

2 The Bible - Scriptural contradictions?

What do these passages tell us about the nature of God?

Psalms 18:30-31

Psalms 119:86, 89, 144

Malachi 3:6

You cannot see my face



Exodus 33:11 and Exodus 33:20 appear to be in conflict. Read them and then decide if Acts 7:38 can solve the problem for us. How?

Did Samuel come to see Saul?



Now compare 1 Samuel 15:35 and 1 Samuel 19:24. Again, think carefully about what the passages are saying to try to resolve them.

Missing generations



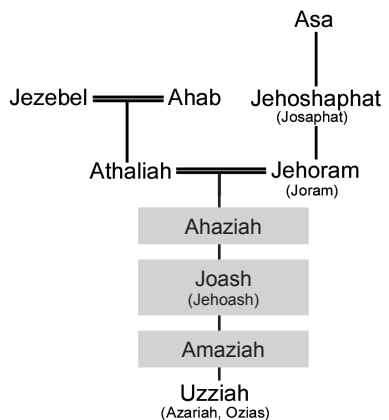
Matthew 1:8 tells us that Jehoram (AV Joram) was the father of Uzziah (AV Ozias). However, the family tree shows that there are three generations (Ahaziah, Joash and Amaziah) omitted.

This seems odd when we consider that Matthew counts them and tells us that 'there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Christ' (verse 17). Is this a mistake, or is there a good reason?

Look at 2 Chronicles 22:2-9, 2 Chronicles 24:22 and 2 Chronicles 25:14-16 to see what particular sins they had been guilty of.

They all died violent deaths, determined by God. They were all descended from Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab.

Can you think of a reason why the omission from the Matthew record may have been intentional, rather than an oversight? It may help to think a little further about Matthew's genealogy. Does it list the kings of the northern kingdom of Israel, or of the southern kingdom of Judah. Of which kingdom were Ahab and Jezebel king and queen?



Two unique kings?



Look at 2 Kings 18:5 and 2 Kings 23:25. Some people argue that these are conflicting. But compare the statements carefully. What is Hezekiah actually commended for? What is Josiah actually commended for? Are the two passages conflicting statements or separate propositions?

The inscription on the cross



The gospel writers give different accounts of the accusation written on the cross of Jesus.

Mark 15:26 THE KING OF THE JEWS

Matt 27:37 THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

Luke 23:38 THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

John 19:19 JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS.

Some critics argue that these different versions are conflicting. What do you think?

Where different biblical texts disagree

The scriptures are in general incredibly free from errors; God has clearly ensured that his word has been transmitted accurately. There are occasions, however, when errors have crept in, and we have simply to acknowledge the fact and not feel defensive about it (compare any modern newspaper report; in general they are full of errors, sometimes accidental, sometimes deliberate). 1 Samuel 13:1 and 1 John 5:7 are two examples which you may recall from Part 2 of *The Way of Life*.

You may be interested to look at some examples of what, at first sight at least, seem to be errors in the original text.

1 Samuel 6:19 This may be an example of a difficult translation. In the Authorised Version, 50,070 men of Beth-Shemesh died because they looked in the ark. This is an amazingly large number for what was a relatively minor town. In the NIV, the number is 70. The Hebrew word *elep* has two meanings. Usually it is translated 'thousand', but sometimes, as in Judges 6:15, it means 'family' or 'clan', so the passage could read 'seventy men, even 50 families'.

2 Samuel 21:8 Compare some different translations. Some Hebrew and Greek biblical manuscripts speak of Saul's elder daughter Merab, as in the New International Version. Others refer to Merab's sister Michal, as in the Authorised Version. This may be an error of copying (see 1 Samuel 18:19). Another possible explanation is that Michal, having no children of her own (2 Samuel 6:23), for some reason brought up the children of her sister.

What have you learned about how to think about difficult passages?

How would you set about thinking about any apparent Bible contradictions you may encounter in future?

Appendix: Alleged contradictions and inaccuracies

This appendix is taken from a book called "*Wrested Scriptures*" by brother Ron Abel. It is available from the Christadelphian Office. You may like to ask for a copy as a present some time.

Many of the alleged contradictions in the Bible do not qualify as such since a contradiction requires an affirmation and denial of the same proposition. The inscriptions on the 'cross' are often cited as contradictory. Upon an examination of the accounts in the Gospels, it will be seen that none of the writers denies, what one of the other Gospel writers affirms. The claim that the accounts are contradictory is a spurious one, since the evidence does not satisfy the definition of a contradiction. If however, one talks about a sun that is always light, yet dark, contradictory statements are made. By definition that which is always light cannot be dark. Nor can one talk about a square circle, since by definition a circle is round and not square. The property of squareness precludes the possibility of a square being a circle.

Many of the alleged inaccuracies (between parallel narratives in the gospels, for example) which are argued against belief in the verbal and infallible inspiration of Scripture, indicate a misunderstanding of the nature of verbal inspiration. Divine penmen were not obliged to record all details of an event. For the purposes of his Gospel, Mark only refers to the healing of one blind man as Jesus left Jericho (Mark 10:46-52), whereas Matthew includes the healing of two blind men. (Matthew 20:29-34). All writers are selective in the information they record. John commented: 'And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written,' (John 21:25). Similarly, a contemporary 'un-inspired' historian may choose to ignore certain data and include others which are relevant to his purpose and classification.

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In certain instances not all problems may be resolved by careful reading of the contexts and a clarification of what is, and what is not, claimed by the narratives. Such ought not to be the source of undue embarrassment. The fact that no resolution of a problem is immediately possible is not proof that the right solution is not available. Humility is required that one does not confine the divine inspiration of Scripture to the level of one's intellectual attainments.