

INTRODUCTION

Lance taught us about the authenticity and reliability of the Bible ...

He gave us five descriptive words about the Bible ...

- Inspired
- Infallible
- Verbal
- Plenary
- Inerrant

Statement of logic ..

- God cannot error
- The Bible is the Word of God
- Therefore, the Bible cannot error

However, this does not mean that it has no difficulties in it ...

Book that Todd gave me ... “Is The Bible the Word of God?” ... the booklet lists a number of apparent contradictions and discrepancies ... things like ..

- Numerical difficulties
- Apparent contradictions ... relating to the resurrection accounts
- Questions about the Bible and science
- Questions about the Bible and history
- Questions about the flood
- Bible cruelty
- Discrepancies in dates
- Discrepancies in OT quotations
- Ethical questions ... killing of people in Canaan, etc.

Satan’s strategy is to cast doubt ... “Has God said?”

When someone brings up these difficulties ... ask them to show you ... most people have only heard, but not looked into it themselves.

There are good answers ... as St. Augustine wisely noted, “If we are perplexed by any apparent contradiction in Scripture, it is not allowable to say, the author of this book is mistaken; but either the manuscript is faulty, or the translation is wrong, or you have not understood.”

The mistakes are not in the revelation of God, but are in the limitations and mistake understanding of man.

SOME GUIDELINES FOR HANDLING DIFFICULT PASSAGES

1. APPROACH DIFFICULTIES WITH THE RIGHT ASSUMPTIONS

Mistake 1: Assuming that the Unexplained Is Not Explainable.

A scientist always assumes that there is an explanation when faced with some unexpected and unexplained anomaly.

In the same way, a Bible student assumes that there is a harmony in the Bible in light of what appear to be contradictions.

Essentially a wrong assumption ... why pursue an answer when one assumes there is none.

EXAMPLE ... critics once proposed that Moses could not have written the first five books of the Bible because there was no writing in Moses' day. Now we know that writing was in existence a couple of thousand years or more before Moses.

EXAMPLE ... critics once believed that the Bible was wrong in speaking of the Hittite people, since they were totally unknown to historians. Now, all historians know of their existence by way of their library that was found in Turkey.

Mistake 2: Presuming the Bible Guilty Until Proven Innocent.

Many critics assume the Bible is wrong until something proves it right. The Bible should be presumed "innocent" until it is proven guilty.

2. BE SURE YOU KNOW WHAT THE TEXT SAYS

For example, 1 Tim. 6:10 is as often misquoted as quoted and is a great illustration of the importance of knowing what the text says and what it means. What the text says is, "The love of money is a root of all sorts of evil." The love of money—not money itself—is decried. It is not the only source of evil but it is called a root. The Greek text says "all evil," but the idea of "all sorts" is implied by the phrase. That is what it says.

3. BE SURE YOU KNOW WHAT THE TEXT MEANS

While the Bible is infallible, human interpretations are not. The Bible cannot be mistaken, but we can be mistaken about the Bible.

The Bible uses some words and phrases that may not mean exactly what you expect them to mean.

For example, some have complained that Jesus was wrong to call the mustard seed the smallest seed when an orchid seed is really smaller. A closer examination of what Jesus *said* reveals that the word He used for "seed" *means* garden seeds that yield a crop. He says it was a seed which a man sows in the field (Matt. 13:31; Mark 4:31) and compares it to the garden plants.

Perhaps the most common mistake of critics is to take a text out of its proper context. As the adage goes, "A text out of context is a pretext." One can prove anything from the Bible by this mistaken procedure.

For example, the Bible says "there is no God" (Ps. 14:1). Of course, the context is that "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God'" (Ps. 14:1).

Many fail to understand the context of Jesus' statement to "Give to him who asks you," as though one had an obligation to give a gun to a small child who asked, or nuclear weapons to Saddam Hussein just because he asked.

Failure to note that meaning is determined by context is perhaps the chief sin of those who find fault with the Bible.

For example, James appears to be saying salvation is by works (James 2:14–26), whereas Paul taught clearly that it was by grace (Rom. 4:5; Titus 3:5–7; Eph. 2:8–9). In this case, James should *not* be construed so as to contradict Paul. Paul is speaking about justification *before God* (which is by faith alone), whereas James is referring to justification *before men* (who cannot see our faith, but only our works).

Another example is found in Philippians 2:12 where Paul says, "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." On the surface this appears to be saying salvation is by works. However, this is flatly contradicted by a host of Scriptures which clearly affirm that we are "saved by grace through faith, and that not of ourselves; it is a gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Eph. 2:8–9).

4. DON'T CONFUSE IMPRECISION WITH ERROR

Rounded numbers do fine when trying to give a general idea of the size of an object or an army. Round numbers are just that—round numbers. Like most ordinary speech, the Bible uses round numbers (1 Chron. 19:18; 21:5).

Critics often point to variations in the NT's use of the OT Scriptures as a proof of error. However, they forget that every *citation* need not be an exact *quotation*. It was then (and still is today) a perfectly acceptable literary style to give the

essence of a statement without using precisely the *same words*. The same *meaning* can be conveyed without using the same *verbal expressions*.

Sometimes they vary because there is a change of speaker. For example, Zechariah records the Lord as saying, “they will look on *Me* whom they have pierced” (12:10). When this is cited in the NT, John, not God, is speaking. So it is changed to “They shall look on *Him* whom they pierced” (John 19:37).

At other times, writers cite only part of the OT text. Jesus did this at His home synagogue in Nazareth (Luke 4:18–19, citing Isa. 61:1–2). In fact, He stopped in the middle of a sentence. Had He gone any farther, He could not have said as He did, “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” (v. 21). For the very next phrase, “And the day of vengeance of our God,” is a reference to His second coming.

Sometimes the NT paraphrases or summarizes the OT text (e.g., Matt. 2:6). Others blend two texts into one (Matt. 27:9–10).

There are also instances where the NT applies a text in a different way than the OT did. For example, Hosea applies “Out of Egypt have I called My Son” to the Messianic nation, and Matthew applies it to the product of that nation, the Messiah (Matt. 2:15, from Hos. 11:1). In no case, however, does the NT misinterpret or misapply the OT, nor draw some implication from it that is not validly drawn from it. In short, the NT makes no mistakes in citing the OT, as the critics do in citing the NT.

5. REMEMBER THAT WE DO NOT HAVE THE ORIGINAL WRITINGS

When critics do come upon a genuine mistake in a manuscript copy, they make another fatal error—they assume it was in the original inspired text of Scripture. They forget that God only uttered the original text of Scripture, not the copies. Therefore, only the original text is without error. Inspiration does not guarantee that every copy of the original is without error.

Especially in the Old Testament where numbers are involved, a minor copyist’s error might have been incorporated into the text.

For example, 2 Kings 8:26 gives the age of king Ahaziah as twenty-two, whereas 2 Chronicles 22:2 says forty-two. The later number cannot be correct, or he would have been older than his father. This is obviously a copyist error, but it does not alter the inerrancy of the original.

Several things should be observed about these copyist errors.

- 1. No one has ever found an original manuscript with an error in it.*
- 2. They are minor errors (often in names or numbers) which do not affect any doctrine of the Christian faith.*
- 3. Copyist errors are relatively few in number, as will be illustrated throughout the rest of this book. Fourth, usually by the context, or by another Scripture, we know which one is in error.*

6. DON’T CONFUSE PERSPECTIVE WITH FALSE TESTIMONY

Just because a witness only sees part of the accident or only sees it from one angle doesn’t mean that his testimony is false. So also, when a biblical writer records a part of an event which he saw and fails to mention some other part that someone else saw, his record is still true.

It is a mistake to assume that a Partial Report is a False Report.

An example ... Matthew (28:5) says there was one angel at the tomb after the resurrection, whereas John informs us there were two (20:12). Matthew did not say there was *only* one angel. One has to add the word “only” to Matthew’s account to make it contradict John’s.

Likewise, Matthew (27:5) informs us that Judas hanged himself. But Luke says that “he burst open in the middle and all his entrails gushed out” (Acts 1:18). Once more, these accounts differ, but they are not mutually exclusive. If Judas hanged himself on a tree over the edge of a cliff and his body fell on sharp rocks below, then his entrails would gush out just as Luke vividly describes.

These differences in accounts assure us that the authors did not conspire to “get their story straight.”

Compare, for example, Peter’s famous confession in the Gospels:

Matthew: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (16:16).

Mark: “You are the Christ” (8:29).

Luke: “The Christ of God” (9:20).

Just because two or more accounts of the same event differ, it does not mean they are mutually exclusive.

7. REMEMBER THAT SOME STATEMENTS IN SCRIPTURE ARE GENERAL STATEMENTS

Critics often jump to the conclusion that unqualified statements admit of no exceptions. They seize upon verses that offer general truths and then point with glee to obvious exceptions. In so doing, they forget that such statements are only intended to be generalizations.

The Book of Proverbs is a good example of such an issue. Proverbial sayings by their very nature offer only general guidance, not universal assurance.

Proverbs 16:7 is a case in point. It affirms that “when a man’s ways please the Lord, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.” This obviously was not intended to be a universal truth. Paul was pleasing to the Lord and his enemies stoned him (Acts 14:19). Jesus was pleasing the Lord, and His enemies crucified Him! Nonetheless, it is a general truth that one who acts in a way pleasing to God can minimize his enemies’ antagonism.

Another example of a general truth is Proverbs 22:6, “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.” However, other Scripture passages and experience show that this is not always true. Indeed, some godly persons in the Bible (including Job, Eli, and David) had some very wayward children.

8. REMEMBER THAT LANGUAGE ABOUT THE WORLD IS EVERYDAY LANGUAGE

Language about the world is often expressed from human perspective. We often speak of things as they appear to us rather than as we know them to be in the bigger picture of things. The same goes for the biblical authors, who speak of the sun standing still (Josh. 10:12) and heaven being above the earth (Isa. 40:22).

The Bible Uses Non-technical, Everyday Language. The Bible is written for the common person of every generation, and it therefore uses common, everyday language.

It is no more unscientific to speak of the sun “standing still” (Joshua 10:12) than to refer to the sun “rising” (Joshua 1:16). Contemporary meteorologists still speak daily of the time of “sunrise” and “sunset.”

9. REMEMBER THAT THE BIBLE RECORDS THINGS THAT IT DOES NOT APPROVE

The Bible is largely a book of history. As such, it sometimes records things without approving them.

For example, David’s sins (2 Sam. 11) and Solomon’s polygamy (1 Kings 11:1–8) are recorded without any sermons condemning them. The sermons are not necessary because the condemnation is clearly stated elsewhere.

It also records Satan’s lie without approving it (Gen. 3:4–5).

The truth of Scripture is found in what the Bible *reveals*, not in everything it *records*.