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 Jechoniah) was one of his ancestors (Matt. 1:11-12).

Jechoniah, 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). Jechoniah 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 ancestry 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 Jechoniah and thus could not sit on the throne by inheriting the right through Joseph. It further proves the virgin birth: The curse on Jechoniah’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”


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 infor-
mation 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 de-
tract from or contradict other scrip-
tures.

The third "dissimilarity" is that Mat-
thew 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 spo-
ken by Jeremiah and for some reason
was not recorded in his book. Mat-
thew obviously had access to it,
though, through other records.

"Historical errors" disproved

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

Some think the apostle Paul's
statement in I Corinthians 10:8 con-
tradicts 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 cor-
rect to round it off to either 23,000
or 24,000.

Time and again the Bible's accura-
cy has been vindicated by archaeolo-
gists. One example is Daniel's state-
ment that Belshazzar was the last
king of babylon (Dan. 5:30-31). For
centuries historians said Daniel was
wrong — according to them Naboni-
dus was the last king.

But the critics were silenced when
archaeologists dug up some Babylo-
nian documents that stated Naboni-
dus named his son "Belsharussu" — a
variation of Belshazzar. According
to a document now called the Naboni-
dus Chronicle, Nabonidus "entrusted
the army and the kingship" to Bel-
shazzar while he campaigned in cen-
tral Arabia.

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

Critics also once attacked the his-
torical 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 sil-
ver, just as countries today have dif-
f erent 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 astrono-
mers, 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 "unsce-
ntific" 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, mush-
room 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 knew 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
does. 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 "di-
vides 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 those 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” (6-9 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.