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Who, What, When, Where, Why, How of the Christian Experience

LESSON # 23

“DOES THE BIBLE CONTRADICT ITSELF?”



OBJECTIVE: An objection that is frequently heard is that the Bible is a book written by flawed people and has many contradictions in it. We'll spend some time exploring that statement and see if it is true or not.

This is perhaps one of the most frequently asked questions and one of the most common charges about the Bible. Many times when asked Christians who believe the Bible will simply answer, “No,” which is the right answer, but might not be taking into consideration why people are asking the question.

The most common reason people say, “the Bible is full of contradictions is because they heard somebody else say it.” The most common defense is to say, “it doesn't have any contradictions,” but not knowing how to explain it.

The facts are that most people who say there are contradictions and those who say there are not have never examined the issue or the scriptures that are supposedly contradictions.

Anybody that is a serious student of the Bible will have to admit that there seem to be contradictions in the Bible. But are there any? Let look honestly at the question and some of the scriptures that supposedly contradict themselves.

(I) LET'S DEFINE WHAT A CONTRADICTION IS

A) The dictionary says:

- 1) The act of saying something that is opposite or very different in meaning to something else



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- 2) A difference or disagreement between two things which means both cannot be true.
- B) Using these definitions statements like, “President John F Kennedy was shot and died in Dallas in 1964” and “I just saw John F Kennedy talking on television, he is still alive” would be a contradiction.
- C) To say “It is raining outside up to an inch and hour,” and “It’s not raining out, it’s a beautiful, clear day” would be contradictions.
- D) Can you think of some contradictions? List some.
- E) The ‘law of non-contradiction’ says something cannot be “A” and “not-A” at the same time.
- F) If a violation of this principle could be found in the scriptures it would be a problem, If the Bible said Jesus would be born in Bethlehem and somewhere else that Jesus would be born in Jerusalem, that would be a problem and a contradiction. It cannot be both at the same time.

(II) WHAT A CONTRADICTION IS NOT

- A) It is possible for there to be two different accounts or viewpoints of the same incident, event or situation without it being a contradiction.
- B) We need to see that a “difference” is not necessarily a “contradiction.”

Let’s examine what some might call a “contradiction”

- C) Recognizing “a difference” is not necessarily “a contradiction.”

- Read the account of Jesus healing in Matthew 20:29-34
- Read the account in Mark 10:46-52
- Read the same account in Luke 18:35-42
- What ‘difference’ do you notice in these accounts?
- Just because an account is “different” and does not include all the same details, does not make it a contradiction. We often in our own lives will share about experiences different than others who experienced it with us.



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- If one of the accounts would have said the men were not blind at all, that would be a contradiction. They simply choose to share some details others do not.

D) Some say the account of Judas hanging himself is contradicted in the scriptures. Preston Sprinkle, in a article for Relevant Magazine explains it this way:

Matthew 27:5 says that Judas hung himself, while Acts 1:18 says that he fell to the ground and burst wide open. These are two *different* accounts of Judas' death, but they are not formal contradictions. A contradiction would be one passages saying, "Judas hung himself and died" and another passage saying, "Judas *didn't* hang himself; rather, he threw himself from cliff and splattered on the ground."

In the Bible, it could be that he hung himself in a high tree, and then the rope snapped and he fell headlong and burst all over the ground. Or maybe his attempt at hanging himself didn't work (Matthew 27 doesn't actually say he died from hanging himself), and so he went and threw himself from a cliff, as recorded in Acts.

E) There is a **reason** that we have four different Gospels by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. These are four different viewpoints of the same life and the same events. Sometimes they are almost exactly the same, sometimes there are subtle differences, sometimes what one includes the other writer does not. These are not 'contradictions' they are simply 'different' than each other. Many of the 'so-called contradictions' can be answered this way.

F) ANOTHER EXAMPLE. What was written on the cross? Some would say the Bible contradicts itself here, as each Gospel says something different.

"And above His head they put up the charge against Him which read, 'THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS'." Matthew 27:37

"The inscription of the charge against Him read, 'THE KING OF THE JEWS'." Mark 15:26

"Now there was also an inscription above Him, 'THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS'." Luke 23:38

"Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It was written, 'JESUS THE NAZARENE, THE KING OF THE JEWS'." John 19:19



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QUESTION: Which one is right? Or, are they all right?

ANSWER: Most likely Pilate had written, "This is Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews" There is no contradiction here, just a 'difference' in what was reported by each of the Gospel writers.

G) Preston Sprinkle gives another example with how numbers are used in the scripture. The Bible writers wrote and talked, not unlike the way we write and talk. When we say things like, "I'll see you in an hour," do we mean in exactly sixty minute, to the second we will see you? Or do we mean in about an hour, and everybody understands this to be so? The Bible is no different.

Speaking of this Sprinkle says, *"For instance, 1 Chronicles 21:5 says that Judah had 470,000 valiant soldiers while the parallel in 2 Samuel 24:9 says they had 500,000. Is this a contradiction? Not if you read the passage according to the normal rules of language. We don't demand such precision in our daily speech; we round up or round down, and no one accuses us of lying."*

There are many such accounts in the scriptures, but we get the idea. We know that people round off numbers, make guesses as to how many people showed up for a meeting or a party. We say "a dozen" all the time, but usually that will mean a couple short of or a couple more than twelve. Nobody debates this or will say we are contradicting ourselves if we told one person, "A dozen people came to the party" and told somebody else it was eleven.

G) THE PARTING OF THE RED SEA IN EXODUS

In the Book of Exodus, one account says that God parted the Red Sea, while another account says that a strong wind from the east did it. Is this a contradiction or a difference?

ANSWER: A difference. God did it, but by sending a strong wind from the east. The most amazing part of the account is God sent it at the exact moment they were ready to cross!

H) One of the most quoted '**contradictions**' involves Judas, who betrayed Jesus. Let's read the two accounts and answer whether this is a contradiction or a difference.

Matthew 27:3-8

When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and the elders. "I have sinned," he said, "for I have betrayed innocent blood." "What is that to us?" they replied. "That's your responsibility." So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he



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went away and hanged himself. The chief priests picked up the coins and said, "It is against the law to put this into the treasury, since it is blood money." So they decided to use the money to buy the potter's field as a burial place for foreigners. That is why it has been called the Field of Blood to this day.

Acts 1:16-19

and said, "Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through the mouth of David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus-- he was one of our number and shared in this ministry." (With the reward he got for his wickedness, Judas bought a field; there he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out. Everyone in Jerusalem heard about this, so they called that field in their language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)

WHICH ONE WAS IT?

ANSWER: Both. He hung himself, and apparently at some point, the rope broke, or wild animals pulled him down, or something and he fell to the ground., maybe his weight pulling him down, and broke open. In this case, we get additional information. It seems like everybody wouldn't want to include the details Luke included in Acts. But Luke was a physician, an all of this would have been of interest to him.

Matthew tells us how he died. Luke includes what happened to him after his death. Simple.

LET'S REVIEW HOW AMAZING THE BIBLE IS WITHOUT HAVING ANY CONTRADICTIONS

SOME FACTS ABOUT THE BIBLE

- A. Written over a period of 1600 years.
- B. Over 40 authors (written by kings, prisoners, shepherds, doctors, Rabbi, tax collector, military, generals, fisherman, politician.)
- C. Written in different places. Fields, prisons, palaces.
- D. Written in three languages: Greek, Hebrew, Aramaic.
- E. The Bible deals with every major issue in life and speaks of many controversial issues; yet always without contradiction!
- F. The Bible contains history, law, medical information, poetry, songs,



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biographies, correspondence.

- G. No book has been published more than the Bible. The Bible is translated into well over 3,000 languages.
- H. No book has ever survived through more persecution and criticism than the Bible.
- I. The Bible has been the inspiration for more music, art, stories, plays, than any book in history.
- J. The Bible is the accurate historical document of its time.
- K. The Bible is the accurate archeological book of its time.
- L. The Bible is a book of prophecy. Three hundred concerning Christs' first coming, and 300 concerning His second coming, and hundreds concerning history.
 - 1. The Bible says that it may be discarded if the prophecies it contains fail: Deut. 18:20-22; 13:1-4; Matt. 7:15-20.

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