



Lesson 15: Critical Questions on Bible Inspiration

How Do We Reconcile Apparent Contradictions?

THE PROBLEM OF APPARENT CONTRADICTIONS

Bible critics often say that the Bible is “full of contradictions”. If this charge is true, the Bible cannot be the inspired word of God. In order to defend our faith, we must be ready to answer such allegations (1 Peter 3:15). To begin with, we need to realize that there are many enemies of spiritual truth in this world (cf. John 17:14). It should not surprise that there are those who malign the Bible. However, it is one thing for enemies of the Bible to *claim* that there are contradictions in it; it’s another thing for them to *prove* it. Such claims must be challenged! Where are these contradictions? Are they actually contradictions, or do they only seem to be? Is there a logical explanation for apparent discrepancies?

APPARENT CONTRADICTIONS VERSUS ACTUAL CONTRADICTIONS

What constitutes a contradiction? Josh McDowell has said, “The law of non-contradiction, which is the basis of all logical thinking, states that a thing cannot be both **A** and non-**A** at the same time. In other words, it cannot be both raining and not rain at the same time. If one can demonstrate a violation of this principle from Scripture, then and only then can he prove a contradiction.” McDowell adds, “When facing possible contradictions, it is of the highest importance to remember that two statements may differ from each other without being contradictory.” An actual contradiction only exists when there is absolutely no way to reconcile two statements. If there is a logical explanation, there is no contradiction.

EXAMINING ALLEGED CONTRADICTIONS:

Bible critics claim that there are many contradictions in the Bible. It is important that we be able to examine these allegations and show that there are no true discrepancies. Here are some tips to follow as you examine apparent contradictions:

1. **Expect to find an explanation.** All the evidence that we have points to the Bible being God’s divine word. We should therefore expect it to harmonize; when it seems not to harmonize, we should doubt ourselves before we doubt the Bible.
2. **Carefully study the context** of the passage that seems problematic. It helps to remember that words have different meanings in different contexts.
3. **If two inspired witnesses give different details of the same event, assume that both are accurate** and look for ways to harmonize their testimony.
4. **Consult a good Bible teacher or a conservative Bible commentary.** Nearly every conceivable alleged discrepancy has been dealt with by Bible-believing scholars. Their accumulated experience in dealing with such questions and their understanding of the original languages and cultures is an invaluable resource.
5. **Remember that in a few situations, apparent contradictions are the result of scribal errors.** As an example, the King James Version of 2 Chronicles 36:9 says that Johoiachin was 8 years old when he began to reign, but 2 Kings 24:8 states that he was 18. However, the earliest Hebrew manuscripts of 2 Chronicles 36:9 also say that

Jehoiachin was 18, indicating that a later copying error is responsible for the reading in the KJV.

Let's look at some examples of these supposed contradictions and consider how to reconcile them:

- **What words were on the sign placed over the cross of Jesus?**
 - Read Matthew 27:37; Mark 15:26; Luke 23:38 and John 19:19-20.
 - Can you harmonize all four accounts? What would you say were the exact words that were put the sign?

 - Could the fact that the sign was written in three languages account for the different renderings of the gospel writers?

- **Where was blind Bartimaeus healed? Was there another blind man healed then as well? Was he healed as Jesus was leaving Jericho or approaching Jericho?**
 - Read Mathew 20:29-34 and Luke 18:35-43
 - Two facts can be presented to help harmonize these accounts:
 - According to some scholars, Luke's statement that Jesus "was coming near Jericho" could be translated "when they were near to Jericho," or when they were in the vicinity of it, without saying whether they were going to it or from it. (see Albert Barnes)
 - Jericho had been built and rebuilt several times. In Jesus day, there was an old city and a new palatial city which had been built by Herod the Great as a winter residence.
 - How would you harmonize the gospel accounts?

- **Did the men with Saul of Tarsus hear the voice from heaven?**
 - Acts 9:7 says that the men traveling with Saul "stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one." Acts 22:9 says "they did not hear the voice of Him who spoke."
 - Is it possible hear a person speak without understanding what they say?
 - Do we sometimes use the word "hear" to mean "hear and understand"?

- **How did Judas die?**
 - Compare the accounts of Judas death found in Matthew 27:5-10 and Acts 1:18.
 - Did Judas hang himself or did he fall headlong in a field and burst open?

- **Who went to the tomb?**
 - Read the accounts in Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:1-2; Luke 24:1; John 20:1.
 - Who went to the tomb the morning Jesus was raised and what time of day did they go?

QUESTIONS:

1. How would you respond if a friend said that he does not believe the Bible because it is filled with contradictions?

2. List the “five tips” given in this lesson for examining apparent discrepancies. Is there anything that you would add to the list?