

DEMOLISHING CONTRADICTIONS

EXPLORING FORTY ALLEGED CONTRADICTIONS

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Foreword

O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge — by professing it some have strayed concerning the faith. Grace be with you. Amen (1 Timothy 6:20–21).

In more than 30 years of defending the authority of the Bible from its very first verse, I can't recall the number of times that someone has told me there are contradictions in the Bible. I ask them to name one. This is usually followed by silence, or perhaps a few vain attempts to name one.

Many people today buy into the assertion that the Bible is “full of contradictions,” but they haven't bothered to look into the claim for themselves. Since God's Word is perfect, any alleged contradiction in the Bible is going to be due to fallible, imperfect people having misconceptions. I have found time and time again that when an alleged Bible contradiction is brought up, it only takes a little research to refute it.

Most Christians, however, fail to give a good answer when they are presented with an alleged contradiction. This is especially true regarding the Book of Genesis and the charge that evolution/millions of years contradicts the Bible. The inability to have answers to such claims has had a particular effect on the youth in our churches. In my co-authored book *Already Gone*, which presents statistics about young adults (in their 20s) who have walked away from their conservative churches, 44 percent said they did not view the Bible as true and accurate. These 44 percent were asked “why?” Some of the top responses were:

24 percent — the Bible was written by men (which means the Bible would be in contradiction, for it calls itself the Word of God)

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15 percent — the Bible contradicts itself

14 percent — science shows the world is old (which signifies that the Bible in Genesis is in contradiction)

11 percent — the Bible has errors (which means again that it is in contradiction)

4 percent — evolution proves the Bible is wrong (another alleged Bible contradiction)¹

At least 68 percent of these young adults gave an answer that indicated that the Bible had contradictions. It should make you wonder: would they have walked away from the faith if they had answers for these many alleged contradictions when growing up?

These sad statistics show why it is so important for Christians to answer the alleged Bible contradictions. These young people would have discovered how easy it is to answer the challenges. This book is a great starting point in answering these alleged difficulties, and to teach you *how to think* and then *respond* to such claims. Otherwise, just as the Apostle Paul said to Timothy, they could stray from the faith. When Paul wrote these words about 2,000 years ago, he was warning Timothy to avoid a number of things, including *contradictions* that lead to false knowledge. We should heed this advice as well, and not buy into false claims, as some Christians have (including many seminary and Bible college professors). When even some professing Christians bring up alleged contradictions in Scripture, they have a contradiction of their own to tackle: how can they call the Bible the Word of God and say God got some things wrong?

I hope this book will be an encouragement as it equips you to stand on the authority of God's Word with all boldness and without compromise.

— Ken Ham
President and CEO,
Answers in Genesis

1. Ken Ham and Britt Beemer, *Already Gone* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2009), p. 107.

Introduction

Dr. Jason Lisle

“You can’t trust the Bible! It’s full of contradictions!”

It is a popular view these days. Many people have the impression that the Bible is simply an outdated book of fairy tales and contradictions. We are told that biblical stories are fine for children, and perhaps they even contain some moral value. “But surely” says the critic, “such stories cannot be taken seriously in our modern age of science and technology.”

After all, the Bible speaks of floating ax-heads, the sun apparently going backward, a universe created in six days, an earth that has pillars and corners, people walking on water, light before the sun, a talking snake, a talking donkey, dragons, and a senior citizen taking two of every animal on a big boat! On the surface, these things may seem absurd, particularly to those unfamiliar with the Christian worldview. But to make matters even worse, it is alleged that the Bible contains *contradictions*. That is, the Bible seems to say one thing in one place, and then the opposite in another. Which are we to believe? Obviously, two contradictory statements cannot both be true.

While we might come to accept many of the peculiar claims of Scripture, a genuine contradiction cannot be true *even in principle*. It is not possible to have a sunny night, a married bachelor, dry water, a true falsehood, and so on. Thus, the claim that the Bible contains contradictions is a serious challenge indeed. For if the Bible has even one real contradiction, then it cannot be completely true. Yet the Christian asserts that the Bible is the Word of God and without error. The claim of contradictions is a serious allegation against the Christian worldview, and we must be prepared to defend the Bible against such claims.

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Logical vs. Psychological Problems

Aside from the claim of contradictions, most objections to the Bible are not actually problems at all from a logical perspective. For example, suppose that someone claims, “The Bible can’t be trusted because it contains accounts of miracles, and miracles are clearly impossible.” This argument is not rationally sound because it *begs the question*. Clearly, an all-powerful God as described in the Bible would be capable of doing miracles. Thus, by merely assuming that miracles are impossible, the critic has already dismissed the possibility that the Bible is true. His argument is circular. The critic is essentially arguing that the Bible is false because the Bible is false.

But if the Bible is true, then certainly it is not a problem for an all-powerful God to make the sun go backward, to walk on water, to make a donkey talk, or to raise the dead. These things may seem counter-intuitive, but they are not *illogical*. They are merely a *psychological* problem for some. Someone may subjectively feel that it is impossible for the sun to go backward as suggested in 2 Kings 20:11, but there is nothing illogical about an all-powerful God doing just that. To argue that something is impossible because it “seems” counter-intuitive is not rational. Just imagine a lawyer arguing that his client is innocent by saying, “Your Honor, I just really, really believe in my heart that he is innocent. I just don’t feel that he could have done it.” This is nothing more than a mere opinion; it is not evidence at all and would be a silly argument.

Yet people apply this same kind of thinking to the Bible. They essentially argue that the Bible cannot be true because it doesn’t “feel” right to them. Whenever someone asserts that miracles are impossible or that some biblical claim doesn’t “seem” plausible, he is essentially just assuming that the Bible is false. These kinds of assertions need no refutation because they are not *logical* objections, merely psychological opinions. They simply tell us about the emotional state of the critic rather than presenting a genuine challenge to the Christian worldview.

The Challenge of Contradictions

But contradictions are different. If the Bible asserts a particular claim and also asserts a contrary claim, clearly they cannot both be true at the same time. If the Bible contains genuinely contradictory information, then it cannot really be completely true, since one of the two claims would have to be false. Thus, unlike mere subjective opinions about what is plausible, the claim that the Bible contains contradictions is a real challenge — one that Christians should take seriously.

But what constitutes a contradiction? Most alleged biblical contradictions are not even “apparent” contradictions because there is no necessary conflict between the two propositions. For example, the statements, “Jesus is descended from Adam” and “Jesus is descended from Noah” are not contradictory since both are true. A contradiction is a proposition and its negation (symbolically written, “A and not A”) at the same time and in the same relationship. The law of non-contradiction states that a contradiction cannot be true: “It is impossible to have A and not A at the same time and in the same relationship.” The last part of this definition is crucially important. Obviously, A and not A could each be true at *different* times. And this resolves a number of alleged biblical contradictions. They could even be true at the same time if the relationship is different.

Difference of Sense or Relationship

Since words can be used in different senses, it is possible to have A and not A at the same time as long as the relationship or sense of the word is different. A man can be a bachelor and also married, in the sense that he is “married to his job.” This does not conflict with the fact that the bachelor is unmarried in the sense of not having a wife. There is no contradiction if the sense of the word differs. Some of the alleged Bible contradictions fall under this category. For example, it is claimed that James contradicts Romans on the topic of justification.

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Romans 4:2–3 teaches that Abraham was justified by faith alone, not by works. However, James 2:21, 24 teaches that Abraham was justified by works and not by faith alone. Do we have a contradiction here? We do have A and not A at the same time, but the relationship differs. Romans 4 is teaching about justification before God; by faith alone, Abraham was considered righteous *before God*. But James 2 is teaching about justification *before men* (James 2:18); by works (as a result of faith), Abraham was considered righteous before men. There is no contradiction here.

Along the same lines, the Trinity is sometimes alleged to be a contradictory concept: “How can God be both one and three?” But upon inspection, we can see that there is no contradiction because the relationship differs. The Bible teaches that God is one in one sense, and three in a *different* sense. Specifically, there is one God (Isaiah 45:5–6, 18, 22), and yet there are three persons who are God: the Father (Galatians 1:1), the Son (John 20:31), and the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3–4). It may seem counterintuitive that God is one in nature and three in persons, but there is no *contradiction* here. The Trinity may be a psychological problem for some people, but it is not a logical problem.

False Dilemma

Some alleged contradictions of the Bible are presented as a dilemma: “Was the Bible given by inspiration of God as indicated in 2 Timothy 3:16, or was it written by men as indicated in other passages (Luke 1:3; John 21:24)?” The implication is that only one of these can be true, and so, the Bible must contain errors. But this is the *fallacy of the false dilemma* because there is no reason why the Bible cannot be both inspired by God and also written by men. God used men to write His Word (2 Peter 1:21). Another example of a false dilemma is when two words or names are synonymous: Is Reuben the son of Jacob (Genesis 35:22–23) or the son of Israel (Genesis 46:8)? Both are true because Israel is Jacob.

Contextual Considerations

Some examples of alleged contradictions commit the fallacy of *taking the text out of context*. For example, Genesis 1:1 indicates that God exists and has made everything. Suppose someone argued that this contradicts Psalm 14:1, in which we read “there is no God.” But to suppose that this is a contradiction would be absurd, since the excerpt from the Psalms is out of context. In context, Psalm 14:1 teaches that “The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God.’ ” When the context is considered, there is no contradiction at all. We must remember that the Bible records statements and events that it does not endorse.

Clearly, we must endeavor to honor the author’s intentions whenever we study any work of literature. The Bible is no exception. Historical narrations should be taken in the normal (literal) way. Poetic passages in the Bible should not be pressed beyond their intention. Prophetic sections that use a lot of verbal imagery should be taken as such. Figures of speech in the Bible should not be taken as anything other than figures of speech. No, the earth does not *literally* have pillars, or corners, but it does *figuratively*. Even today a person may be considered a “pillar of the community,” and we still sometimes use the “four corners of the earth” as a reference to the cardinal directions. To suggest that such passages are teaching a flat earth is unwarranted, and commits the fallacy of taking the text out of context.

There are places where the Bible uses language of appearance, where something is described as it appears from a human perspective. Obvious examples are where the Bible mentions sunrise and sunset. When we examine the context of such verses, it is clear that the authors are not advancing an astronomical model; they are talking about sunrise and sunset (or the direction thereof: east and west, respectively) in the same sense that we do today. It would be fallacious to pull such verses out of context to argue that the Bible is teaching that the sun goes around the earth in a Newtonian physics sense.

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Fallacy of Sweeping Generalization

There are a number of places where the Bible speaks in terms of generalizations — things that are usually (but not universally) true. The Book of Proverbs contains many of these. It is not a contradiction to have some instances where the general rule does not apply. Therefore, we must be careful not to commit the fallacy of a *sweeping generalization* — applying a general principle as if it were a universal rule. The Proverbs are not intended to be taken as universal rules, but rather as general principles that work most of the time.

Moreover, the Bible also contains things that are indeed rules, but that have acceptable exemptions. Clearly, the Bible teaches that it is wrong to kill, and yet understandably makes exceptions for self-defense, punishment for certain extreme crimes, and during battle. Exceptions to a general principle or exemptions to a rule are not contradictions and thus pose no challenge to the Christian worldview.

Translational Issues

Another difficulty arises due to the fact that most of us read the Bible in a different language than the original. This allows for the possibility of translational issues. One example of confusion that can arise due to translation is found in John 21:15–17. Here Jesus asks Peter three times, “Do you love me?” Peter replies three times that he does love Jesus. In English translations, one word is used for love in all instances, and so, the conversation seems strange. However, in Greek, two words for love are used. When Jesus asks if Peter loves Him, He uses the word *agape* — intending a selfless, godly love. However, when Peter answers he uses the word *phileo* — intending brotherly love. Although love is a perfectly correct way to translate both of these words, some of the subtlety of the original is lost in English versions.

In some instances the correct English translation of a word is disputed. In such cases, it is often helpful to consult several different versions of the Bible to see the range of possible interpretations, or to consult a Hebrew/Greek lexicon. Recall that we should always attempt to honor the intentions of the author, and in many cases

this entails a careful study of the word or phrase in question. It would be disingenuous to accuse the Bible of a contradiction in an English translation when there is no contradiction in the original language.

Additionally, there are very slight variations in ancient manuscripts of the Bible. Although none of the ancient variants differ in any essential way, some do contain differences of numbers, spelling, and an occasional word or phrase. In most cases, it is easy to tell from context which variant is the original. Variations in ancient manuscripts that are clearly copyist errors should not be taken as the intention of the author, since the author is not responsible for transmission errors. The consistent Christian does not claim that a miscopying of Scripture contains no errors — only that the original manuscripts contained none, since they were divinely inspired. Therefore, an alleged contradiction can be dismissed if the ancient manuscripts do not contain the error.

Contradictions of Inference

Nor are *contradictions of inference* a genuine problem for the Christian worldview. A contradiction of inference is where we merely *infer* a contradiction that the text does not actually state. As one example, we might ask, “Where did Mary and Joseph take Jesus after Bethlehem?” Matthew 2:13–15 indicates that they went to Egypt to be safe from King Herod. However, Luke 2:22, 39 indicates that they took the child to Jerusalem (only a few miles from Bethlehem) and then to Nazareth after that. There is no mention of Egypt in Luke’s account. Is this a contradiction?

Although we might *infer* that both Matthew and Luke are describing the same time period and the same visit to the Bethlehem region, the text does not actually state this. Perhaps Matthew is describing a second journey to Bethlehem (or possibly one of the surrounding regions); in fact, the visit of the wise men may have been as much as two years after the birth of Christ, according to Matthew 2:16. So it may be that Joseph and his family went to Nazareth a few months after the birth of Christ in Bethlehem and then

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to Egypt after their second trip to the Bethlehem region. Although this is only one possibility, the point is that there is no necessary contradiction between Matthew 2 and Luke 2. Any apparent conflict exists only in the mind, not in the text.

Another contradiction of inference is what we might call the *X and only X fallacy*. This occurs when a reader erroneously assumes that a number stated in the Bible (X) indicates *only X* and not more. As an example, consider the account of the demon-possessed man recorded in Mark 5:2–16 and Luke 8:26–37. According to Matthew 8:28–34, there were two men who were demon-possessed. Does this conflict with Mark and Luke? We might be inclined to *infer* from Mark and Luke that there was *only* one man, but the text does not actually say this.

So to call this a contradiction is to commit the X and only X fallacy. After all, if there were two men, then it must also be true that there was one man (as well as one other man)! The fact that Mark and Luke do not mention the other man is interesting. Perhaps one man was much more violent or otherwise noteworthy than the other; we can only speculate. In any case, Mark and Luke do not say that there was *only* one man; therefore, there is no contradiction here.

Contradictions of inference tell us that we have incorrectly imagined the details that were not provided by the text. They are not problems with the Bible because such contradictions exist only in our speculations, not in the biblical text. We must always be careful about drawing dogmatic conclusions from things the Bible does not actually state.

Factual Contradictions and Begging the Question

Another type of criticism might be called an *apparent factual contradiction*. In this case, rather than claiming that the Bible contradicts itself, the critic alleges that the Bible contradicts a well-established fact. There are two types of alleged factual contradictions, and both turn out to be fallacious. The first type comes from a misreading of the text. This could stem from any of the fallacies

already listed. A word could be taken in the wrong sense; a verse could be taken out of context; there could be a translational or manuscript dispute; or something could be assumed to be a teaching of Scripture when in fact it is only an inference by the reader.

An example of this type of alleged factual contradiction is the claim that the Bible teaches that the earth is stationary, which contradicts the fact that the earth moves around the sun. In this case, the biblical passages (such as Psalm 93:1, 96:10) have been taken out of context. These are poetic passages indicating the world has been established by God and will not deviate from His plan. These poems are not attempting to develop an astronomical model, and say nothing about physical motion. In fact, the Psalmist also says, “I shall not be moved” (Psalm 16:8; KJV). Clearly, the author does not intend that he will be physically stationary — rather he means that he will not deviate from the path God has created for him.

In the second kind of alleged factual contradiction, the critic has understood the biblical text properly, but is confused about what the external facts actually are. In this case, secular beliefs are assumed to be facts that are beyond question. Examples include: the big bang, evolution, a billions-of-years’ time scale, naturalism, and the secular order of events. The Bible does indeed contradict all of these things, but the critic merely assumes that it is the Bible that is wrong. He then argues that since the Bible contradicts these “facts,” it must be wrong. But this is the fallacy of *begging the question*. The critic has simply assumed that the Bible is wrong (by assuming the secular claims are true), and then uses this to argue that the Bible is wrong. This is nothing more than a vicious circular argument.

The Law of Non-Contradiction — a Problem for the Non-Christian

The critic asserts that the Bible is false because it contains contradictions. Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of this claim is that it actually backfires on the critic. The reason is this: *only if the Bible is true would contradictions be unacceptable!* Most people simply assume the law of non-contradiction; they take it for granted that

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a contradiction cannot be true. But have you ever stopped to think about why a contradiction cannot be true?

According to the Bible, all truth is in God (Colossians 2:3; Proverbs 1:7), and God cannot deny (go against) Himself (2 Timothy 2:13). So it makes sense that truth cannot go against itself. Since the sovereign, eternal God is constantly upholding the entire universe by His power (Hebrews 1:3), the Christian expects that no contradiction could possibly happen anywhere in the universe at any time. The universal, unchanging law of non-contradiction stems from God's self-consistent nature.

But apart from the Bible, how could we know that contradictions are *always* false? We could only say that they have been false in our experience. But our experiences are very limited, and no one has experienced the future. So if someone claimed that he or she has finally discovered a true contradiction, the non-Christian has no basis for dismissing such a claim. Only in a biblical worldview can we know that contradictions are always false; only the Christian has a basis for the *law* of non-contradiction.

The Bible tells us that all knowledge comes from God (Colossians 2:3), and when we reject biblical principles, we are reduced to foolishness (Proverbs 1:7). We see this demonstrated in the critic who tries to use God's laws of logic to disprove the Bible. Such an attempt can only fail. The law of non-contradiction is a *biblical principle*. Therefore, whenever anyone uses that law as a basis for what is possible, he or she is tacitly assuming that the Bible is true. The critic of the Bible must use biblical principles in order to argue against the Bible. In order for his argument to be meaningful, it would have to be wrong.

Summary and Conclusions

In this introduction, we've seen that many criticisms of the Bible are not even alleged contradictions, but mere opinions about what is possible. These are not logical problems for the Bible; they are simply psychological problems for the critic. A contradiction would be "A and not A at the same time and in the same relationship." Many

alleged biblical contradictions have been asserted. But in most cases we find that A and not A are *not* at the same time, or are used in a *different* sense or relationship and are thus not contradictions at all. The critic sometimes presents a pair of biblical principles as if they were two mutually exclusive options, when, in fact, this is not the case — a *false dilemma*.

In other instances, we find that the words or phrases have been taken *out of context*: poetic passages taken hyper-literally, figures of speech not taken as such, or language of appearance taken as a Newtonian physics. Sometimes critics commit the fallacy of *sweeping generalization*: taking a general principle as if it were universally true, or taking a rule as if it had no exceptions. Some alleged contradictions are nothing more than a *translational or manuscript issue*; the original text contains no contradiction at all.

Additionally, a number of contradictions are merely erroneous *inferences*: they exist only in the mind of the critic, not in the biblical text. One in particular that occurs frequently is when the critic assumes that a number (X) means “only X” when the Bible does not state this. Also, the Bible is sometimes alleged to conflict with an external “fact.” A number of these claims stem from a misreading of Scripture. In other cases, the critic has simply assumed that the Bible is in error when it contradicts a particular belief. In doing so, the critic has committed the fallacy of *begging the question*.

Perhaps most significantly, we have shown that any claim of alleged contradiction actually *confirms* that the Bible is true. This is because the law of non-contradiction is based on the biblical worldview. When the critic accepts that a contradiction cannot possibly be true, he has implicitly presumed that the Bible must be true.

So when someone alleges that the Bible cannot be trusted because it contains contradictions, we might turn the question around and simply ask him, “If the Bible is not true, then why would contradictions be *wrong*?” If the Bible were not true, there would be no basis for saying that contradictions are always false; thus, the critic could not argue that the Bible must be false for allegedly containing them. But if the Bible is true, then it cannot have

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contradictions. Thus, alleged contradictions really cannot possibly be a problem for the Bible — even in principle.

Nonetheless, it is appropriate to be aware of some of the most frequently cited claims of contradictions and to understand the details of why such claims fail when we understand the context. This will serve to confirm that the Bible does not contain contradictions; it is true in its entirety. Alleged contradictions turn out to be nothing more than fallacious reasoning of the critic. Essentially, all of the claims addressed in this book fall under one of the categories listed above; but it is helpful to see each one fleshed-out, lest we be accused of skirting the hard questions.

The Bible tells us “but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence” (1 Peter 3:15; NASB). In this spirit, we offer this book. We trust it will affirm the faith of Christians and challenge the beliefs of non-Christians. We pray this series will glorify our Lord Jesus, “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:3; NASB).

Genesis

Meat of the Matter

Bodie Hodge

Was Abel eating meat soon after the Curse when he wasn't supposed to be (Genesis 1:29), since he kept the flocks and sacrificed an animal in Genesis 4:2–4?

This alleged contradiction comes from assuming Abel was doing something that Scripture doesn't say he was. The relevant passages are:

And God said, "See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food" (Genesis 1:29).

Then she bore again, this time his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD. Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering (Genesis 4:2–4).

Those assuming this is a contradiction are assuming that Abel, who was commanded by God to be vegetarian, was eating the meat from his sacrifice. Matthew indicates that Abel was righteous and therefore was surely not being disobedient to God's command in Genesis 1:29 to be vegetarian.²

So that upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar (Matthew 23:35; NASB).

So, there is no reason to assume that Abel was eating any of the meat — and thus, there is no contradiction.

2. It wasn't until Genesis 9:3 that mankind was permitted to eat meat.

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As an aside, then, why was Abel tending the flocks? We need to consider that flocks can yield many other things, such as wool, milk, leather, sacrifices for sin, etc.

A fattened (well-fed and tended) lamb, for example, would likely be the one that would be producing the most wool, had the most life ahead of it, and so on; hence the most valuable. So when Abel sacrificed the fattened ones, he was offering his best, and it was a blood sacrifice. This sacrifice was acceptable to the Lord, as it mimicked what God did with Adam and Eve as blood sacrifice (Genesis 3:21) to cover their sins (Hebrews 9:22).

The passage doesn't indicate that Abel *ate* of the sacrifice, so there is really no reason to assume he did. When God sacrificed animals to cover Adam and Eve's sin, there is no indication that they ate either, and since Abel mimicked what God did, then there is no reason to believe that he would have eaten from the sacrifice.

The first possibility of eating the sacrifice would have been with Noah and his family after the Flood when they sacrificed and God told them they were not restricted to vegetarian meals (Genesis 8:20–9:3), although some of those who perished in the Flood may have disobeyed and eaten meat earlier.