

Does the Bible Contain Errors?

If the Bible is inspired by God it cannot contain errors. But critics continually cite supposed biblical contradictions and inaccuracies. Here are some examples that show God's Word is entirely correct.

The Bible has been maligned and attacked by critics who claim that God's Word is full of errors and contradictions. And today even some "Christian" clergymen are saying that the Bible's teachings may or may not be true.

Skeptics assert that the Bible can't be completely trusted and that it is full of errors, especially in areas such as history and science. Because of these "errors," the skeptics refuse to accept the Bible as being the inspired, infallible Word of God.

What is the truth about these so-called errors? Let's look at some examples critics use in their attacks on the Bible's trustworthiness.

The two genealogies

Matthew 1 and Luke 3 both give genealogies of Christ, but they appear to contradict. Actually they complement each other.

Matthew's genealogy is clearly that of Joseph. Matthew recorded it for legal purposes; he was writing to prove to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah, and the Jews' custom in keeping records was to trace descent through the father. Legally, the Jews of Jesus' day looked on Him as a son of Joseph (John 6:42).

Also, Joseph's lineage was given to emphasize the fact that Jesus had to be born of a virgin. He could never sit upon the throne of David if Joseph were His real father, since Jeconiah (or Jeconiah) was one of his ancestors (Matt. 1:11-12).

Jeconiah, called Coniah in Jeremiah 22:24-30, was so evil God cursed him and his descendants and said "no man of his seed shall prosper, sitting upon the throne of David,

and ruling any more in Judah" (verse 30). Jeconiah did have children (1 Chron. 3:17) but was childless as far as having any descendants on the throne. Joseph's children could not, therefore, ever sit on David's throne.

How, then, could Christ be a descendant of David and qualify to sit on the throne? Enter the genealogy in Luke 3.

Luke's genealogy is actually Mary's. According to Jewish usage, Mary's genealogy was given in her husband's name. The original Greek merely says Joseph was "of Heli" (Luke 3:23). In fact, Joseph was the son-in-law of Heli, since his father was Jacob (Matt. 1:16).

Unlike in Joseph's lineage, there was no block to the throne of David in Jesus' actual blood genealogy through Mary. Her ancestor was David's other son, Nathan (Luke 3:31). To fulfill His promise to establish David's throne forever, God honored Nathan by making him the ancestor of the promised King who would sit on David's throne through eternity (Luke 1:31-33).

But how could Mary transmit David's royal inheritance — the right to the throne — to her son, since all inheritances had to pass through male descendants? According to Israel's law, when a daughter was the only heir, she could inherit her father's possessions and rights if she married within her own tribe (Num. 27:1-7, 36:6-7).

Apparently, Mary had no brothers who could be her father's heirs. Joseph became Heli's heir by marriage to Mary, and thus inherited the right to rule on David's throne. This

right then passed on to Christ.

Both genealogies had to be recorded to establish Christ's right to rule on David's throne. Joseph's genealogy shows Christ was a descendant of Jeconiah and thus could not sit on the throne by inheriting the right through Joseph. It further proves the virgin birth: The curse on Jeconiah's line would have passed on to Christ if He were Joseph's real son, but He wasn't — He was begotten by the Holy Spirit and was the Son of God.

But Christ was Mary's son through Nathan and can inherit the throne legally because of her marriage to Joseph, whose genealogy shows he was of the tribe of Judah.

These two genealogies do not contradict. When studied together, they prove Christ's legal right to rule on David's throne when He returns. For more information, write for our free booklet, *The United States and Britain in Prophecy*.

Matthew's "mistakes"

Matthew 27:1-9 presents three difficulties, according to skeptics. The first concerns the death of Judas. Matthew says Judas died by hanging himself. But in Acts 1:18, Peter says Judas died from a fall.

Contradiction? No. The hanging must have been improperly carried out, since it resulted in Judas falling from the noose and bursting asunder on the ground below.

We don't have sufficient details to know whether Judas was dead before the fall. He may have been hanging dead for some time, and his body decomposed and fell, or he may have slipped from the noose and died from

the fall. If the rope was hung from a tree, the weight of his suspended body could have caused the branch to break.

Or did he hang himself from a tree on or near the side of a cliff and suffer a much higher fall? This information is not given, but the details that are recorded are enough to show the manner of his suicide.

Matthew's and Peter's accounts also differ as to how the 30 pieces of silver were used. Matthew says the chief priests bought the potter's field, while Peter indicates Judas bought the field.

When the two accounts are put together we can conclude that when Judas saw Jesus condemned to death, he felt remorse over his treachery. He returned the 30 pieces of silver to the priests and then committed suicide in a potter's field. The chief priests used the money to buy this field in Judas' name to bury aliens in.

Biblical passages add to each other's meaning; they do not detract from or contradict other scriptures.

The third "difficulty" is that Matthew 27:9 purports to be a quotation from Jeremiah. But you can search the 52 chapters of Jeremiah's book and you will not find it.

So the critics say Matthew made a mistake. Instead a similar quotation is found in Zechariah 11:12-13; although Zechariah mentions casting 30 pieces of silver to a potter, there is nothing about a potter's field.

But notice carefully Matthew's words again: "Then was fulfilled that which was *spoken* by Jeremy the prophet . . ." This prophecy was spoken by Jeremiah and for some reason was not recorded in his book. Matthew obviously had access to it, though, through other records.

"Historical errors" disproved

What some consider classic examples of errors in the Bible's historical sections can also be explained.

Some think the apostle Paul's statement in I Corinthians 10:8 contradicts Numbers 25:9. Did 23,000 or 24,000 die in the plague? When we read both accounts carefully, we see that the Old Testament version gives the total number of people who died in the plague. Paul relates that most of them, or 23,000, died in one

day. The remaining thousand died later.

Another possible explanation is that round numbers were used by both writers. If the actual number was around 23,500 it would be correct to round it off to either 23,000 or 24,000.

Time and again the Bible's accuracy has been vindicated by archaeologists. One example is Daniel's statement that Belshazzar was the last king of Babylon (Dan. 5:30-31). For centuries historians said Daniel was wrong — according to them Nabonidus was the last king.

But the critics were silenced when archaeologists dug up some Babylonian documents that stated Nabonidus named his son "Belsarusus" — a variation of Belshazzar. According to a document now called the Nabonidus Chronicle, Nabonidus "entrusted the army and the kingship" to Belshazzar while he campaigned in central Arabia.

Belshazzar was therefore the *second ruler* of Babylon who reigned in his father's absence. This explains why Belshazzar wanted to make Daniel the "third ruler" in the kingdom (Dan. 5:16).

Critics also once attacked the historical accuracy of the account in II Kings 18. It describes the struggle between King Sennacherib of Assyria and King Hezekiah of Judah. For the sake of peace, Hezekiah offered whatever tribute would satisfy the Assyrian ruler. Sennacherib asked for 300 talents of silver and 30 talents of gold (verse 14).

A problem developed with this account when archaeologists found Sennacherib's official records, which described the settlement as being 800 talents of silver and 30 of gold. This was 500 more talents of silver than what the Bible said.

But more recent discoveries revealed that Assyria and Judah used different standards for calculating silver, just as countries today have different currency standards. It turned out that 800 Assyrian talents of silver equaled 300 Jewish talents of silver. The Bible account stood vindicated.

Bible scientifically accurate

Did Joshua make a mistake in astronomy? Critics cite Joshua 10 and other passages as proof that the

Bible is scientifically inaccurate.

In order to give the Israelites more time to defeat their enemies, God lengthened the day by causing the sun to "stand still" (verses 12-13). Didn't Joshua know that the earth rotates around the sun? He probably did. Technically speaking, he should have said, "Earth, stop rotating!" But the Bible wasn't written for astronomers, in scientific language. Though the Bible does give the foundation for understanding science, it is written in language for the average man.

Technically, the earth stopped rotating during Joshua's long day, but to the observer on earth the "sun stood still." We still use "unscientific" expressions like "the sun sets" and "the kettle is boiling." Critics should not construe such expressions in the Bible as errors in science.

In Matthew 13:31-32, Christ said the kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed, which He referred to as the smallest of all seeds. At least one theologian claimed this was an error in botany, since we know today that there are smaller seeds than the mustard seed. For instance, mushroom spores are smaller, although spores are not true seeds.

In any case, we must consider the audience to whom Christ spoke. Many of His listeners were farmers, and the smallest seed they sowed was the mustard seed. They had no knowledge of anything smaller. Christ's object was not to teach science, but spiritual truth.

All biologists know that the hare or rabbit does not chew the cud like a cow. Yet the Bible says it does (Lev. 11:6, Deut. 14:7). If this is an error, it wasn't Moses who made it — he only told the Israelites what God wanted him to say. And God certainly knows what a hare does and doesn't do, since He created them.

The answer to this difficulty is that the hare *appears* to chew the cud, and God used that as a sign to help identify clean and unclean animals. In any case, the hare is still unfit for human consumption because it "divides not the hoof," the other requirement of clean animals.

Biblical measurements

Many supposed contradictions in the Bible are related to time and measurement.

Israel used both a civil and sacred calendar. The civil year started in the autumn with the month Tishri. The sacred year began in the spring with the month Nisan or Abib. If two writers disagree on the month and day of an event, we must see which calendar they use for reckoning.

John 19:14 appears to disagree with Matthew 27:45. John describes events *before* the crucifixion and says they took place about the "sixth hour." Matthew agrees with Mark 15:33 and Luke 23:44 when he says darkness covered the land *after* the crucifixion from the sixth to the ninth hours. Is there disagreement as to when the crucifixion occurred?

The Jewish state was then under Roman control. John used the Roman reckoning of time — counting from midnight. To John, the "sixth hour" was six o'clock in the morning. But according to the Jews' reckoning of time, which the other Gospel writers used, this was the *first hour* of the day. The sixth hour, to them, was noon, Roman time. The crucifixion occurred between these times. The four versions do not contradict; they add to each other.

An apparent mathematical error occurs in the dimensions of the "molten sea" in II Chronicles 4:2. The Bible says this huge vessel was

10 cubits from brim to brim and 30 cubits in circumference (a cubit was about 18 inches). Since the circumference of a circle is found by multiplying pi (3.14) with the diameter, a vessel 10 cubits in diameter must have a circumference of 31.4 cubits. Didn't the Israelites know about pi and its value?

All evidence indicates that people during that age had a detailed understanding of science and technology. We cannot assume that their knowledge of geometry and basic mathematics was so poor that they didn't know how to calculate circles.

Picture the molten sea vessel in your mind. It had a thickness of a "handbreadth" (6-8 inches) with a curved brim "like a lily blossom" (II Chron. 4:5, New International Version). Looking at it from the top, we could see three circles: 1) around the outside of the curved brim, 2) around the outside below the brim and 3) around the inside. Which one was 30 cubits in circumference? Probably the one outside below the brim where the figures of bulls were inscribed (verse 3).

If the diameter was 10 cubits from brim to brim, the outside circumference around the brim would actually be 31.4 cubits, because the thickness of the brim would be included in the

measurement. There is no mathematical error when we determine where the measurement was made.

There are no real errors in the Bible. There are only *alleged* discrepancies that might at first appear to be errors. On occasion what appears to be an error is caused by a faulty translation, of which there are several among the many different versions of the Bible. If a seeming contradiction cannot be immediately solved, we don't need to be overly concerned.

Jesus Christ said, "The scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35). There is a solution to all the so-called discrepancies. The Scriptures are unified in teaching the truth — not error. All Scripture is profitable (II Tim. 3:16) — error isn't. The Bible is the inspired Word of God and we can rely on its trustworthiness. It is a sure foundation for our faith.

"The word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirits, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (Heb. 4:12, New International Version). The Bible is what we are to live by — and by it we are being judged. We need to study this inspired and inerrant Word of God. □