Has the teacher lied? Not at all. In truth, both Jimmy and Joe, along with several other students, asked about the teacher's marital status. Depending on the setting, the teacher may rightfully choose only to mention one who asked the question, or she may decide to name every student who inquired about her private life.

Just as someone would be unjustified in alleging that the aforementioned teacher was a liar because in one setting she stated that Jimmy asked the question, and in another setting she mentioned that it was Joe, a person would be equally unjustified in accusing Matthew and/or Luke of being mistaken. Did the disciples of John ask Jesus why His disciples were not fasting? Yes. Did the Pharisees and their scribes ask Jesus virtually the same question? Yes. What's more, when Mark addressed this subject in his gospel account, he mentioned how "the disciples of John **and** of the Pharisees...came and said to Him, 'Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?'" (Mark 2:18).

Though it may appear at first glance that Matthew and John are in conflict, both accounts are correct. "Each tells the truth, but each tells only a part of what was true, and we get at the whole truth by putting both of their statements together as one. This circumstance furnishes a key to the reconciliation of the different writers in many other places where there is an appearance of discrepancy."<sup>17</sup>

## CAN ANYONE ACTUALLY DO “GOOD”?

Matthew 12:35; Galatians 6:10; 3 John 11;  
Psalm 14:3; Ecclesiastes 7:20; Romans 3:12

Most people will read the title of this section and immediately think, “Of course a person can do good.” After all, Jesus said, “A good (*agathos*) man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things” (Matthew 12:35). Paul instructed Christians to (simply) “do good to all” (Galatians 6:10). He later reminded the disciples in Corinth that “we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (2 Corinthians 5:10). And John wrote: “Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God” (3 John 11).

So why such an elementary question? This question is occasionally asked by skeptics who want to know why the Bible repeatedly teaches that God’s people are to “do good,” if, as other biblical passages teach, “there is none who does good, no, not one” (Psalm 14:3; 53:3; Romans 3:12; cf. Mark 10:18). “For there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin” (Ecclesiastes 7:20; cf. Isaiah 64:6). Thus, Bible critics ask, “How can the Bible teach that Christians are to do good, if no one can actually be good?”

The question is a fair question. Admittedly, the Bible’s different uses of the term “good” may be confusing to some initially. As with the solution to so many alleged Bible contradictions, however, the answer actually is very simple: words are used in different senses. The term “good” can be used in different ways and in varying degrees. We can

talk of a good pizza, a good day, a good dog, a good boy, and our good God, and mean somewhat (or perhaps very) different things.

In the purest and highest meaning of the word, only God is “good.” Jesus referred to this supreme goodness when He said to the rich young ruler, “No one is good but One, that is, God” (Mark 10:18). In truth, as Caleb Colley concluded in his article “Why is Good Good?,” “God is good, but not in virtue of a standard of goodness that exists separate from Him.... Good is defined by God’s goodness, which is inseparable from His nature.”<sup>18</sup>

On the other hand, human beings can only know goodness and be good on a dependent and finite level. In the beginning, everything God made, including the first human beings, “was very good” (Genesis 1:31)—but not “good” in precisely the same way our perfectly good God is good. God is innately good. He **cannot** do evil (cf. Titus 1:2); He cannot even be tempted by evil (James 1:13). But a man **can** be tempted to sin, and he **can choose** to sin (James 1:14-15). In fact, every person of an accountable mind and age who has ever lived (save God Incarnate, the Lord Jesus) has chosen to do that which is **not** good (Romans 3:23). Such a decision on man’s part, even one such decision, makes him “no good” in the sense that, apart from God’s amazingly good, saving grace, he is a lawfully condemned, unholy sinner (Romans 3:24). What’s more, on our own, apart from God, we can do absolutely nothing about our sinfulness. There is nothing that we could do on our own to become “good.”

Sinful man can only become good and just by choosing to accept God’s perfectly good and gracious gift of salvation

through Christ (Romans 5:8,15-21). Subsequently, God saved, newly made good people (i.e., Christians) will “put to death” their rebelliously sinful selves (repenting of sins—Acts 2:38; 3:19) and “put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him” (Colossians 3:5,10; cf. Romans 12:1-2).

Indeed, Christians can be good and do good. We are not good in and of ourselves. Rather, by the grace of our innately and supremely good God, we can be justified and “become followers of what is good” (1 Peter 3:13). We can walk in the light of God, knowing that “the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). And, during moments of weakness, when we choose that which is not good, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Thus, our good God even provided a way for Christians to remain “good” and to continue doing good works, in spite of our imperfections and struggles with sin.

## THE RESPONSE TO JESUS’ PARABLE OF THE VINEDRESSERS

Matthew 21:41; Mark 12:9; Luke 20:16

At the conclusion of Jesus’ parable of the wicked vinedressers, Jesus asked His audience, “Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vinedressers?” (Matthew 21:40). According to Matthew, Jesus’ **hearers** responded: “**They** said to Him, ‘He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease his vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons’” (Matthew 21:41). However, according to Mark and Luke, **Jesus** answered His own question, saying,

“He will come and destroy those vinedressers and give the vineyard to others” (Luke 20:16; Mark 12:9). Luke then added: “And when **they** heard it they said, ‘Certainly not!’” (Luke 20:16). How is the Bible reader to understand these differing responses? Did Jesus answer His own question or did others? And how did those who reacted to Jesus’ teaching actually respond?

First, consider that the parable of the vinedressers is one of Jesus’ easiest parables to understand: no landowner will tolerate the workers of his land killing his own commissioned servants, and certainly not his own son. Thus, the answer to Jesus’ question, “What will the owner of the vineyard do?” is self-evident—even a child knows that the landowner will severely punish his workers.

Consider the school teacher who asks a class full of students, “What will happen to a student who chooses to beat up another student in class?” Likely, one or more in the class would respond by saying, “He will be kicked out of class and sent to the principal’s office.” But might the teacher echo the same obvious response? “That’s right! He will be expelled from this class and sent to the principal.” So who responded to the teacher’s question? In truth, both “the class” and “the teacher” responded. [Often parents do the same thing with their children: (a) They ask an obvious question; (b) They wait for the child to respond; and (c) Then (for the sake of emphasis) they respond by repeating the answer the child just gave.]

When Jesus taught the parable of the vinedressers, He was in the Temple. Some of His enemies, including chief priests, scribes, and elders, were present (Luke 20:1; Matthew 21:23), as well as anyone else (“the people”—Luke

20:9) at the Temple who stopped to hear the Master Teacher. Is it possible that both Jesus (the Teacher) and some among His hearers responded to the self-evident judgment upon the vinedressers? Indeed. Is it also possible that some responded to Jesus' parable and subsequent question and answer by not wanting to believe the truth that He had just taught "against them" (Luke 20:16)? Most certainly.

There is no proven contradiction among Matthew, Mark, and Luke. All three accounts of Jesus' parable of the vine-dressers are in perfect harmony with one another. By meditating on what each writer penned, we merely get a fuller picture of the events of the day—a picture of people who were rejecting and attempting to kill the "Landowner's" Son.

## DOES THE HOLY SPIRIT KNOW WHEN JESUS WILL RETURN?

Matthew 24:36; Mark 13:32

One question that various individuals have submitted to Apologetics Press through the years involves the Second Coming of Christ and the omniscience of the Holy Spirit. If the Holy Spirit is God (Acts 5:3-4), and thus omniscient (Psalm 139), both Christians and non-Christians have inquired why Jesus said about His return, "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but **only the Father**" (Mark 13:32)? Why would the "Father alone" (Matthew 24:36, NASB) be aware of the time of Jesus' Second Coming? Does this exclude the Holy Spirit?

When Jesus came to Earth in the flesh, He willingly "made Himself of no reputation" (Philippians 2:7; He "emp-

“tied Himself”—NASB). He moved from the spiritual realm to put on flesh (John 1:14) and voluntarily became subject to such things as hunger, thirst, weariness, and pain. Our omnipotent, omniscient, holy God chose to come into this world as a helpless babe, Who, for the first time in His eternal existence, “increased in wisdom” (Luke 2:52). While on Earth in the flesh, Jesus was **voluntarily** in a subordinate position to the Father.<sup>19</sup>

It has been suggested that, similar to how Jesus chose not to know some things while on Earth, including the date of His return, perhaps the Holy Spirit also willingly restricted Himself to some degree during the first century.<sup>20</sup> Perhaps the special role of the Holy Spirit in the first century in regards to spiritual and miraculous gifts (Acts 2:38; 1 Corinthians 12:7), special revelation (John 14:26; 16:13), divine inspiration (2 Timothy 3:16), and intercession (Romans 8:26), etc., is somewhat similar to the role that Christ played. That is, could it be that both God the Son and God the Spirit voluntarily restricted their knowledge on Earth in the first century? And thus, could that be why Jesus said, “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but **only the Father**” (Mark 13:32)? Considering that more than a few Christians and scholars believe that even God the Father may freely choose to limit His own knowledge of certain things,<sup>21</sup> many would likely not hesitate to explain Mark 13:32 and Matthew 24:36 by contending that the Holy Spirit freely limited His knowledge for a time regarding Christ’s return.

Given especially the indisputable fact that the Son of God voluntarily chose not to know certain things for a time, it may be possible that the Holy Spirit could choose the

same. However, the Holy Spirit Himself revealed through the apostle Paul that He, the Spirit, “searches **all things**, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so **no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God**” (1 Corinthians 2:10-11). Furthermore, there are no explicit statements in Scripture about the Holy Spirit’s willful unawareness of certain things, as there are about Jesus (Mark 13:32; cf. Luke 2:52). All one can cite is Jesus’ statement about “only the Father” knowing the date of the Son’s return, and conclude that this implies the Spirit of God was unaware of that day. What’s more, in context, Jesus placed much more emphasis on the words “no one knows” than the qualifying statements “not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son.” Jesus wanted His hearers to understand that just as those in Noah’s day “**did not know**” the day of the Flood (Matthew 24:39), and just as the servants in the parable of the servants “**do not know** when the master of the house is coming” (Mark 13:35; Matthew 24:50), so “**you do not know** what hour your Lord is coming” (Matthew 24:42; Mark 13:33). Thus, Jesus taught the all-important central message in these chapters of “watching” and being “ready” for the unknown time of Christ’s return (Matthew 24:36-25:46; Mark 13:32-37). Even though we may learn something of the Messiah’s voluntary, self-imposed emptying of some of His omniscience (Mark 13:32), Jesus’ “purpose was not to define the limits of his theological knowledge, but to indicate that vigilance, not calculation, is required”<sup>22</sup>—a lesson that all “end-of-time” false-prophets need to learn!

Rather than quickly dismiss the omniscience of the Holy Spirit during a particular period of time in human history, a better explanation exists: expressions such as “no one,” “only,” “except,” “all,” etc. are oftentimes used in a **limited sense**. Consider what Paul revealed in Romans 3: “Jews and Greeks...are **all** under sin. As it is written: ‘There is **none** righteous, **no, not one**.... They have **all** turned aside... there is **none** who does good, **no, not one**’” (vss. 9,10,12). In this passage, Paul was stressing the fact that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23), but he was using these inclusive and exclusive terms (e.g., “all,” “none”) in a somewhat limited sense. Paul was obviously not including Jesus in this passage, as elsewhere he wrote that Jesus “knew no sin” (2 Corinthians 5:21; cf. Hebrews 4:15; 1 Peter 1:19). Neither was he including infants,<sup>23</sup> the mentally challenged, or angels. Who then has sinned? All humans of an accountable mind and age,<sup>24</sup> with the obvious exception being the sinless Son of God.

In chapter six, we examined Jesus’ statement in John 17:3, where He exclaimed: “And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the **only true God**, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.” Are we to believe, as some do, that Jesus was implying neither He nor the Holy Spirit is divine? Not at all. Rather, when the Bible reveals that there is only one God, one Savior, one Lord, one Creator (Isaiah 44:24; John 1:3), etc., reason and revelation demand that we understand the inspired writers to be excluding everyone and everything—**other than the members of the Godhead**. Throughout the Gospel of John, the writer repeatedly referred to Jesus’ deity (1:1,3,23; 4:25-26; 9:38; 10:30-33; 20:28)—Jesus most certainly was not denying it

in John 17:3. Unless the biblical text **specifically** mentions what a member of the Godhead does not know, do, etc., we should be careful alleging ignorance, limited power, etc.

In Matthew 11:27, Jesus stated: “All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and **no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son**, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.” Are we to believe that the Spirit of God does not fully comprehend the Son of God or God the Father? After all, Jesus said, “[N]o one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son.” Once again, the terms “no one,” “anyone,” and “except” must be understood in a limited sense. Jesus was in no way suggesting that the Spirit of God, Who “searches all things, yes, the deep things of God” (1 Corinthians 2:10), does not fully understand the Father as Jesus does. The Son of God was revealing that aside from the “one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him” (Matthew 11:27), “no man or angel clearly and fully comprehends the character of the infinite God.... None but God **fully** knows Him.”<sup>25</sup> Once again, Jesus was alluding to His deity. Mere humans cannot truthfully speak in this manner. “The full comprehension and acknowledgment of the Godhead, and the mystery of the Trinity, belong to God alone.”<sup>26</sup> Jesus was and is God. And, we should no more exclude the Holy Spirit from Jesus’ statement about He and God the Father in Matthew 11:27 than we should exclude the Father or the Son from Paul’s statement about the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 2:10-11.

In short, it is unnecessary to conclude that the Holy Spirit must at one time have given up some of His omniscience because Jesus stated of His return: “[N]o one knows, not

even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.” In light of the way in which God and the Bible writers oftentimes used exclusive terms in limited senses, especially as those terms relate to the Godhead, it cannot be proven that Jesus was excluding the Spirit of God in this statement. If we should not exclude Jesus and the Holy Spirit from the God that Jesus praised in John 17:3, and we should not exclude the Holy Spirit from the Divine that Jesus spoke of in Matthew 11:27, it seems entirely unnecessary to infer that in Mark 13:32 and Matthew 24:36 Christ was implying that the Holy Spirit was unaware of the day of His return.

### THE QUESTIONING OF PETER

Matthew 26:71; Mark 14:69; Luke 22:58; John 18:25

A concerned Bible student once wrote our offices regarding the apostle Peter’s triple denial of Jesus. It was not the usual inquiry regarding how many times the rooster crowed following Peter’s denials of Christ.<sup>27</sup> Rather, his question focused on the charges made against Peter prior to each of his denials. All four gospel writers first testify that a “servant girl” confronted Peter (Matthew 26:69; Mark 14:66; Luke 22:56; John 18:17). The writers then seem to “go their separate ways.”

Matthew writes: “[A]nother girl saw him and said to those who were there, ‘This fellow also was with Jesus of Nazareth’” (26:71).

Mark records: “[T]he servant girl saw him again, and began to say to those who stood by, ‘This is one of them’” (14:69).

Luke writes: “And after a little while another saw him and said, ‘You also are of them’” (22:58).

John testifies: “[T]hey said to him, ‘You are not also one of His disciples, are you?’” (18:25).

About one hour later (Luke 22:59), just prior to Peter’s third denial, John records that “**one of the servants** of the high priest,” a relative of Malchus, accused Peter (18:26). Matthew and Mark, on the other hand, write: “[T]hose who stood by” charged him with associating with Jesus (Matthew 26:73; Mark 14:70). What is going on here? How can all of the gospel accounts be accurate if they all are different? As has been alleged, “The event could have happened only one way.” Is this true? Did Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John err in their recording of this event?

Before answering this supposed contradiction, imagine that you are sitting next to three newspaper reporters at a professional basketball game. Ten minutes into the game, a fracas breaks out in the stands involving one prominent basketball player and a few fans—a scenario not too bizarre, given recent outbreaks at sporting events. The next morning, the three reporters retell the events in the following manners:

Reporter #1: After an angry fan sitting behind the team’s bench insulted Joe Smith by calling him a “namby-pamby boy,” Joe ran into the stands and demanded that he stop.

Reporter #2: A small group of fans behind the Wings’ bench had been taunting Smith with racial slurs for 10 minutes. Finally, Joe had had enough. He jumped into the stands and yelled at everyone in the group, insisting that they stop the verbal abuse.

Reporter #3: What caused Joe Smith to leap into the stands and threaten a father and his three sons? The father had called Joe a sissy, and the sons joined in by repeatedly calling him a “mama’s boy.”

Is it possible for all three of these reports to be true? Could it honestly be stated that Joe was responding to “an angry fan,” while at the same time reacting to “a small group of fans”? Could Joe have been called both a sissy and a namby-pamby boy? The answer to all three questions is “yes.” Reporters tell stories from different perspectives, often including details that other reporters omit. Most people have no problem understanding modern-day examples of supplementation. In fact, we often read different reports of the same story in order to get a fuller picture of what took place. One reporter’s story can differ from another’s **without** contradicting it.

Are the differences in the gospel writers’ accounts of the accusations hurled at Peter proof of biblical errancy? Not any more than the differences in the basketball reporters’ accounts are proof of mistakes on their part. On the occasion of Peter’s first denial, one of the high priest’s servant girls accused Peter of being a disciple of Christ. Prior to Peter’s second denial, the writers inform us that he was accused by a plurality of people, including (1) the same servant girl who confronted him the first time (Mark 14:69), (2) an unnamed man (Luke 22:58), and (3) a group of individuals simply designated as “they” (John 18:25). Only an hour later, “one of the servants of the high priest,” a relative of Malchus, accused Peter (John 18:26), along with “those who stood by” (Matthew 26:73; Mark 14:70). Nothing in these accounts is incongruous.

Surely one can picture the various blood-thirsty individuals all hurling charges at Peter throughout the night in hopes of him being arrested, beaten, and killed, as was Jesus. We must keep in mind that these accounts are not contradictory, but supplementary. No writer gives every detail about every event. One must read them all in order to have the best possible understanding.

Truly, “the event happened only one way.” However, it was recorded by four different individuals from four different, but harmonizing, viewpoints.

### **“TODAY YOU WILL BE WITH ME IN PARADISE”—*HOW EXACTLY?***

Luke 23:43

One of the most outspoken critics of the Bible’s inspiration in the 1980s and 1990s was Dennis McKinsey. For 16 years he edited a journal called *Biblical Errancy*, which was touted as “[t]he only national periodical focusing on Biblical errors, contradictions, and fallacies, while providing a hearing for apologists.”<sup>28</sup> He also published two books on the subject of Bible “errors”: *The Encyclopedia of Biblical Errancy* (1995) and *Biblical Errancy* (2000), which were cited several times in previous chapters. One of his writings that seems to have spread more widely than others is a pamphlet he authored on why Jesus should be rejected as man’s God and Savior. Allegedly, man should reject Jesus as Lord for many reasons, including why He lied about His whereabouts to the thief on the cross. Jesus told the thief on the cross, “[T]oday you will be with Me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43). But McKinsey asks: “How could they have been together in paradise that day if Jesus lay in

the tomb for three days?”<sup>29</sup> Allegedly, the Lord’s promise “could not have been kept unless Jesus went to heaven that day, in which case he would not have been buried for three days.”<sup>30</sup> Skeptic Steve Wells similarly commented on Jesus’ promise to the thief, saying: “[H]ow can that be since it’s only Friday and, according to the gospels, Jesus lay dead in the tomb Friday night and all day Saturday.”<sup>31</sup> Obviously, these skeptics do not understand the Bible’s teaching about the afterlife.

Those who are even remotely familiar with Scripture surely recognize how uninformed and anemic this allegation is. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament reveal that man is composed of both soul/spirit and body (Zechariah 12:1; Matthew 10:28; 1 Corinthians 5:5). At death, the spirit separates from the body. When Rachel died, Genesis 35:18 says, “her soul was departing.” It separated from her body. After the death of Jairus’ daughter, Jesus commanded her to “arise,” after which “**her spirit returned**, and she arose immediately” (Luke 8:54,55). Implied in this statement is the fact that her spirit had departed from her body at death. Where did the spirits of Rachel and Jairus’ daughter go? To the realm of departed spirits, known as sheol in the Old Testament and hades in the New Testament (cf. Psalm 16:10; Acts 2:27; Luke 16:23).

The reason Jesus could truthfully say that He would meet the thief on the cross that very day in paradise is because, while Christ’s body was placed in a tomb for three days, His spirit went to the part of the hadean realm known as paradise (Acts 2:27; Luke 23:43), along with the spirit of the thief on the cross. Unlike the spirits of the wicked and unforgiven that await Judgment Day in the part

of the hadean realm known as “torments” (Luke 16:23), Jesus and the thief on the cross dwelt together in paradise (or “Abraham’s bosom”—Luke 16:22).

On the day of Pentecost, Peter quoted from Psalm 16 (“You will not leave my soul in Hades”—Acts 2:27), and applied this passage to Christ, saying, “His [Jesus’] soul was not left in Hades” (Acts 2:31). When was Jesus’ soul in hades? After His death, and before His resurrection. Who was with Him in the part of hades known as paradise? The thief on the cross. Did Jesus lie when He told the thief, “Today you will be with me in Paradise”? Certainly not.<sup>32</sup>

The fact that Dennis McKinsey would introduce Jesus’ statement to the thief on the cross as a reason why Christ should not be accepted as man’s Savior surely testifies to the weakness of his case. “Therefore by their fruits you will know them” (Matthew 7:20).

## JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA AND THE GREAT STONE

Matthew 27:60; Mark 16:4

A gentleman contacted our offices a few years ago questioning some of the events surrounding the burial of Christ. He specifically wanted to know about the likelihood of Joseph of Arimathea being able to roll “**a great stone**” (Matthew 27:60) against the entrance of the tomb. A person can understand how one man could transport the body of Jesus, wrap it in linen, and lay it in a tomb (27:59-60), but how could one man roll a “very large” (Mark 16:4) stone over the opening of the tomb of Jesus?

First, one should keep in mind that Joseph was **very** familiar with this tomb. He was the owner of it and also

the one who had hewn the tomb out of the rock (Matthew 27:60; cf. Isaiah 53:9). It could be that he had made provision so that a large stone could easily be set against the entrance of the tomb (even by one man), yet when set in place, it might be extremely difficult to remove (even for several men). If the entrance of the tomb, for example, was at a lower elevation, and the large stone was on an incline, temporarily held in place by smaller stones and/or by a slight indentation in the ground, Joseph might easily (or with ample effort) have been able to roll the stone against the entrance by himself.

Second, and more importantly, Joseph was not by himself. Although Matthew, Mark, and Luke do not mention anyone else helping Joseph roll the stone against the tomb's entrance, they also neither expressly state nor imply that he was alone. In fact, John records that Nicodemus helped Joseph prepare Jesus' body for burial, and afterwards "**they** laid Jesus" in the tomb (John 19:42). In truth, since **none** of the gospel writers indicates that **only** one or two men buried Jesus, an untold number of people (e.g., Joseph's servants) may have helped Joseph and Nicodemus roll the "great stone" against the entrance of Jesus' tomb.

It is imperative for Bible students and skeptics to keep in mind as they read through Scripture, and especially the gospel accounts, that silence does not negate supplementation. Just because the synoptic writers were silent about Nicodemus helping Joseph bury Jesus, does not mean Nicodemus could not have helped Joseph or that John was mistaken. Furthermore, simply because the gospel writers were silent about others (such as servants that a "rich man" like Joseph probably had—Matthew 27:57) who might have

helped Joseph and Nicodemus roll the large stone over the entrance of the tomb, does not mean there were not any. In short, nothing in the gospel accounts concerning Joseph of Arimathea or the great stone that covered the entrance of Jesus' tomb is impossible or discrepant.

## WAS MOSES INELOQUENT OR "MIGHTY IN WORDS"?

Acts 7:22; Exodus 3:11; 4:10; 6:30

In one of the more well-known scenes of Scripture, the Lord, in the midst of an unconsumed burning bush, appeared to Moses on Mount Horeb. He revealed to Moses that it was time to deliver the Israelites out of Egyptian bondage. It was time to give the descendants of Abraham the land of Canaan, which He had promised to his descendants more than 400 years earlier (cf. Genesis 12:1,7; 13:15; 15:13). It was time for **Moses** to lead God's people out of Egypt (Exodus 3:10).

Moses, however, was not convinced that he was the one to go to Pharaoh and make such demands. "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh...?" Moses asked the Lord (Exodus 3:11). "O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither before nor since You have spoken to Your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue" (4:10). "Behold, I am of uncircumcised lips, and how shall Pharaoh heed me?" (6:30).

Some wonder how Moses could be ineloquent, if Stephen, in his speech to an angry mob prior to his death, described Moses as one "**mighty in words and deeds**" (Acts 7:22). According to Bible critic Steve Wells, author of the *The Skeptic's Annotated Bible*, Acts 7:22 contradicts Exodus 4:10-16 and 6:12-30.<sup>33</sup> R. Paul Buchman likewise

lists these verses on his Web site “1001 Contradictions and Discrepancies in the Christian Bibles.”<sup>34</sup> Allegedly, Acts 7:22 is incompatible with what we learn about Moses in Exodus 3-6. How could Moses be “mighty in words,” yet also be ineloquent?

First, it is possible that Moses was not as ineloquent and “slow of speech” as one might initially think. The Bible student must keep in mind **who** made the statements about Moses’ speech in the book of Exodus. God did not say that Moses was incapable of speaking effectively—**Moses** did. **Moses** made these statements about himself. What’s more, Moses made the statements about himself **after** God had instructed him (1) to go back to the land where he had fled 40 years earlier for fear of his life (Exodus 2:15), (2) to present himself before the most powerful king on Earth (3:10), and (3) to tell the king of Egypt to let hundreds of thousands of Israelite slaves go free (Exodus 3:10; cf. Numbers 1:46). Moses was obviously **afraid** and **doubted** if he could do what God commanded. “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh...?” Moses asked (Exodus 3:11). He said: “Suppose they will not believe me or listen to my voice; suppose they say, ‘The Lord has not appeared to you’” (4:1). Even after seeing two amazing miracles (4:3-8), Moses still offered excuses (4:10). Moses was so troubled over the entire matter that he finally pleaded with God saying, “O my Lord, **please send someone else**” (4:13, ESV).

What was God’s response to Moses? According to Exodus 4:14, “[T]he anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses.” In addition to Moses being “very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth” (Numbers 12:3), Moses appears to have been so alarmed by the

thought of going back to Egypt and making demands of Pharaoh that he highly exaggerated his ineloquence. Could it not be said that Moses stated fairly eloquently his case for being “ineloquent”? What’s more, when he wrote all of these events (and others) down by inspiration years later (in the Pentateuch—Joshua 8:32; John 5:46), he was equally as “eloquent.” Keep in mind that simply because God spoke of Aaron as one who “can speak well” (Exodus 4:14), does not necessarily mean that Moses was not an eloquent speaker, or that God thought that Moses was not up for the task at hand. Obviously, God had more confidence in Moses’ abilities than Moses did. It was Moses’ fear and hesitancy, not his alleged ineloquence, that led our long-suffering God to elevate Aaron as his spokesman.

If the skeptic refuses to accept that Moses was much more eloquent than the prophet claimed in his meeting with God on Mount Horeb, the Bible student might also point out that Stephen’s reference to Moses being “mighty in words and deeds” was (in context) in reference to Moses **during the first 40 years of his life in Egypt** (Acts 7:22). In Stephen’s speech in Acts 7, he reminded his Jewish audience that Pharaoh’s daughter brought Moses up “as her own son. And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds” (Acts 7:21-22). Stephen then stated: “Now when he [Moses] was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren, the children of Israel...” (7:23). It was after **another** “forty years had passed” (7:30)—after Moses had become a shepherd and had dwelt in the land of Midian for 40 years—that, **at the age of 80**, Moses made excuses before God of being ineloquent. Thus, in context, these statements were made

about a man at two very different periods of time in his life. And, as everyone should know, **two different statements cannot rationally be said to contradict each other if they are referring to two different time periods.** How many of us were better at something in our younger years? Could Moses have not been a more eloquent speaker at 40 than at 80 (after spending four decades as a shepherd in a foreign land)?

Some might argue that since Moses said to God, “I am not eloquent, **neither before nor since You have spoken to Your servant**” (Exodus 4:10), this means that Moses was never “mighty in words,” neither at 40 nor 80. Keep in mind, however, (1) it was **Moses** making this assertion, not God, and (2) we cannot be certain how far back in the past Moses meant for this statement to apply. He just as easily could have been referring to a time just before God appeared to him from the burning bush. What’s more, the events recorded in Exodus 3-4 could very easily have lasted days or weeks (cf. 4:14,27-28). Commentator Albert Barnes believes that this statement in Exodus 4:10 “seems to imply that some short time had intervened between this address and the first communication of the divine purpose to Moses.”<sup>35</sup>

Sadly, skeptics not only ignore **who** made these statements, as well as the different **time periods** under discussion in the related passages, they also ignore the fact that **different words** are used, which do not necessarily mean the same thing. Even if Moses was not exaggerating about his ineloquence, and even if the statements in Exodus 3-6 and Acts 7:22 were referring to the same period of time in Moses’ life, **being “slow of speech and slow of tongue”**

**is not necessarily incompatible with being “mighty in words”** (Acts 7:22). In fact, the phrase “mighty in words” (*dunatos en logois*) immediately follows Stephen describing Moses as “learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians.” How could Moses, an (alleged) ineloquent speaker, be “mighty in words”? Asking this question a little differently could help us answer it much easier. Could a man (1) of royalty, (2) who was very well educated, and (3) whose actions were described as “mighty,” ever be considered “mighty in words,” even though he may not be the greatest of orators? Most certainly. How many first-class athletes and coaches have given extremely motivating speeches to their teams and fans (e.g., Tim Tebow; Ray Lewis), and yet they may not be viewed as “eloquent” speakers? How many statesmen have risen to the occasion and delivered stirring addresses at crucial times in history (e.g., President George W. Bush’s speech at Ground Zero three days after the 9/11 attacks), though the statesmen generally were not viewed as great orators? How many people throughout history have been “mighty in words” as a writer, but not as a speaker? How many gospel preachers have I heard in my lifetime, who (1) knew the Scriptures extremely well, and (2) had done amazing things in their lifetime, and yet although they may not have been considered “great orators,” could truly be said to be “mighty in words”? Considering that “the gospel of Christ...is the power of God to salvation” (Romans 1:16), many stirring sermons have been preached the past 2,000 years by rather weak men. Even one of the greatest gospel preachers this world has ever known (the apostle Paul), stated to the Corinthians: “And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom” (1 Corinthians 2:1).

Skeptics' criticisms of Exodus 3-6 and Acts 7:22 should only further confirm how superficial and manipulative their accusations against the Bible writers really are. The fact is, Bible critics have no proof that these passages contradict each other; yet, as with so many alleged discrepancies they champion, skeptics seem to care little about making false, unprovable allegations. In other arenas, such individuals would be ostracized for such blatant carelessness and dishonesty.

### WHO IS THE GOD OF THE EARTH?

John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Luke 4:5-7

The apostle John records three times how Jesus referred to Satan as “the ruler of this world” (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). Years later, the apostle Paul actually referred to Satan as “the god (*theos*) of this world” (2 Corinthians 4:4, ASV). Even Satan appeared to understand something about his reign on Earth when he showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world, and said, “All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for this has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. Therefore, if You will worship before me, all will be Yours” (Luke 4:5-7; cf. Matthew 4:8-9). Yet, how can Satan be the god and ruler of this world if numerous other passages clearly distinguish Jehovah as the “Lord of the whole earth” (Micah 4:13; Zechariah 4:14)? How can the devil be the ruler of the world if Jesus claimed, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth” (Matthew 28:18)? Is the God of heaven not the “Lord of heaven and earth” (Acts 17:24)? Are these two different thoughts completely contradictory (as skeptics allege)?<sup>36</sup>

One fundamental interpretation principle that must be considered in any attempt to correctly understand written or spoken communication (which on the surface may seem contradictory) is whether or not the compared words or phrases are used in the same sense. A fan may say about his favorite basketball player, “He is smoking,” and mean the player is shooting the basketball very well. Later, however, the fan may see the same player outside the arena with something in his mouth and shout with astonishment, “He is smoking!” The two statements are exactly the same; they are both true, yet they communicate very different thoughts.

The Bible is very clear that the infinite, eternal Creator of the Universe, Who is “upholding all things by the word of His power” (Hebrews 1:3), is the one, true God, “the Most High over all the earth” (Psalm 83:18). Jehovah is the Creator of all things, including Satan (Colossians 1:16). In the most complete and ultimate sense imaginable, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is the Ruler of heaven and Earth. However, there is a sense in which Satan is “ruler” and “god” of the world—not in the ultimate sense, but, indeed, in **a sense**.

In what respect could the devil ever be considered a “ruler” or “god”? The answer to this question is rather simple when one considers the fact that most of God’s human creation through the millennia have chosen to **serve** Satan, rather than submit themselves in obedience to the true God of the Universe. During the days of Noah, “the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5). During the days of Moses and Joshua, the land of Egypt was full of idolatry (Exodus 12:12), the land of Canaan was overrun with abominable immorality

(Leviticus 18), while people of Israel struggled for centuries with the fleshly desire to serve “other gods.” When Jesus came to Earth, He acknowledged the fact that whereas “difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it” (Matthew 7:14), “wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it” (7:13).

Tragically, most accountable individuals willingly choose to reject the true God—their Creator and potential Savior—and instead make Satan their “god” and “ruler.” Most unbelievers do not literally worship Satan as “god,” but, as Lenski noted, “The god of this eon [age/world] is apt in this connection...because he [Satan] is the embodiment of all wickedness and ungodliness in this world, the author and the propagator of hostility to God. He originated the perdition in which men perish.”<sup>37</sup> A man who chooses to love the world and “all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father,” but of Satan and his sinful world (1 John 2:16). When a person rejects the true God as Ruler of his life, by default he pledges allegiance to Satan, making him “god” and “ruler.” No contradiction exists among the statements of the Bible about who rules the Earth.

## **BIBLICAL CONSISTENCY AND THE BELIEVER’S TREATMENT OF FALSE TEACHERS**

2 John 10-11; 1 Timothy 6:20-21; 2 Timothy 2:16-17

If Christians are to be kind and loving to everyone (Luke 10:29-37), some question why 2 John 10-11 teaches, “If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine (‘the doctrine of Christ’—vs. 9), **do not receive him into**

**your house nor greet him**; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.”<sup>38</sup> Also, why did Paul instruct Timothy to “shun profane and idle babblings” (2 Timothy 2:16; 1 Timothy 6:20-21)? Are Christians to shun those with whom we disagree, and even go so far as not to greet them or allow them into our homes?

First, Scripture, indeed, repeatedly calls for Christians to love everyone—whether family, friends, fellow Christians, or enemies (Matthew 5:43-48; 22:36-40; Romans 12:9-21). We are to “[r]epay **no one** evil for evil” (Romans 12:17), but strive to “be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave” us (Ephesians 4:32). But Christian kindness and love is not antithetical to such things as, for example, punishing rule breakers. A father who loves his son, and would even die for him, will promptly discipline him for unruly conduct (Proverbs 13:24; Ephesians 6:4). A school principal may genuinely love and care for every student under his oversight, but he may occasionally have to expel a disorderly child from the school for at least two reasons: (1) so that the hundreds of other students who want to get an education can safely and successfully do so, and (2) in hopes that such drastic measures will cause the unruly child to awaken to his senses before it is too late (and he does something far worse as a teenager or as an adult). An **uninformed outsider**, who sees a father disciplining his son or a school principal punishing a student, may initially think less of these adults and wonder how they could call themselves Christians. The **logical, more informed bystander**, however, will quickly size up the situation and easily see the consistency in the loving, disciplinary actions.

In the epistle of 2 John, the apostle expressed his concern for the eternal destiny of Christians, saying, “Watch yourselves, that you might not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward” (vs. 8, NASB). John was alarmed because deceptive false teachers who denied the incarnation of Jesus were a serious threat to the salvation of Christians. “For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh” (2 John 7). These false teachers (known as Gnostics) alleged that Christ could not have been incarnated because the flesh is inherently sinful. And, since the flesh is supposedly intrinsically evil, Gnostics taught that Christians did not need to resist fleshly temptations. Just “do whatever feels good” and know that such wicked actions are only physical and not spiritual. Allegedly, the soul could still be pure, even if the individuals themselves participated in wicked activity.<sup>39</sup>

The apostle John (who had “seen” and “handled” the actual body of Christ—1 John 1:1-4; i.e., Jesus **did** come in the flesh) repeatedly condemned the central teachings of certain Gnostics who were confusing and misleading first-century Christians.

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because **many false prophets have gone out into the world**. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world (1 John 4:1-3).

Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness. And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin. Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him. Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous. He who sins is of the devil.... Whoever has been born of God does not sin (1 John 3:4-9).

False doctrine was a real and present danger in the first-century church, just as it is today. Christians were (and are) to be on “guard” because “some have strayed concerning the faith”—profane and idle babblers and teachers of contradictory doctrines of “what is falsely called knowledge” (Greek *gnosis*; 1 Timothy 6:20-21; cf. 2 Timothy 2:15-26). Denying the physical life, death, burial, and resurrection of the body of Christ was heresy, and thus John and others warned the early church of such deception. What’s more, claiming that “all unrighteousness is **not** sin,” was to directly contradict the Law of Christ. In truth, “the works of the flesh are evident,” and “those who practice such things will **not** inherit the kingdom of God” (Galatians 5:19,21). John wrote: “Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God,” because “all unrighteousness **is** sin” (1 John 3:10; 5:17).

Christians are commanded to withdraw fellowship (lovingly, faithfully, and sorrowfully) from brethren who rebel against the teachings of Christ (cf. 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15). Such actions by Christians and churches are taken for at least two reasons: (1) to keep the church and the Christian families that comprise her from being harmed spiritually by the defiantly unfaithful (whose

very tolerated presence would have even more damaging effects than an incessantly disruptive student in a school room; cf. 1 Corinthians 5:6-7); and (2) in hopes of causing the wayward child of God to come to his senses (being “ashamed” of his sinful conduct; 2 Thessalonians 3:14; 1 Corinthians 5:5)—repenting of sin and being restored to the family of God.

Similarly, in 2 John 10-11, the apostle of the Lord instructed hospitable Christians to recognize the seriousness of greeting and housing deceptive false teachers. [NOTE: “The greeting was ‘*Chairo!*’ literally, *goodspeed* or *God speed*. This greeting was more than mere formality; it was an approval of the course being pursued by the one thus greeting, and included a desire for success in the effort attempted.”<sup>40</sup>] First-century roaming teachers and preachers “**depended** on the generosity of the members of the church” for their housing and hospitality.<sup>41</sup> John the apostle, however, wanted the church to understand the serious threat that these dangerous false teachers posed to the precious bride of Christ. Doctrinal error is not something to “play with,” especially when such error involves the foundation of the Church (the life of Christ—2 John 7) and the denial of sin (the very thing that results in eternal death for the impenitent—Romans 6:23; Luke 13:3,5). By refusing to house and bid God-speed to deceptive teachers, the ungodly efforts of these misleading “messengers” would be greatly diminished. In time, they might choose to (or have to) stop their sowing of error altogether because of lack of opportunities, assistance, and encouragement. Such a result combined with genuine repentance would be the very thing for which Christians hope and pray.

Anyone who can see the reasonable and loving consistency of parents telling their children to “be nice to everyone,” **but** “don’t listen to these dangerous people” (showing them pictures of known child molesters), should be able to see the consistency of God’s message concerning Christian love and hospitality, and the way Christians react to false teachers who espouse damnable error. Children who shun dangerous sexual predators are protecting their own innocence, as well as keeping themselves and their families from a moment (or a lifetime) of grief. What’s more, the avoided, dangerous strangers are not given the opportunity to continue in their sins. Thus, the children’s obedient avoidance of them could be of great help to the sinful strangers in the highest way possible—if they awaken to their spiritual senses.

Christians are actually fulfilling the Law of Christ to “do good to all” (Galatians 6:2,10) even as we identify and refuse to embrace and fellowship false teachers. We are “doing good” to the “household of faith” by helping keep her pure and unaffected by cancer-spreading deceptive teachers (2 Timothy 2:17-18). Allowing error to spread would be tantamount to “rejoic[ing] in iniquity,” which is unloving (1 Corinthians 13:6). What’s more, the false teachers themselves are in no way encouraged to continue down the road of deceit. Rather, it is the hope and prayer of Christians that false teachers would become convicted of the error of their ways and repent before the Master Teacher (Luke 2:47; John 7:46) returns and judges them eternally for their doctrinal deceit (2 Peter 2).

[NOTE: Near the conclusion of his excellent commentary on 2 John, Guy N. Woods made an appropriate observation that both Christians and critics of 2 John 10-11 should

consider: “John does not here forbid hospitality to strangers, or, for that matter, to false teachers when, in so doing, false teaching is neither encouraged nor done. Were we to find a teacher known to be an advocate of false doctrine suffering, it would be our duty to minister to his need, provided that in so doing we did not abet or encourage him in the propagation of false doctrine.... **What is forbidden** is the reception of such teachers in such fashion as to supply them with an opportunity to teach their tenets, to maintain an association with them when such would involve us in the danger of accepting their doctrines.... The test is, Does one become a partaker by the action contemplated? If yes, our duty is clear; we must neither receive them nor give them greeting; if No, the principle here taught is not applicable.”<sup>42]</sup>

# AFTERWORD

No one is perfect. No one but God has ever or will ever get everything correct. Indeed, “To err is human.” The real question is, what will a person do once he makes mistakes? Is he honest enough to admit them? Is he humble enough to swallow his pride? Does he really care about the truth, or does the end justify the means?

To the Christian, truth is paramount. Everything about our God is truth (1 John 5:6; John 14:6), and the Christian’s pursuit of God is one of truth (John 8:31-36). The **only** “agenda” a Christian should have is whatever **God’s** “agenda” is (i.e., whatever the truthful, omniscient Creator and Savior wants us to be and do, which includes owning up to our mistakes—Luke 18:9-14; Acts 26:20).

When human beings do not acknowledge God and His truthful standard for their lives, deceit eventually rules the day, even though it is often peddled as “truth.” One glaring example of such deceitfulness is seen every day in America

in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: repeated accusations that the Bible is full of discrepancies. Outspoken critics of the Bible's supernatural inspiration continue to claim certain Bible passages are contradictory, even though time and again many have heard and seen the passages explained in a clear, logical, and biblically consistent manner. Some skeptics have been in multiple public debates where they made allegations against the Bible writers that were truthfully and logically answered. Yet, the same skeptics continue to repeat the same unproven allegations against the Bible writers in future debates, articles, and books.

Why would skeptics continue to cite “contradictory” Bible passages, which at the very least they would have to admit are **unproven** allegations? It would seem for the same reason so many in today's mainstream media continually press certain stories (which are unproven at best and fabricated falsehoods at worst): the end justifies the means. So many people care more about their own agendas than the truth.

No lie is more dangerous than that told by many modern atheists, agnostics, and skeptics: that the Bible is not the inspired Word of God. Yet, there is nothing to fear, because the truth has nothing to fear. Just as  $2 + 2$  does not have to worry about “4,” truth does not fear an honest investigation.

Admittedly, when a person only gives the Bible a quick, superficial glance, many verses will initially “appear” contradictory. (How could “James” be alive in Acts 15, if “James” died in Acts 12?) The fact is, however, as we've carefully demonstrated in these three volumes of *The Anvil Rings: Answers to Alleged Bible Discrepancies*, there are logical (and often quite simple) explanations to the many so-called con-

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traditions in the Bible. Some skeptics will refuse these reasonable responses, but honest unbelievers must admit that when someone **takes the time to understand** the text in the same fair-minded way we sincerely try to understand a neighbor, the Bible is seen for what it is: pure, harmonious truth. In a sense, then, I suppose we should thank Bible critics for bringing to our attention the scriptures they dislike and allege to be discrepant—for a study of such passages should only strengthen the faith of Christians and help honest unbelievers see the error of their ways.

*“The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but the word of the Lord endures forever” (1 Peter 1:24-25).*

# ENDNOTES

## Chapter 1

- <sup>1.</sup> For two Apologetics Press books on the inspiration of the Bible, see *Behold! The Word of God* (2007) by Kyle Butt and *The Bible Is From God: A Sampling of Proofs* (2020) by Dave Miller. See also the “Inspiration of the Bible” section at [apologeticspress.org](http://apologeticspress.org) for more than 200 articles on this subject matter.
- <sup>2.</sup> See Eric Lyons and Kyle Butt (2014), “7 Reasons to Believe in God,” <http://apologeticspress.org/APContent.aspx?category=12&article=5045>. See also AP’s book, *Does God Exist?* (2017).
- <sup>3.</sup> Alexander Pope (1709), “An Essay on Criticism,” [http://languageolog.ldc.upenn.edu/myl/ldc/ling001/pope\\_crit.htm](http://languageolog.ldc.upenn.edu/myl/ldc/ling001/pope_crit.htm), emp. added.
- <sup>4.</sup> Wayne Jackson (1997), “Homer Sometimes Nodded, but the Bible Writers Never Did!” <http://www.apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=13&article=249>.
- <sup>5.</sup> Horace, “Ars Poetica,” <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/horace/arspoet.shtml>, 1.359.
- <sup>6.</sup> Mike Davis (2008), *The Atheist’s Introduction to the New Testament: How the Bible Undermines the Basic Teachings of Christianity* (Denver, CO: Outskirts), pp. 1-3.

7. Dan Barker (2008), *godless: How an Evangelical Preacher Became One of America's Leading Atheists* (Berkeley, CA: Ulysses), pp. 222,242, emp. added.
8. Dennis McKinsey (2000), *Biblical Errancy* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus), p. 13.
9. John Loftus (2010), "Why I Don't Believe the Bible is God's Word," Debunking Christianity, [http://debunkingchristianity.blogspot.com/2006/07/why-i-dont-believe-bible-is-gods-word\\_12.html](http://debunkingchristianity.blogspot.com/2006/07/why-i-dont-believe-bible-is-gods-word_12.html).
10. "At one time, no physical evidence was forthcoming that the nation of the Hittites, mentioned so frequently in the Old Testament (nearly 60 occurrences of the term, e.g., Genesis 23:10; 26:34; Joshua 1:4), ever existed. No known evidence was available to verify their historicity. This circumstance provided fodder for those who dismissed the divine authenticity of the Bible.... It was Hugo Winckler who in 1906 excavated Bogazkale—the ancient capital of the Hittite Empire—an expansive site of over 400 acres" (Miller, pp. 20-21).
11. See Butt, pp. 58-60.
12. Ibid., pp. 173-206.
13. Kyle Butt and Dan Barker (2009), *The Butt/Barker Debate* (Montgomery, AL: Apologetics Press).
14. Ibid.
15. H.C. Leupold (1959), *Exposition of the Psalms* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker), pp. 166-167.
16. Dennis McKinsey (1998), "Tough Questions for the Christian Church," *Biblical Errancy*, October, emp. added.
17. Marvin R. Vincent (1997), *Word Studies in the New Testament* (Electronic Database: Biblesoft).
18. Matthew Henry (1997), *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Electronic Database: Biblesoft).
19. In the book of Jeremiah alone, the writer claimed over 500 times that his message originated **with God** (e.g., 1:4; 2:1,4; 3:6; 4:3; 5:19). Cf. also such New Testament verses as Galatians 1:12 and 1 Thessalonians 2:13.

## Chapter 2

1. See Eric Lyons and Kyle Butt (2006), “The Very Works that I Do Bear Witness of Me,” Apologetics Press, <http://www.apologeticspress.org/APContent.aspx?category=10&article=1772&topic=293>.
2. John 8:31-32; 17:17; Romans 10:17; 1 Corinthians 3:11; Ephesians 2:20. See Dave Miller (2019), *Is Christianity Logical?* (Montgomery, AL: Apologetics Press).
3. See Kyle Butt (2014), “What Is a Pastor?” <https://www.apologeticsspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=11&article=5011>.

## Chapter 3

1. As quoted in James A. Haught (1996), *2,000 Years of Disbelief: Famous People with Courage to Doubt* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus), p. 251.
2. New York Public Library, <https://www.nypl.org/voices/print-publications/books-of-the-century>.
3. Bertrand Russell (1927), “Why I Am Not a Christian,” <https://users.drew.edu/~jlenz/whynot.html>, emp. added.
4. Penn Jillette (2010), “How Did You Become an Atheist?” *BigThink*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E3rGev6OZ3w>, emp. added.
5. Ibid.
6. He also later became drunk and impregnated his daughters, albeit unknowingly (Genesis 19:30-36).
7. Jillette.
8. “Top 10 Worst Bible Passages” (2009), *Telegraph*, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/6120373/Top-10-worst-Bible-passages.html>, emp. added.
9. *Debate: Does the God of the Bible Exist? Dan Barker vs. Kyle Butt* (2009), Apologetics Press, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lnk4UCvY89U>.
10. Jean-Paul Sartre (1989), “Existentialism is Humanism,” in *Existentialism from Dostoyevsky to Sartre*, ed. Walter Kaufman, trans. Philip Mairet (Meridian Publishing Company), <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/sartre/works/exist/sartre.htm>, emp. added.

11. Peter Singer (2000), *Writings on an Ethical Life* (New York: Harper Collins), p. 193, emp. added.
12. Although Abraham did not know that God was testing him (any more than the disciples and the Gentile woman mentioned earlier knew that Jesus was testing them), **Abraham stood firmly upon the promises of God**. The Lord had guaranteed him saying, “Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and **with his descendants after him**.... My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear.... At the appointed time I will return to you, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son” (Genesis 17:19,21; 18:14). “And the Lord visited Sarah as He had said, and the Lord did for Sarah as He had spoken. For Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him. And Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him—whom Sarah bore to him—Isaac” (21:1-3). Once more God reminded Abraham that “**in Isaac** your seed shall be called” (21:12). The same God who tested Abraham’s faithfulness only a few verses later (in Genesis 22), is the same God Who had recently promised him that Isaac would have many offspring (Genesis 12:1-3; 13:16; 17:2,4-6,16). Thus, Abraham concluded that, though he might kill his son at God’s trying command, God would virtually immediately raise him from the dead.

Abraham’s insight and confidence is exhibited when he said to the young men who accompanied him and Isaac on part of their journey: “Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and **we** will come back to you” (Genesis 22:5). Notice that Abraham did not say that “I” will come back to you, but “we” (Abraham **and** Isaac) “will come back to you.” As the Hebrews writer notes, Abraham was willing to offer up Isaac, “concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead” (11:19).

13. For further insight into Genesis 22, see Dave Miller (2018), “God, Abraham, & Child Sacrifice,” Apologetics Press, <http://apologeticspress.org/APContent.aspx?category=12&article=5570>.
14. Dan Barker (2016), “The 10 Worst Old Testament Verses by Dan Barker,” *Freethought Today*, April, <https://ffrf.org/publications/free->

- thought-today/item/26141-the-10-worst-old-testament-verses.
15. If the owner of the donkey did not want to redeem the donkey, he then had to “break its neck” (Exodus 13:13). However, he could not sacrifice it. In short, the donkey had to be redeemed or killed.
  16. “The 10 Worst Old Testament Verses by Dan Barker.”
  17. *Ibid.*, emp. added.
  18. “Top 10 Worst Bible Passages.”
  19. “The 10 Worst Old Testament Verses by Dan Barker,” emp. added.
  20. For further insight into Psalm 137, see Kyle Butt (2016), “Psalm 137:9—Dashing Babies’ Heads Against a Stone,” Apologetics Press, <https://www.apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=13&article=913>.
  21. “Top 10 Worst Bible Passages.”
  22. Dan Barker (2016), *God: The Most Unpleasant Character in All Fiction* (New York: Sterling), p. 97, emp. added.
  23. *Ibid.*, p. 99.
  24. Charles Darwin (1871), *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* (New York: The Modern Library, reprint), pp. 873-874, emp. added.
  25. For more information on “The Biblical View of Women,” see Kyle Butt’s 2011 article by this title at <http://apologeticspress.org/APContent.aspx?category=13&article=3654>.
  26. For further reading on the role of women in the church, see Dave Miller (2014), “Male and Female Roles: Gender in the Bible,” Apologetics Press, <http://www.apologeticspress.org/APContent.aspx?category=11&article=5007&topic=389>.
  27. Emp. added.
  28. Valerie Tarico (2014), “11 Kinds of Bible Verses Christians Love to Ignore,” May 31, [https://www.salon.com/2014/05/31/11\\_kinds\\_of\\_bible\\_verses\\_christians\\_love\\_to\\_ignore\\_partner/](https://www.salon.com/2014/05/31/11_kinds_of_bible_verses_christians_love_to_ignore_partner/).
  29. John Simkin (2014), “Slavery in the Roman Empire,” *Spartacus Educational*, <http://spartacus-educational.com/ROMslaves.htm>.
  30. Simkin.
  31. “Conscription,” *Merriam-Webster.com*, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/conscription>, emp. added.
  32. “Who Must Register” (2008), Selective Service System, <https://web.archive.org/web/20090507213840/http://www.sss.gov/FSwho.htm>.

33. Frederick Danker, William Arndt, and F.W. Gingrich (2000), *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press), p. 76.
34. The one exception being never to “obey man” if submission to him conflicted with a command from God. For example, to those who “commanded” Peter and John “not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus” (Acts 4:17-18; 5:28), the apostles answered, “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). “For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20).
35. Various forms of slavery have been commonplace throughout history. Virtually every ancient civilization used slaves [“History of Slavery” (no date), *History World*, [www.historyworld.net/wrld-his/PlainTextHistories.asp?historyid=ac41](http://www.historyworld.net/wrld-his/PlainTextHistories.asp?historyid=ac41)]. Slavery was prevalent enough in Babylon in the 18<sup>th</sup> century B.C. to be mentioned numerous times in the Code of Hammurabi [“Code of Hammurabi, King of Babylon” (no date), [https://archive.org/stream/cu31924060109703/cu31924060109703\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/cu31924060109703/cu31924060109703_djvu.txt)]. What’s more, historians estimate that, by the time Paul wrote his New Testament epistles in the first century A.D., five to eight million slaves resided within the Roman Empire, including 15-25% of the total population of Italy [Walter Scheidel (2007), “The Roman Slave Supply,” pp. 3-6, <https://www.princeton.edu/~pswpc/pdfs/scheidel/050704.pdf>].
36. See Dave Miller’s article titled “Philemon and Slavery” (2005), <https://apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=11&article=560> to learn more about how “God would have slaves not to be treated as slaves.” The Gospel of Jesus Christ “effectively eradicates the forms of slavery that are deemed objectionable” (Miller).
37. If you would like to read a more extensive response to questions regarding slavery, and especially slavery in the Old Testament, see Kyle Butt (2005), “Defending the Bible’s Position on Slavery,” *Reason & Revelation*, 25[6]:41-47, June, [https://www.apologeticspress.org/pub\\_rar/25\\_6/0506.pdf](https://www.apologeticspress.org/pub_rar/25_6/0506.pdf).
38. Bertrand Russell (1927), “Why I Am Not a Christian,” <https://users.drew.edu/~jlenz/whynot.html>, emp. added.
39. Ibid.
40. For a detailed response to annihilationists who claim “eternal” hell is **not** a reference to “time” or “duration,” but only an allusion to

its “nature,” see Eric Lyons and Kyle Butt (2005), “The Eternality of Hell [Parts 1 & 2], Apologetics Press, *Reason & Revelation*, January & February, <http://apologeticspress.org/APContent.aspx?category=11&article=1474&topic=427>; <http://apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=11&article=1475>.

41. Russell.
42. Independent of people’s feelings.
43. Thomas B. Warren and Wallace I. Matson (1978), *The Warren-Matson Debate* (Jonesboro, AR: National Christian Press), p. 284.
44. See Eric Lyons and Kyle Butt (2017), *Reasons to Believe* (Montgomery, AL: Apologetics Press), pp. 1-50.
45. Though Bertrand Russell criticized Christ for preaching on hell, while praising Socrates for being “bland and urbane towards people who would not listen to him,” Socrates was **not** dealing with the absolute, most important message that man could ever hear: the way to eternal life versus the tragedy of eternal punishment. Logically speaking, Jesus’ warning others about hell was one of the most loving things that He (or anyone) could preach. After all, if His preaching on hell convinced men to follow God’s gracious “way” to eternal life (John 14:6), then He saved them from eternal death. No one thinks of firemen, policemen, or doctors as being unkind when they warn others of potential physical harm or death, so how could anyone logically argue that Jesus was being unkind when He warned His hearers of the greatest tragedy of all—eternal, spiritual separation from God?

## Chapter 4

1. See Kyle Butt (2007), *Behold! The Word of God* (Montgomery, AL: Apologetics Press).
2. Allen A. MacRae (1953), “The Scientific Approach to the Old Testament—Part 2,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 110[438]:134, April.
3. Farrell Till (1991a), “Scientific Boo-Boos in the Bible,” *The Skeptical Review*, January-February, <http://www.theskepticalreview.com/tsrmag/1boobo91.html>.

4. Farrell Till (1991b), "Bible Biology," *The Skeptical Review*, March-April, <http://www.theskepticalreview.com/tsrmag/2biolo91.html>.
5. Dennis McKinsey (1995), *The Encyclopedia of Biblical Errancy* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus), p. 213.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 209,230.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 216, emp. added.
8. Loren Petrich (1990), "Scientific Errors in the Bible," <http://www.skepticfiles.org/atheist/genesisd.htm>.
9. Ibrahim Khalil (2007), "The Bat in Bible and Quran," <http://www.articlesbase.com/science-articles/the-bat-in-bible-and-quran-113198.html>.
10. McKinsey (1995), p. 213; see also Dennis McKinsey (2000), *Biblical Errancy* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus), pp. 744,14, emp. added.
11. R. Laird Harris, Gleason Archer, Jr. and Bruce Waltke, eds. (1980), *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago, IL: Moody), p. 654; cf. Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles B. Briggs (1993), *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Electronic Database: Biblesoft).
12. Harris (1980), et al., pp. 654-655.
13. "Bat" (2020), San Diego Zoo, <http://animals.sandiegozoo.org/animals/bat>.
14. "Synecdoche" (2009), *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary* (2009), <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary>; see D.R. Dungan (1888), *Hermeneutics* (Delight, AR: Gospel Light, reprint), pp. 300-309; cf. Genesis 8:4; 21:7.
15. George Cansdale (1970), *All the Animals of the Bible Lands* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), p. 135, emp. added.
16. "Human Rabies Often Caused by Undetected, Tiny Bat Bites" (2002), *Science Daily*, <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2002/05/020506074445.htm>.
17. *Ibid.*, emp. in orig.
18. Butt, p. 124.
19. "Ruminant" (2009), *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary* (2009), <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary>.
20. Cf. Donald Morgan (2009), "Bible Absurdities," [http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/donald\\_morgan/absurd.html](http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/donald_morgan/absurd.html); cf. also McKinsey, 1995, p. 214.

21. See Alfred Ely Day (1996), "Coney," *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* (Electronic Database: Biblesoft).
22. Till (1991b).
23. Farrell Till (1990), "What about Scientific Foreknowledge in the Bible?" *The Skeptical Review*, July-August, <http://www.theskeptical-review.com/tsrmag/4scien90.html>; cf. Butt, pp. 103-130.
24. Gordon Wenham (1979), *The Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), p. 172, emp. added.
25. R. Laird Harris (1990), *Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), 2:571.
26. Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., Peter H. Davids, F.F. Bruce, and Manfred T. Brauch (1996), *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press), p. 158; cf. C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch (1996), *Keil and Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament* (Electronic Database: Biblesoft), new updated edition.
27. Cansdale, pp. 131-132.
28. Leonard Brand (1977), "Do Rabbits Chew the Cud?" *Origins*, 4(2):102-104, <http://www.grisda.org/origins/04102.htm>.
29. *Ibid.*
30. Till (1991b), emp. added.
31. Wenham, pp. 171-172.
32. Kaiser, et al., 1996, p. 158.
33. Jonathan Sarfati (1998), "Do Rabbits Chew their Cud?" *Creation*, 20[4]:56, September.
34. McKinsey, 1995, p. 213.
35. Morgan.
36. Till (1991b), emp. added.
37. Carl Zimmer (1994), "Masters of an Ancient Sky," *Discover*, February 1, emp. added. <http://discovermagazine.com/1994/feb/mastersofanancie333>.
38. See Eric Lyons and Kyle Butt (2008), *The Dinosaur Delusion: Dismantling Evolution's Most Cherished Icon* (Montgomery, AL: Apologetics Press), pp. 13-46.
39. Zimmer.
40. McKinsey, 1995, p. 213.
41. *Ibid.*, pp. 749,14.
42. Steve Wells (2009), *Skeptic's Annotated Bible*, <http://www.skepticsannotatedbible.com/>.

43. Petrich.
44. Till (1991b).
45. Robert Hutchinson (2007), *The Politically Incorrect Guide to the Bible* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery), p. 57.
46. “Millipedes and Centipedes” (2008), University of California Integrated Pest Management, <http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn7472.html>.
47. See “Most Leggy Millipede Rediscovered” (2006), *BBC News*, June 8, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/5052966.stm>.
48. “Millipede” (2009), <http://www.enchantedlearning.com/subjects/invertebrates/arthropod/Millipede.shtml>.
49. Adam Clarke (1996), *Adam Clarke’s Commentary* (Electronic Database: Biblesoft).
50. The Sun literally moves. It rotates about every 27 days at its equator ([www.nasa.gov/sun](http://www.nasa.gov/sun)), while traveling through the Milky Way Galaxy at an estimated 514,000 miles per hour ([starchild.gsfc.nasa.gov/docs/StarChild/questions/question18.html](http://starchild.gsfc.nasa.gov/docs/StarChild/questions/question18.html)).
51. Keep in mind that “the Father of lights” (James 1:17), Who is “light” (1 John 1:5), could create light easily without first having to create the Sun, Moon, and stars. Just as God could produce a fruit-bearing tree on Day 3 without seed, He could produce light supernaturally on Day 1 without the “usual” light bearers (which subsequently were created on Day 4). For more information, see Eric Lyons (2006), “When Were the Sun, Moon, and Stars Created?” [www.apologeticspress.org/AllegedDiscrepancies.aspx?article=1990&b=Genesis](http://www.apologeticspress.org/AllegedDiscrepancies.aspx?article=1990&b=Genesis).
52. The Moon also rotates on its axis as it revolves around Earth ([moon.nasa.gov/about/in-depth](http://moon.nasa.gov/about/in-depth)).
53. Justin Rogers (2017), “Does the Bible Teach a Flat Earth?” *Reason & Revelation*, July, 37[7]:74-77, [apologeticspress.org/APContent.aspx?category=11&article=5428&topic=82](http://apologeticspress.org/APContent.aspx?category=11&article=5428&topic=82), emp. in original.
54. A story has circulated on the Internet for many years that NASA discovered Joshua’s “missing day.” This story is a hoax. Although some (such as C.A.L. Totten and Harry Rimmer) have alleged to have discovered a “missing day” (in connection with Joshua 10), their calculations and differing conclusions are highly questionable and unproven at best and laughable at worst. Rimmer goes so far as to “arrive at the conclusion that the day of battle was Tuesday...

- July 22” [Rimmer (1944), *The Harmony of Science and Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), pp. 251-283].
55. Steve Wells (2012), *Skeptic’s Annotated Bible*, <http://www.skepticsannotatedbible.com/contra/whale.html>.
  56. Dennis McKinsey (1995), *The Encyclopedia of Biblical Errancy* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus), p. 142, emp. added.
  57. *Ibid.*, pp. 142-143.
  58. Barclay M. Newman, Jr. (1971), *A Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament* (London: United Bible Societies), p. 100.
  59. Frederick William Danker, William Arndt, and F.W. Gingrich, (2000), *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press), p. 544.
  60. W.E. Vine (1952), *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell), p. 209.
  61. Jack P. Lewis (1976), *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Austin, TX: Sweet), 2:178.
  62. Dave Miller (2003), “Jonah and the ‘Whale’?” Apologetics Press, <http://www.apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=6&article=69>.
  63. See Steve Wells (2010), *The Skeptic’s Annotated Bible*, [http://www.skepticsannotatedbible.com/mt/sci\\_list.html](http://www.skepticsannotatedbible.com/mt/sci_list.html); Dennis McKinsey, 2000, p. 263.
  64. William Lane (1974), *The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), p. 171.
  65. J.W. McGarvey (1875), *Commentary on Matthew and Mark* (Delight AR: Gospel Light), p. 121, emp. added.

## Chapter 5

1. Dennis McKinsey (1995), *The Encyclopedia of Biblical Errancy* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus), p. 332.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 313.
3. Dennis McKinsey (1996), “Dialogue and Debate,” *Biblical Errancy*, 149:1116, May.
4. As well as Romans 3:28.

5. Bob Seidensticker (2018), “Top 20 Most Damning Bible Contradictions (2 of 4),” *Cross Examined*, October 22, <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/crossexamined/2018/10/top-20-most-damning-bible-contradictions-2-of-4/>.
6. From Acts 7:58-13:9, Luke only referred to Paul as “Saul” (from Tarsus). After Saul’s conversion to Christ, and once he began his first missionary journey, Luke noted that “Saul...also is called Paul” (Acts 13:9). From that point forward (other than when Paul was detailing his past conversion to Christ in Acts chapters 22 and 26), the New Testament writers (including Paul) never used the name “Saul” again, only “Paul.”
7. For an explanation of “calling on the name of the Lord,” see <http://apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=6&article=775>.
8. Acts 16:14-15,30-34; 18:4-8; cf. Romans 6:1-4; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Galatians 3:26-29; Colossians 2:11-12.
9. It is often claimed by many confused individuals within “Christianity” that baptism is unnecessary for salvation since we are saved “by grace...though faith...**not of works.**”
10. Aristotle (n.d.), *Metaphysics*, trans. W.D. Ross, <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/metaphysics.4.iv.html>, 4:3.
11. “Having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances....” Cf. Romans 6:14; Galatians 3:10; 4:5; Colossians 2:14.
12. McKinsey (1996), 149:1116.
13. J.H. Thayer (1977), *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker), p. 248, emp. added.
14. For more information on the complimentary nature between (1) the gift of grace and (2) obedient faith, see volume 2 of *The Anvil Rings*, chapter 7.
15. We cannot say for sure if John 3:16 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 should 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.
16. Consider: would God have been pleased with any Israelites who reasoned that “Deuteronomy 6:4-5 is all I need. I don’t need to know any more than that”? The Shema, as Jews call it, certainly summarizes one of the main themes of Scripture, but treasuring this passage to the neglect of all others would have been perilous for the Israelites, as it would be for us—whether about this verse or any other.
  17. Depending on what dictionary one consults, the words “run,” “go,” “take,” and “stand” each may have 100 or more definitions (i.e., senses in which they can be understood).
  18. See [www.guinnessworldrecords.com/world-records/english-word-with-the-most-meanings/](http://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/world-records/english-word-with-the-most-meanings/) (emp. added), and specifically its reference to the 1989 printing of the Second Edition of *Oxford English Dictionary*.
  19. Example: “I object to the object hanging in the courtroom.”
  20. Example: “As I overlooked my research paper one last time, I decided to overlook the endnotes, since they are sometimes tedious to read.”
  21. Or derivatives thereof (e.g., knew, known, knowing).
  22. E.g., Exodus 6:3; 1 Samuel 3:7. For more information on different ways in which “know” is used in Scripture, see chapter 9, pp. 205-209.
  23. Interpretations based upon merely one word without any reliance on the immediate or remote context.
  24. Matthew 7:1; Philippians 4:13; Matthew 7:7.
  25. See Eric Lyons (2003), “To Judge, or Not to Judge,” [www.apologeticspress.org/APContent.aspx?category=11&article=1197](http://www.apologeticspress.org/APContent.aspx?category=11&article=1197).
  26. See Kyle Butt (2010), “Defending the Bible’s Position on Prayer,” [www.apologeticspress.org/APContent.aspx?category=13&article=3483](http://www.apologeticspress.org/APContent.aspx?category=13&article=3483).
  27. “Believe” (2019), *Merriam-Webster*, [www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/believe](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/believe).
  28. Example: “To have a firm or wholehearted religious conviction or persuasion” ([www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/believe](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/believe)).
  29. John 14:6; Ephesians 2:12-13; 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9.

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30. John 1:1,29; 6:48; 8:12; 10:9,11,14; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1; 20:31.
31. John 2:1-11; 4:46-54; 5:1-9; 6:1-14,16-21; 9:1-41; 11:1-44.
32. If a person doesn't first come to believe in the one true God of the Bible, nothing else matters. Everything else a person comes to learn and believe logically **follows** an acceptance of God's existence.
33. Matthew 10:32-33; Romans 10:9-10; 1 John 4:15; 1 Timothy 6:12.
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>, emp. added.
35. J.H. Thayer (1977 reprint), *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker), p. 511, emp. added.
36. See especially James 2:14-26 and Hebrews 11.
37. Cf. Romans 1:5; 16:26, ESV.
38. "Faith...is a work of God in the sense it is that which God has ordered man to do" [Guy N. Woods (1989), *A Commentary on The Gospel of John* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company), p. 125.] This phrase does not mean works performed by God; rather, the intent is "works required and approved by God" (Thayer, p. 248). Cf. Wayne Jackson (1997), "The Role of 'Works' in the Plan of Salvation," *Christian Courier*, 32:47, April.
39. Just another example of hyperbole (i.e., intended exaggeration).
40. Jeremiah 16:7; Acts 2:46; 27:34-35.
41. "Believe" (2019), *Merriam-Webster*, [www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/believe](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/believe).
42. Where are confession and repentance mentioned in Mark 16:16? Where are belief and confession in Acts 2:38? Where is belief mentioned in 1 John 4:15? Etc.
43. D.R. Dungan (1888), *Hermeneutics* (Delight, AR: Gospel Light, reprint), p. 305.
44. Acts 4:32; 5:14; 9:42; 10:45; 18:8; 1 Timothy 4:12; 6:2.

## Chapter 6

1. See Dewayne Bryant (2011), “The Non-Crucified Non-Saviors of the World,” <http://apologeticspress.org/APContent.aspx?article=973>.
2. Israel Knohl (2008), “The Messiah: Son of Joseph,” *Biblical Archaeology Review*, September/October, 34[5]:61.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., emp. added.
5. J.W. McGarvey (1875), *Commentary on Matthew and Mark* (Delight AR: Gospel Light), p. 194.
6. Kyle Butt (2003), “Wearing Gold and Braided Hair,” <http://www.apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=11&article=1210>, emp. in orig.
7. “Should You Believe in the Trinity?” (2000), <http://www.watchtower.org/library/ti/index.htm>.
8. Robert Jamieson, et al. (1997), *Jamieson, Faussett, Brown Bible Commentary* (Electronic Database: Biblesoft).
9. David Reed (1986), *Jehovah’s Witnesses Answered Verse by Verse* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker), p. 82.
10. See “Jesus is a False Messiah” (2016), [www.evilbible.com/do-not-ignore-the-old-testament/jesus-is-a-false-messiah](http://www.evilbible.com/do-not-ignore-the-old-testament/jesus-is-a-false-messiah). See also Steve Wells (2016), “How Much Power Did Jesus Have?” [www.skepticsannotatedbible.com/contra/power.html](http://www.skepticsannotatedbible.com/contra/power.html).
11. Dennis McKinsey (1995), *The Encyclopedia of Biblical Errancy* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus), p. 114. Cf. Steve Wells (2020), “Did Jesus Perform Many Signs and Wonders?” <http://www.skepticsannotatedbible.com/contra/signs.html>.
12. See Kyle Butt (2003), “Blasphemy Against the Holy Spirit—The Unpardonable Sin,” <http://www.apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=11&article=1218>.
13. Burton Coffman (1984), *Matthew* (Abilene, TX: ACU Press), p. 179.
14. Dennis McKinsey (2000), *Biblical Errancy* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus), p. 787.
15. Dennis McKinsey (1998), “Tough Questions for the Christian Church,” *Biblical Errancy*, October.

16. Frederick William Danker, William Arndt, and F.W. Gingrich, (2000), *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press), p. 367.

## Chapter 7

1. Dennis McKinsey (1995), *The Encyclopedia of Biblical Errancy* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus), p. 298, emp. added.
2. Steve Wells (2014), *The Skeptic's Annotated Bible*, <http://skepticsannotatedbible.com/gen/4p.html>, emp. added.
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13. Referring specifically to Matthew's account of the prophecy: Matthew 16:28.
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15. Wells, 2020.

16. The term “mountain” is sometimes used figuratively in the Old Testament in reference to a particular government or kingdom (Psalm 76:1-4; Jeremiah 51:25; Isaiah 11:9; Daniel 2:35).
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5. See Dave Miller (2020), “Genesis: Myth or History?” *Reason & Revelation*, May, 40[5]:50-57, <http://www.apologeticspress.org/APContent.aspx?category=9&article=5793>.
6. “United States: Life expectancy of women at birth from 2008 to 2018” (2020), Statista, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/263736/life-expectancy-of-women-in-the-united-states/>.
7. Genesis 25:26,32-34; 27:36; cf. Hosea 12:3.
8. Merrill F. Unger (1988), “Israel,” *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary* (Electronic Database: Biblesoft).
9. Matthew 16:17; 17:25; Mark 14:37; Luke 22:31; John 21:15-17.
10. Jesus, after all, commissioned the apostles to “make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19). What’s more, the apostles baptized penitent believers during, as well as after, Jesus’ ministry (John 3:22-26; 4:1-2; 1 Corinthians 1:14-16; 12:13).
11. All Scripture references in this section are from the ASV.
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15. Ibid.
16. Davis, 4[1]:40. See also E. W. Bullinger (1898), *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1968 reprint), p. 554.
17. Steve Wells (2007), *Skeptic’s Annotated Bible*, <http://skepticsannotatedbible.com/ex/12.html#29>.
18. Dennis McKinsey (1998), “Does the Bible Contradict Itself? (Part 1),” *Biblical Errancy*, 181:4, January.

19. For a reasoned defense of “God’s Just Destruction of the Canaanites,” see <http://www.apologeticspress.org/AllegedDiscrepancies.aspx?article=1630&b=Joshua>.
20. For other specific scriptures about the failure of the various tribes of Israel to drive out the Canaanites, see Joshua 13:13; 16:10; 17:11-13; 15:63; Judges 1:21,27-36; 2:1-5.
21. When Luke wrote that “all the world should be registered” by the decree of Caesar, and that “all went to be registered” (Luke 2:1,3), he obviously meant “all” in a limited sense—not every single person on the planet, but those under Caesar’s rule (i.e., within the Roman Empire).
22. “Hyperbole” (2018), *Merriam-Webster*, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hyperbole>.
23. If (a) there were a total of 450 years from the oppression of Abraham’s descendants to inheriting the land of Canaan (Acts 13:17-20 (NASB), and (b) Abraham’s descendants were oppressed in a foreign land for 400 years (Acts 7:6), and (c) they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years (Acts 13:18), then it must have taken them about 10 years to conquer the nations in the land of Canaan and receive their inheritance (Acts 13:19).
24. For more information, see Eric Lyons (2005), “Alleged Chronological Contradictions,” <http://apologeticspress.org/APContent.aspx?category=13&article=1582>.
25. Simply because much of Joshua is sequential does not mean that every single statement was written in chronological order.
26. “*Heykal*” (2006), *New Exhaustive Strong’s Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary* (Electronic Database: BibleSoft). Cf. “*Heykal*” (1993), *Brown, Driver, and Briggs Hebrew Lexicon* (Electronic Database: BibleSoft).
27. Rayan Zehn (no date), “Bible Contradictions #6: How Did David Kill Goliath?” *The Atheist Papers*, <http://atheistpapers.com/2014/01/07/bible-contradictions-6-how-did-david-kill-goliath/>.
28. Jeff Miller (2014), “How Could There Be Light Before the Sun?” Apologetics Press, <https://www.apologeticspress.org/APContent.aspx?category=13&article=5001&topic=82>.
29. See *The Anvil Rings* volume 1, chapter 1 for more information.
30. For further explanation of Jesus’ statements in Matthew 12:1-14,

- see *The Anvil Rings* volume 2, chapter 3 (“Did Jesus Condone Law-Breaking?”).
31. First and Second Kings were originally one book in the Hebrew Bible.
  32. This phrase is found 18 times in reference to the book of the kings of **Israel** and 15 times in reference to the book of the kings of **Judah**.
  33. First and Second Chronicles were originally one book in the Hebrew Bible.
  34. This phrase is found seven times in reference to both Israel and Judah and three times in reference to Israel alone. In addition, the phrase “the book of the kings” is found once without any particular kingdom specified.
  35. Some time ago, I heard an otherwise great Bible lesson where a preacher misidentified these books in this manner.
  36. If Jehoiachin was carried away into captivity in 597 B.C. (1 Kings 24:8-16), and he was in captivity for 37 years (1 Kings 25:27), then his release (and the closing of the book of Kings) would have taken place in 560 B.C.
  37. See J. Barton Payne (1988), “1 & 2 Chronicles,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), 4:304.
  38. Including two grandsons of Zerubbabel (1 Chronicles 3:17-21).
  39. Cf. the language at the end of 2 Chronicles (36:22-23) and the beginning of Ezra (1:1-4).
  40. See Payne, 4:304-306.
  41. For more information on various non-canonical writings referenced in the Bible, see AP’s article “Are There Lost Books of the Bible?” (2003), [www.apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=13&article=66](http://www.apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=13&article=66).
  42. Cf. M. Pierce Matheny and Roy L. Honeycutt, Jr. (1970), *Broadman Bible Commentary: 1 Samuel-Nehemiah*, ed. Clifton J. Allen (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press), 3:210.
  43. Steve Wells (2016), “The Skeptic’s Annotated Bible,” [www.skepticsannotatedbible.com/2chr/21.html](http://www.skepticsannotatedbible.com/2chr/21.html).
  44. See Eric Lyons (2005), “Alleged Chronological Contradictions,” Apologetics Press, <http://www.apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=13&article=1582>.

45. As opposed to the end of it, which is where Matthew, Mark, and Luke place the event.
46. C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch (1996), *Commentary on the Old Testament: 1 & 2 Kings; 1 & 2 Chronicles* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson), 3:209-210.
47. *Ibid.*, 3:643.
48. See R.D. Patterson and Hermann J. Austel (1988), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: 1 & 2 Kings*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), 4:173.
49. For more information on the uncanny brevity of Scripture, see Dave Miller (2020), *The Bible Is From God* (Montgomery, AL: Apologetics Press), pp. 91-94.
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51. C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch (1996), *Keil and Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament* (Electronic Database: Biblesoft), new updated edition.
52. For an answer to the skeptic's charge that the God of the Bible is evil for instructing the Israelites to kill countless thousands of Canaanites, including the Amalekites, see Eric Lyons (2013), "God's Just Destruction of the Canaanites," *Reason & Revelation*, 33[5]:57-59, May, <http://apologeticspress.org/apPubPage.aspx?pub=1&issue=1121&article=2151>.

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2. J.W. McGarvey (n.d.), *The Fourfold Gospel* (Cincinnati, OH: Standard), p. 107, emp. added.
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5. McGarvey, p. 279, ital. in orig.
6. Paul Carson (1995), "New Testament Contradictions," *The Secular Web*, [http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/paul\\_carlson/nt\\_contradictions.html](http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/paul_carlson/nt_contradictions.html).
7. See McGarvey, p. 109.

8. As quoted in Leon Morris (1995), *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), revised edition, p. 136.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 136.
10. See *The Anvil Rings* volume 2, chapter 5.
11. *Ibid.*
12. Steve Wells (2009), *Skeptic's Annotated Bible*, <http://www.skepticsannotatedbible.com>. Cf. Bart Ehrman (2009), *Jesus, Interrupted* (New York: HarperCollins), pp. 39-40.
13. See *The Anvil Rings* volume 1, chapter 10.
14. Keep in mind that sections of the **inspired** text which may be summarizations of what Jesus taught (rather than word-for-word quotations) cannot reasonably be used to justify the promotion of paraphrased Bible versions. The **Holy Spirit** inspired the biblical text in a word-for-word manner; He did not inspire Bible translators to summarize the sacred text. (If you want a summary of the Bible, consult a good article or commentary, not a "Bible.") We recommend Bible versions that hold in high esteem plenary, verbal inspiration, and translate the text with complete equivalence, rather than dynamic equivalence, which frequently results in paraphrasing. In short, if there is any paraphrasing to be done within the Bible, let it be by the **Holy Spirit**, Who in His infinite wisdom summarized various statements of Scripture.
15. See *The Anvil Rings* volume 1, chapter 4 for more information.
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17. J.W. McGarvey (1875), *Commentary on Matthew and Mark* (Delight, AR: Gospel Light), p. 276.
18. Caleb Colley (2010), "Why is Good Good?" Apologetics Press, <http://www.apologeticspress.org/APContent.aspx?category=95&article=3601>.
19. Cf. Wayne Jackson (1995), "Did Jesus Exist in the Form of God While on Earth?" *Reason & Revelation*, 15[3]:21-22, March, <http://www.apologeticspress.org/APContent.aspx?category=10&article=354>.
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  29. Dennis McKinsey (no date), "Jesus Christ is the Answer?"
  30. Dennis McKinsey (1983), "Jesus, the Imperfect Beacon," *Biblical Errancy*, February, p. 3.
  31. Wells (2020), <http://www.skepticsannotatedbible.com/lk/23.html>.
  32. For more information on where are the dead, see Dave Miller (2005), "Afterlife and the Bible," <http://www.apologeticspress.org/APContent.aspx?category=74&article=1478>.
  33. Wells (2020), [http://www.skepticsannotatedbible.com/contra/moses\\_speaker.html](http://www.skepticsannotatedbible.com/contra/moses_speaker.html).
  34. R. Paul Buchman (2001), "1001 Contradictions and Discrepancies in the Christian Bibles," <http://www.1001biblecontradictions.com/I2a%20-%20HOJ%20%5B76-103%5D.html>.
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  36. Cf. Wells (2015), <http://www.skepticsannotatedbible.com/2cor/4.html>; <http://www.skepticsannotatedbible.com/contra/lord.html>.
  37. R.C.H. Lenski (1963), *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg), p. 960, bracketed items added.
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39. For more information, see “Gnosticism” (1982), *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 2:484-490.
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  41. I. Howard Marshall (1978), *The Epistles of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), p. 74, emp. added.
  42. Woods, pp. 349-350, emp. added.

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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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# The Anvil Rings

## VOLUME 3

One of the first things that any honest truth-seeker would want to know, if someone came to him claiming to be in possession of revelation from God, is if the “revelation” was factually accurate. The fallibility of the message would be the first indication that it was man-made and not Heaven-sent. On the other hand, factual accuracy would be the first thing to expect from any document claiming to be God-breathed.

So what about the Bible? Its writers claimed special revelation from God, and yet many contend that these penmen made all manner of errors in writing Scripture.

- Did Moses make a scientific mistake in categorizing bats as birds?
- Was Jonah swallowed by a fish or a whale?
- Are we saved by grace, faith, or works?
- Did God actually tell Abraham to kill his son?

The skeptic has logically argued that, if the “inspired” apostles and prophets made mistakes in their “inspired” writings, then they were not guided “by inspiration of God.” Where skeptics have gravely erred, however, is concluding that the Bible writers actually made mistakes in their penning of Scripture. In truth, as you will continue to see in this third volume of *The Anvil Rings*, the “contradictions” that the Bible writers supposedly made are mere presumptions or misinterpretations on the part of the reader.

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