

Alleged Bible Difficulties and Contradictions

Bible difficulties, or apparent Bible contradictions, exist. The opponents of Christianity often use them in their attempts to discredit Christianity. Sometimes these attacks undermine the faith of Christians who either don't understand the issues or don't have the resources to deal with them.

The Originals are Inspired, not the copies.

What a lot of Christians don't know is that the autographs (original writings) are inspired, not the copies. The autographs are the original writings, the original documents penned by the biblical writers. The copies are copies **of** inspired documents. The copies are not themselves "inspired"; that is, they have no guarantee of being 100% textually pure. But don't worry, the Bible manuscripts are 98.5% textually pure and only a very small amount of information is in question because we have repetitive facts, instructions, and information found elsewhere in the Bible. Nevertheless, through the copying method over the years, various textual problems have arisen. Following is a list of the types of errors that have occurred in copying the manuscripts. I've used English as examples instead of going into the original languages for examples.

- **Dittography** - Writing twice what should have been written once.
 - A good example would be writing "latter" instead of "later." "Latter" means nearest the end. "Later" means after something else.
- **Fission** - Improperly dividing one word into two words.
 - Example: "nowhere" into "now here."
- **Fusion** - Combining the last letter of one word with the first letter of the next word.
 - "Look it is there in the cabinet... or Look it is therein the cabinet."
- **Haplography** - Writing once what should have been written twice.
 - A good example would be "later" instead of "latter." "Later" means after something else. "Latter" means nearest the end.
- **Homophony** - Writing a word with a different meaning for another word when both words have the exact same pronunciation.
 - Meat and meet have the exact same sound but different meanings. Also, there and their and they're another example.
- **Metathesis** - An improper exchange in the order of letters.
 - Instead of writing "mast," someone writes "mats," or "cast" and cats."

Does this mean we cannot trust the Bible?

Does this mean that the Bible we hold in our hand is not inspired? Not at all. Inspiration comes from God and when He inspired the Bible, it was perfect. Our copies of the original documents are not perfect, but they are very close to being so. The critics often erringly assume that even the copies are supposed to be perfect. But when we point out that God never said the copies would be perfect, they then ask how can the Bible be trusted at all? Quite simply, it is redundant in its facts and information and the amount of material that has any variation at all is so minute compared to the whole Bible that the Bible is considered to be almost 100% accurately copied. Furthermore, the copyist errors present no problems doctrinally.

Still, some will say that since there are, for example, copyist errors then we must throw out the entire Bible. But this argument is very weak. Are we to throw out a book science text book because there is a misspelled word or two in it? Does this mean that the whole book cannot be trusted? Of course not. Furthermore, compared to other ancient documents, the New Testament, for example, has far more textual evidence in its favor than any other ancient writing. Please consider the chart below.

Author	When Written	Earliest Copy	Time Span	No. of Copies
Homer (Iliad)	900 BC	400 BC	500 years	643
Ceasar (The Gallic Wars)	100 - 44 BC	900 AD	1,000 years	10
Plato (Tetralogies)	427 - 347 BC	900 AD	1,200 years	7
Aristotle	384 - 322 BC	1,100 AD	1,400 years	49
Herodotus (History)	480 - 425 BC	900 AD	1,300 years	8
Euripedes	480 - 406 BC	1,100 AD	1,500 years	9
New Testament	50 - 90 A.D.	130 AD	30 years	24,000

This chart was adapted from charts in Evidence that Demands a Verdict, by Josh McDowell, 1979, pages 42 and 43.

If the Bible cannot be trusted as being reliable because it has only a small percentage of copyist errors, then neither can the above documents be trusted that have far less textual support. In other words, the critics, to be consistent, would have to reject the Iliad, The Gallic Wars, Plato's Tetralogies, Aristotle's works, Herodotus' history, and Euripedes' writings. Are the critics willing to disregard all those writings -- which are far less well preserved -- if they throw out the Bible as being reliable? They should if they are fair in how they apply their criticism. But, since basically no one discards those writings as being so bad they can't be trusted, why would anyone apply the double standard to the Bible . . . unless they have an agenda.

We can see that the Bible is an ancient document that has withstood thousands of years of transmission with remarkable accuracy and clarity, far more so than the great works of old listed in the chart above. We can trust it to be what it says it is: the word of God.

Bible difficulties, or apparent Bible contradictions, exist in the Bible and we need to be aware of them and know how to respond to them because the opponents of Christianity often use them in their attempts to discredit Christianity by invalidating the Bible. Sometimes these attacks successfully undermine the faith of Christians who either don't understand the apparent discrepancies and don't realize they are not contradictions, or don't have the resources to deal with them.

What is a Contradiction? A contradiction occurs when one statement makes another statement impossible when both statements deal with the same topic at the same time. For example, in my right pocket is a set of car keys. In my right pocket there is no set of car keys. Both statements cannot be true at the same time. Therefore, to state that both were true is to state a contradiction.

If one gospel account says two people went to Jesus' tomb and another says that one went, it is not a contradiction because the accounts do not say that **only** one went or **only** two went. If one account said that only one went, then two could not have gone and that would be a contradiction.

One of the most common accounts used as a contradiction is how did Judas die, by hanging or falling down?

- **By hanging (Matthew 27:3-8)** - *"Then when Judas, who had betrayed Him, saw that He had been condemned, he felt remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, ⁴saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." But they said, "What is that to us? See to that yourself!" ⁵And he threw the pieces of silver into the sanctuary and departed; and he went away and hanged himself. ⁶And the chief priests took the pieces of silver and said, "It is not lawful to put them into the temple treasury, since it is the price of blood." ⁷And they counseled together and with the money bought the Potter's Field as a burial place for strangers. ⁸For this reason that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day."*
- **By falling (Acts 1:16-19)** - *"Brethren, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit foretold by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus. ¹⁷"For he was counted among us, and received his portion in this ministry." ¹⁸(Now this man acquired a field with the*

price of his wickedness; and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out. ¹⁹And it became known to all who were living in Jerusalem; so that in their own language that field was called Hakeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)"

There is no contradiction here at all because both are true. Remember, a contradiction occurs when one statement excludes the possibility of another. What happened here is that Judas went and hung himself and then his body later fell down and split open. In other words, the rope or branch of the tree probably broke due to the weight and his body fell down and his bowels spilled out. Also, notice that Matt. 27:3-8 tells us specifically how Judas died, by hanging. Acts 1:16-19 merely tells us that he fell headlong and his bowels gushed out. Acts does not tell us that this is the means of his death where Matthew does.

- **Context.** When dealing with opponents who site biblical difficulties, you must always challenge them to look at the verses in context. Very often, the problems disappear when doing this. In Matt. 5:48 Jesus says, "*Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*" Sometimes people will quote a verse like this and say that it is an impossibility to accomplish and that the Bible asks you to do impossible things. Therefore, it cannot be from God.¹ The answer, of course, is found in the context, Matt. 5:43-48.

*"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy.'*⁴⁴ *But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you*⁴⁵ *in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.*⁴⁶ *For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax-gatherers do the same?*⁴⁷ *And if you greet your brothers only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?*⁴⁸ *Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."*

- Notice that the context is dealing with loving all people equally. This is what it means to be perfect. It means to be perfect in loving others and it is a noble thing to strive for. Therefore, this is not speaking about perfection as God is perfect, but it is urging people to love as God loves -- equally.
- **Assumptions:** Sometimes people are looking for contradictions in the Bible and so they will find anything that looks like a contradiction. When this happens, point it out. When a person has misconceptions removed, many things fall into place. So, listen to what they say and see if there are any false assumptions.
- **Copyist Errors:** The fact is that the copies of the biblical manuscripts are not perfect. These copy errors account for several alleged contradictions. For example, how many charioteers were killed by David, 700 or 7000? In 2 Samuel 10:18 it says, 700 but in 1 Chronicles 19:18 it says 7,000. This is an example of a copyist error. Notice how the number is off by a single zero; that is, by a single notation of a digit. According to Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible, by Gleason Archer, page 382, regarding the characters used
- to designate numbers, "Nun final ך, was mistaken for dotted Zayin ך," would account for the copyist error in the text. Most probably, the correct number is 7,000 charioteers." Therefore, we can admit that there are copyist errors, though minor and infrequent. We must also point out that inspiration deals with the autographs (the original writings), not the copies. **We have copies of inspired documents.**