

Does the Bible Contradict Itself? - Study Guide
Based on the Book by Dr. William F. Arndt

Introduction

“The Christian...is not afraid of the outcome if the Bible is subjected to rigorous examination as to the consistency of its various statements and narratives with one another.” – Dr. William F. Arndt

Christian Apologetics = *“A field of Christian theology which aims to present a rational basis for the Christian faith, defend the faith against objections, and attempt to expose the flaws of other world views.”*

What apparent contradictions (or conundrums) in the Bible trouble you?

What is the implication if unresolvable and legitimate contradictions in the Bible were to be found?

What do the following verses say about God’s Word and/or whether the Bible is God’s Word?

Psalm 18:30 (pg 663) _____

Psalm 119:81 (pg 749) _____

Proverbs 30:5 (pg 807) _____

John 5:39 – 40 (pg 1307) _____

2 Timothy 3:14 – 17 (pg 1461) _____

2 Peter 1:19 – 21 (pg 1493) _____

What do the following verses say about those who oppose God’s Word as well as their tactics?

Matthew 4:1 – 7 (pg 1183) _____

John 8:43 – 47 (pg 1314) _____

Galatians 1:6 – 12 (pg 1426) _____

What does God say in the following verses about the intellectuals who oppose the Word of God and true wisdom from God?

1 Corinthians 1:17 – 25 (pg 1398) _____

1 Corinthians 2:14 (pg 1400) _____

Ephesians 4:17 – 19 (pg 1435) _____

2 Timothy 4:1 – 4 (pg 1461) _____

1 Peter 3:15 – 17 (pg 1489) _____

Setting the Ground Rules – “Fair and Balanced Approach”

How would you define a contradiction?

Dictionary Definitions:

Merriam Webster:

1. *A proposition, statement, or phrase that asserts or implies both the truth and falsity of something;*
2. *A statement or phrase whose parts contradict each other. Example: "a round square" is a contradiction in terms.*

Dr. Ernst uses a definition written the language of 1925 from the *Standard Dictionary*:

1. *The principle that it is impossible for the same thing to be and not to be at the same time and in the same sense;*
2. *That contradictory attributes cannot co-exist in, and may not be affirmed of, the same object;*
3. *That the same proposition cannot be both true and false.*

Dr. Ernst makes the following points about scoffers and unbelievers when they approach an apparent contradiction in the Bible:

1. *"For the same thing" are the words to be noted [in definition 1] here. It seems incredible...that people often imagine they have found a discrepancy merely because they entirely lose sight of the question whether the same person or thing is spoken of in the two propositions.*
2. *The next term of the definition to be remembered is "at the same time". The time element in two propositions which apparently contradict each other is often overlooked.*
3. *We further observe that the definition contains the phrase "in the same sense". Many so-called contradictions disappear if this term is given due attention.*
4. *Where attributes are assigned to a person or thing, they must not be contradictory...But before saying two propositions clash because they ascribe contradictory qualities to a person or thing, let us make sure we are not deceiving ourselves...Christians are said to be holy, and they are said to be sinners. [According to critics of the Bible] contradictory qualities are here affirmed of Christians. But...The Scriptures inform us that the Christian is a dual person, that he is a new being, born again by the Spirit of God...According to his new nature [in Christ] he is holy; according to his old nature he sinful. Hence the two qualities are not contradictory in the case of a Christian.*
5. *The definition finally says that the same proposition cannot be both true and false...But we may say with full conviction that no instances of this sort occur anywhere in the Scriptures.*

Dr. Ernst goes on to state that some basic rules or guidelines that are to be used when faced with an apparent contradiction in the Bible.

1. *In dealing with alleged contradictions, it is of utmost importance to remember that two propositions may differ from each other without being contradictory.*
2. *Now and then a discrepancy appears to exist...because [the verses] have not been translated correctly or not with sufficient accuracy...The fault in instances of this nature does not lie with Bible, but with the translation.*
3. *...we are no longer in possession of the original manuscripts of the [Bible] but have merely copies of these manuscripts...The possibility is not excluded that when these copies were prepared, some errors crept in. We must not forget that it is the original text of the Bible that is inspired and that of later copies inspiration can be predicated only in as far as they agree with the autographs of the Apostles and Prophets...[However] Even when typographical errors are numerous, the message of the book is not altered. Besides, no one of us thinks of charging the author of the book with the responsibility of such errors.*
4. *It is important to remember that in solving alleged discrepancies it is sufficient that a possible way of harmonizing the two texts in question be pointed out. More cannot in fairness be asked... [Others have*

- pointed out that] in explaining a difficulty, it is always to be remembered that even a possible explanation is sufficient to meet the objector.*
5. *If we are unable to remove a certain difficulty, that does not prove than nobody else can...What folly if a man declares that what appears puzzling to him must appear so to everyone else!*
 6. *What is needed above everything else in dealing with so-called discrepancies in the Scriptures is the spirit of reverence, which bows submissively when the 'King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only-wise God' has spoken. To him who approaches the Scriptures in this attitude it will be granted to understand many things which to the irreverent, haughty critics are like a book sealed with seven seals.*

To understand many Biblical Contradictions requires a basic knowledge of the Biblical texts from which we get our English translations. This is a very brief overview.

- † We do not have the original writings (commonly called autographs) of any book of the Bible. Our English translations depend upon manuscripts copied from other manuscripts.
- † The Old Testament was written primarily in Hebrew with a little Aramaic. The New Testament was written in Greek.
- † The most reliable Hebrew texts upon which most current English translations are based are called The Masoretic Texts after the Masoretes, a group of Jews, who primarily copied and edited from earlier texts. The Masoretic Text was written and compiled between 7th and 10th Centuries A.D.
- † The Dead Sea Scrolls discovered in 1946 contained many Hebrew manuscripts of the Old Testament but not the totality of each book. The Dead Sea Scrolls pre-date the Masoretic Text by about 1000 years and generally show good agreement with the Masoretic texts.
- † The Septuagint is the first translation of the Old Testament ever made. It is in a form of Greek called “Koine” that was common at the time. The Septuagint was “The Bible” of Greek speaking Jews (and later Christians) around the Mediterranean at the time of Christ and during the time of the apostles. The Septuagint had definite influence in our translations even though it was not in Hebrew.
 - It was written (i.e. translated) during the years 250 B.C. – 150 B.C. starting with the Hebrew Pentateuch at the directive of Ptolemy Philadelphus of Egypt who wanted a collection of every major book translated to Greek for his grand library at Alexandria.
 - The legend goes that 72 learned rabbis were separated into separate and individual cells on the island of Pharos and worked independently for 72 days translating the Pentateuch. At the end of the 72 days each produced a translation identical to the other.
 - The rest of the books of the Old Testament were translated later, although the legend was expanded to say that the whole Old Testament was translated in 72 days. There is clear evidence that this is not the case. Belief in the legend led many serious church leaders such as Augustine to believe that the Septuagint was inspired by God.

- Thus the translation became known as the “Septuagint” from the Latin word for “seventy”. An abbreviation used by Biblical scholars for the Septuagint is the Roman numerals for 70, “LXX”.
- The Septuagint is not just a singular translation. Several different versions (translations) were completed during that time period.
- Surviving copies of the Septuagint are copies made by Christians. B.C. Jewish copies in existence are only fragments of Deuteronomy, Leviticus, Numbers, Exodus, and the “Letter of Jeremiah”.

Applying the above principles and understandings, let us look at some examples of apparent contradictions.

A look at a few Old Testament “Contradictions”

Are there two different accounts for the order of creation?

Read **Genesis 1: 11 – 13 (pg 1)**. Compare the timing of the creation of the plants and animals with **Genesis 2:4 – 7**.

What is the apparent contradiction? _____

How would you answer it? _____

How many of each kind entered Noah’s Ark?

Read **Genesis 7:1 – 10 (pg 10)**. In particular compare verse 2 and 8.

What is the apparent contradiction? _____

How would respond to the apparent contradiction? _____

How many Arameans (and what type) did David and his troops kill?

Compare **2 Samuel 10:15 – 19 (pg 380)** with **1 Chronicles 19:16 – 19 (pg 507)**.

What is the contradiction? _____

How would respond to the contradiction? _____

How many sons did Jesse have?

Compare **1 Samuel 16:6 – 11 (pg 348)** to **1 Chronicles 2:13 – 16 (pg 485)**.

What is the apparent contradiction? _____

How would respond to the apparent contradiction? _____

Did Michal remain without children?

Compare **2 Samuel 6:16, 20 – 23 (pg 479)** to **2 Samuel 21:8 (pg 507)**. In the NIV note the footnote for the “Merab” in the second passage.

What is the apparent contradiction? _____

How would you respond to the apparent contradiction? _____

Note also the apparent contradiction in **2 Samuel 21:7 – 9** about Mephibosheth. This is further evidence of that we are not talking about the same Michal.

Did Absalom have any sons?

Compare **2 Samuel 14:27 (pg 494)** to **2 Samuel 18:18 (pg 501)**.

What is the apparent contradiction? _____

How would you respond to the apparent contradiction? _____

Can God be seen?

Compare **Genesis 32:29 – 30 (pg 40)**, **Exodus 24:9 – 10 (pg 95)**, **Exodus 33:17 – 23 (pg 108)**, and **John 1:18 (pg 1300)**.

What is the apparent contradiction? _____

How would you answer it? _____

Is God omniscient?

Compare **Deuteronomy 8:1 – 2 (pg 223)**, **Psalms 139:1 – 4 (pg 760)**, and **John 21:17 (pg 1334)**.

What is the apparent contradiction? _____

How would you answer it? _____

A look at a few New Testament “Contradictions”

What were the Disciples to take with them as they went out and preached?

Compare **Matthew 10:5 – 10 (pg 1192)** with **Mark 6:7 – 8 (pg 1232)**.

What is the apparent contradiction? _____

How would you answer it? _____

The Accounts of the Blind Men at Jericho

Compare **Matthew 20:29 – 34 (pg 1209)**, **Mark 10:46 – 52 (pg 1241)**, and **Luke 18:35 – 43 (pg 1287)**.

What two apparent contradictions exist within these narratives?

How would you resolve the difficulties? _____

What was the hour of Christ's crucifixion?

Compare **Mark 15:25 – 27 (pg 1250)** with **John 19:13 – 14 (pg 1330)**.

What is the apparent contradiction? _____

How would you answer it? _____

Why are we not bound to the ceremonial law?

Compare **Matthew 5:17 – 20 (pg 1185)**, **Galatians 4:8 – 11 (pg 1429)**, and **Colossians 2:16 – 17 (pg 1445)**?

What is the apparent contradiction? _____

How would you answer it? _____

Did Jesus bring peace on earth?

Compare **Luke 2:8 – 14 (pg 1256)** and **John 14:27 (pg 1324)** to **Luke 12:51 – 53 (pg 1279)**.

What is the apparent contradiction? _____

How would you answer it? _____
