

# OpenTheo

## **Alleged Discrepancies (Part 1)**



### **Authority of Scriptures** - Steve Gregg

In "Alleged Discrepancies (Part 1)," Steve Gregg discusses the common charge that the Bible contains inaccuracies and contradictions. He argues that while there may be perceived discrepancies, the Bible has been historically accurate and can be properly understood through careful interpretation. Gregg emphasizes the importance of understanding context, genre, figures of speech, and principles of hermeneutics in preventing misunderstandings and the appearance of contradictions in the Bible. He also provides examples of alleged discrepancies, and suggests that through responsible interpretation, all contradictions can be resolved.

### **Transcript**

You have a handout that has the title Alleged Discrepancies in the Bible. A discrepancy is a contradiction. A contradiction exists when you've got two passages that just simply don't jive and cannot be harmonized.

We have seen in some of our earlier lectures that of those that would seek to destroy confidence in the Bible, or to prove that the Bible is not the word of God, it is often an attempt that has been made to show that the Bible contradicts science, or that the Bible contradicts historical or archaeological knowledge. And, as I think we have seen, there are times indeed where the Bible does contradict the opinions of scientists and the opinions of archaeologists. At least for a while, until further discovery comes along, and the opinions of those scientists and the opinions of those archaeologists generally have to be revised.

Those who had believed the Bible generally don't end up having to revise their opinion, because the greater findings usually confirm the Bible. In fact, historically they always have confirmed the Bible. And we have never yet found that the Bible is really in contrast or in contradiction to real science, only the opinion of some scientists.

And it's never been in contradiction to what is really known of history, only what was thought to be true of history for a period of time, when our knowledge of certain facts was deficient from archaeological sources. But, as we said, the claim that the Bible is in

error in either of these areas, because of any perceived contradiction between history or science, that perception is a flawed perception, and certainly an argument that needs to be challenged whenever it is brought up. And certainly when the truth is known, it presents no threat to our belief that the Bible is the Word of God.

If anything, the more we look at it, the more we are encouraged to believe that it is the Word of God. Now, it's a different kind of argument against the inspiration of Scripture to say that the Bible contradicts itself. You see, if the Bible contradicts scientific opinion, or if the Bible contradicts the opinion of historians, we can always suggest that the Bible may yet be proven to be true, and those whom it contradicts may yet be proven to be false.

And that, as we see, has been the trend in discovery, that those who find themselves actually contradicting the Bible are the ones who get embarrassed by further discovery. So, if there were some area today where historians would say, well, we have not yet found evidence for such and such a thing in the Bible that we think we should have found evidence for by now, therefore the Bible contradicts what is known, we could simply confidently say, well, we will stick with our belief in the Bible for the time being. Not all the facts have come in yet, and when they are in, we have reason to believe they may yet confirm the Bible and not its critics.

But, we cannot take the same kind of an approach to the claim that the Bible contradicts itself, because the evangelical, at least, is convinced that the whole Bible is the Word of God. Every book in it is the Word of God, is inspired by God. Now, that which is inspired by God must, of necessity, be without factual error, because whenever a factual error is made, the person who is promoting that error is either misinformed or dishonest.

They either don't have the correct information, or they do, and they're trying to twist it and give a different view than what they know to be true. This cannot be the case with anything that God has inspired, because God would never be misinformed, He knows everything, and He would never be dishonest. So, He would always tell the truth, and His truth that He understands would always be in accord with the facts, and therefore nothing in the Bible could be untrue if God inspired it.

And that's what we're testing right now. Is this inspired? The Bible claims to be inspired, but we're running a test on this to see if the claim is believable. Now, if the Bible truly contradicts itself, then in the nature of what a contradiction is, it means that this passage, if it contradicts another passage in the same Bible, if the contradictions are there, then both statements cannot be true.

One, at least, must be false. Now, if even one statement in the Scripture is false, then it would challenge our conviction that the Bible is the Word of God. Let's put this into perspective.

I think when people get to talking about highly emotionally charged issues of personal faith and conviction and religion and so forth, they sometimes swing to extremes and make irresponsible statements. As, for example, when somebody says, well, you know, through the years the Bible has been copied so many times it doesn't resemble at all the original, and we can't trust anything in the Bible. That's an extreme piece of disinformation, really.

The Bible hasn't changed that much, but it would be equally wrong for the one faithful to the Scripture to say, no, God has preserved it, it has never changed, not one thing, there's been no corruption in the manuscripts, you know, it's been supernaturally preserved without any error. That would be a mistake, too, because it simply isn't true. The fact of the matter is somewhere in between.

The fact is that there has been some little corruption in the manuscripts to the extent that about 1.7 percent of the New Testament and about 5 percent of the Old Testament have experienced some measure of significant corruption in the transmission over the ages. But before we get alarmed about that, all that really means is that we have different manuscripts which on these particular passages don't agree verbatim with each other. They differ from one another.

That means one of them must have been copied wrong by someone back there. But fortunately, as the textual scholars have affirmed, these passages that are disputed, where there's different readings in the manuscripts, none of them are the basis for any theological proposition. That is, everything we believe about Jesus, about God, about every issue theologically, can be established upon the Scriptures that don't have variations in them, upon the Scriptures that all the manuscripts agree about.

And so there's nothing really in Christian belief that is challenged by the fact that there are some variant readings in different manuscripts. There's been a very tiny bit of corruption in the manuscripts, and what has come down to us has not really in any way altered our ability or inhibited our ability to know what the Bible teaches on every subject necessary for us to know. Now when it comes to the idea that the Bible has contradictions in it, we can be equally irresponsible in our loyalty to the Bible.

I used to be this way because of my conviction that the Bible is the Word of God, and the corollary of that being I'm convinced that the Bible could not possibly contradict itself. When I would meet skeptics who said the Bible is full of contradictions, which is a pretty sweeping statement, I would generally say, no, there's no contradictions in the Bible. Now, I went many years able to say this without being seriously challenged by anyone intelligent enough to show me any, and I was quite confident that I would never find anyone who could show me contradictions in the Bible.

As a matter of fact, most of the people who told me that there were a lot of contradictions in the Bible had never read the Bible, and they could not show one

example, which was always encouraging to me in my debates with them. But as I got older and read the Bible a lot, I myself began to find the passages which could be claimed by the undiscerning reader to be contradictory. There certainly are passages which on the surface appear to say opposite things from each other, and where, as I say, an undiscerning person or one who wishes to jump quickly to a negative conclusion could say, oh, there's a contradiction there.

And as I became more acquainted with the Bible and read it a great deal, I found more of these, and as I also became involved in dialogue with non-Christians who had done more of their homework and who had actually read the Bible and looked for the contradictions, many of them had been amassed. As a matter of fact, one Christian writer, writing a book against the claim that there are contradictions in the Bible, that is, he was defending the Bible against that claim, he had done his homework, collecting from all the articles and tracts and books written by agnostics and opponents of the Bible, he had collected 900 examples where at one time or another some skeptic had said, here's a contradiction in the Bible, that he actually dealt with in a book, I think his book is called *Alleged Discrepancies in the Bible*, if I'm not mistaken, same thing as my notes are, or something like that. John Halley, that's his name, and his book I think is still available, but he purports to deal with 900 cases where it is alleged that there are contradictions in the Bible.

Now, some of these are extremely easy to dispense with, and anyone who would claim that there were contradictions is clearly being, well, there's no nicer way of saying it, a fool. But there are instances where it's a bit more challenging, where the Bible appears to contradict itself in certain places. Now, my conviction is, as it always was, that the Bible does not really contradict itself, at least not when properly understood.

But what I've come to realize in conversations with people who found what they thought were discrepancies in the Bible, contradictions in the Bible, is that they were misunderstanding one or another passage in the Bible that they thought contradicted each other. And therefore, this lecture is going to have a lot to do with teaching you how to correctly understand passages, how to interpret them rightly to get the right meaning out of them. Whenever you read anything, whether it's in the Bible or anywhere else, your mind automatically interprets it.

That is, when you look at a page with letters on it, your mind, without you even knowing it's doing it, is interpreting those letters as sounds and as syllables and as words and giving meaning to those words. Actually, all you have on this page is so much ink representing little shapes and things on a white piece of paper. The only reason you can make any sense of it is because your mind interprets these individual little characters as letters representing sounds.

And when you put the sounds together, they represent a combined sound. And a

combined sound in our upbringing has been associated with certain meanings. We call these words.

And our mind is doing this interpretation all the time without even being aware of it. You just read it, you know, unconscious of the fact that you are interpreting little black marks into concepts, words and concepts. Well, at another level, every time you read, you're taking these statements that you read in the Bible or elsewhere and you're deciding what to think about them.

And usually this is done by trying to figure out what was the author trying to communicate. You read a book or a newspaper or a magazine trying to understand, OK, this author knows something. He's trying to communicate or at least thinks he knows something.

And I'm reading it in order that I might know what it is he's saying. But to do that, you often have to recognize different genres, different styles, you know, poetry and history and things are written in different styles. And there are figures of speech and there are nuances that the author hopes the reader will recognize as such.

And as you read, you continually make these interpretive decisions about, you know, is this person being literal? Is he using a figure of speech? Again, you often do this without realizing you're doing it. I mean, there are figures of speech in our culture that we use all the time. And if someone stops and says, wait, what does that figure of speech actually literally mean? You'd realize that the actual words in that phrase, you're not using them literally at all.

It's just an accepted phrase that has a concept that it conveys. Well, what I'm saying is reading the Bible as reading anything else requires that we interpret it in order to understand it. And the better we are at interpreting it, the better, the more likely it is that we will understand it.

And the more acquainted we are with the Bible, the better we will become at interpreting it. The Bible presents more challenges than much literature does for us in interpretation because it doesn't, it's not written by people who are contemporaries of ours in our culture. It wasn't written in our language.

Figures of speech and words and things were different in some cases. And to understand it and interpret it correctly requires a little more conscious effort in some cases than reading, for example, something written by a contemporary of ours in our language. We interpret quite naturally.

We understand the figures of speech because they're our own. But when we read something from an ancient culture, from a foreign land, written in dead languages, I mean, languages are now dead, they weren't then. Then we have to bring a little more

conscious effort to understanding how we're interpreting this just because it's foreign.

So I want to talk to you about how to interpret scripture so as to not make mistakes on passages that seem to be discrepancies. The subtitle of these notes I'm giving you is a crash course on common sense hermeneutics. Now, hermeneutics, if you're not familiar with that word, you will probably not hear it all that often in your life, but you'll probably hear it again sometime.

Hermeneutics is the science of interpretation. It does not only have to do with the interpretation of scripture. It is simply a branch of philosophy that when you interpret anything, you are engaging in a discipline called hermeneutics.

To know how to properly interpret something requires that you follow proper principles of hermeneutics. So what I'm going to give you in this lecture and the following ones are several principles of hermeneutics that will help you not misunderstand. It will help you interpret correctly various things in the Bible.

When this is done, it is my contention that the better you understand, the more accurately you understand what is actually being said, the less likely it is that you will be stumbled, the less likely it is that you will wrongly perceive a contradiction where there is not one. But because many critics of the Bible are not really seriously interested in understanding what the Bible is saying, they would just as soon take what it appears to say to them. And if they can find fault with it, they quickly do.

They attach some kind of assumption of error to it before they make any kind of honest effort to try to understand what's really being said. Now, we have, therefore, before us a crash course in common sense hermeneutics. How to interpret scripture so as not to mistakenly misunderstand passages in such a way as to strengthen the conviction that there are contradictions in the Bible.

I want to say this, too, when it comes to swinging to extremes. Many evangelicals might assume that if you really could find a contradiction in the Bible and it could not be resolved, and I don't believe this is the case. I'm not aware of any contradiction in the Bible that cannot be resolved responsibly by correct understanding of the passages.

But let us just say hypothetically, if you could find two passages, both in the Bible, that truly contradict each other and there is no getting around it, they just plain contradict each other and there's no escaping that conclusion. Many feel like, well, we just throw the whole Bible out because obviously if Jeremiah contradicted Job, let us say, then the Bible is flawed. Well, that would not be a correct conclusion, necessarily.

It would mean that either Jeremiah or Job is flawed, but it would tell us nothing about Isaiah or Psalms or Proverbs or Matthew, Mark, Luke or John. In other words, we need to understand the Bible is not just a book, it's a collection of writings. And even if it were

the case that someone were persuaded that one of these writers contradicted another writer, instead of throwing out the whole Bible, the whole collection, it would simply lead to the conclusion that one of these two writers who have contradicted each other must be mistaken.

And then you might even rule that that particular writer maybe wasn't inspired, his book shouldn't be in the Bible. But rather than casting a cloud of doubt over the whole Bible, it would only legitimately cast some doubt upon the one passage where the problem occurred. So we need to keep things in perspective here.

If someone could find a contradiction that they believed was a contradiction in the Bible and you couldn't answer it and you couldn't get around it, you might decide, well, maybe that writer was making a mistake there, maybe he wasn't inspired when he wrote that. But that would only mean maybe his book doesn't belong in the Bible. It doesn't mean the whole Bible can't be trusted.

Each book has to be judged on its own merits. Now, I would like to say that I don't think you ever have to reach that conclusion. You don't ever have to conclude that the Bible writers have indeed contradicted each other in some way that challenges your belief in their inspiration.

But in order to come to this, you need to not only have some kind of a blind loyalty description that blinds on that, I will not look at anything that looks like it's contradictory, I will not acknowledge it. That is not the way to find truth. The way to reach and follow the interest of truth is to examine critically everything you do believe, just in case you might be wrong.

And if you are wrong, you should always be eager to correct yourself. And if you're wrong about the Bible, you should be eager to correct yourself about that. That is at least where I am coming from.

But I am also going to tell you that in view of the things we're going to talk about here, I believe that every alleged contradiction in the Bible can be resolved without any flights of fancy, without any fancy footwork, without any slightly deceptive, you know, obscuring of facts. I believe simply by getting the correct understanding of each passage, you will remove all the appearance of contradiction in every case. And there are a lot of those appearances, but there are certain principles which will help to resolve them.

And I should hope that you'd be interested in knowing that since you're reading through the whole Bible in this school, you may find them. You certainly will find some of them. And furthermore, in conversations with unbelievers, you may not only find the contradictions, you may find the unbelievers who have found them and need to know how to discuss this intelligently with them.

Now, there are some basic rules of interpretation that are not even necessarily related to the issues of resolving apparent discrepancies. If you're reading the Bible, there are certain things that you just have to have as a fundamental of your approach to understanding. And like I say, this is extremely important, whether or not you have passages you're dealing with that seem to be discrepant.

This just has to do with understanding in general the Bible. One is that you should consider the context of a passage. To simply extract a phrase or a sentence or a verse out of the Bible and try to assume that you know what it means from its actual wording without any appeal to the flow of thought in which it occurs is a great mistake.

There are times, of course, where you can reach correct conclusions because a statement is so plain it couldn't mean anything else. And even without reference to the context, you might understand it. But many, many times a passage is ambiguous.

It could mean one thing or another. And the best way to understand what it actually means is by following the train of thought of the passage in which it occurs. So this would be what we call the immediate context of a verse or a thought or a sentence that you're trying to understand.

Follow it in its immediate context. Sometimes it's even necessary to take a larger context, the whole book in which it occurs. Like, let's say, a statement you're wrestling with occurs in the writings of Paul, one of his epistles.

And maybe you can't understand it completely simply by looking at the paragraph or the chapter it's in. But it may have some key words that Paul uses frequently in his writing. He might have a special sense in which Paul uses a phrase frequently, the same phrase, one of his favorites.

The word *sarx*, for example, is a Greek word that means flesh. Paul, in his writings, uses the word *sarx* in a special way that almost no one else does. Talking about flesh, sometimes Paul seems to be referring to the fallen nature of man, although the word flesh usually means the body.

But there is evidence in Paul's writings that he often means something different by that word than is commonly meant. And if you're reading a passage, it happens to be in the writings of Paul, and it has something to say about flesh. And it may be you don't understand fully what it means just from the paragraph or the chapter it's in.

An appeal to the larger context of Paul's other writings, and where he uses this word in various contexts, may help you to zero in on what the meaning is. So the larger context of, say, the whole book in which it occurs, or other books by the same writer. And of course, there's also the context of the whole Bible to consider.

Because if the biblical writers are writing from God, as we believe they are, they will



agree with others who have written from God. Now, that doesn't mean we have to use a shoehorn to forcibly force a meaning into the passage that's consistent with the rest of the Bible, even if it can't be done. But again, many statements in Scripture, like many statements elsewhere, can be taken one way or another.

Or maybe a variety of ways. Maybe a whole spade of alternatives exist as to what could conceivably be meant here in this passage. And it's always best, in my opinion, to interpret it in light of what the whole of the Bible teaches on the particular subject.

If there's a choice, it's always more charitable, it seems to me, to interpret the writer's words in light of the rest of the Scripture on the same subject. And the failure to do this has often led to terrible misunderstandings of individual passages. So, the first rule is to consider the context.

The immediate, the whole book, or the group of books by the same author, or the whole Bible. All of these contexts are helpful to know. A second rule would be to consider the historical background when information is available.

Sometimes it isn't. Sometimes we just don't know enough about the historical background. There is a passage in 1 Timothy 2, where Paul is writing to Timothy in Ephesus, and he says, I don't permit a woman to teach and have authority over a man.

Well, there are some people who believe that this needs to be understood in light of the conditions in Ephesus, where they claim there were priestesses of the goddess Diana who were leading the temple cult, and this spirit had come into the church, and there were women taking charge in the church, and even beginning to teach heretical things, and therefore Paul was not so much against women in leadership, he was simply against women of this sort in Ephesus doing these kinds of things in that particular church. Well, of course, the people who are arguing that way are the same people who argue that women should be pastors, generally. And the question is, are they interpreting this correctly? Well, they claim to have some historical background of what's going on in Ephesus to guide them in this.

The fact of the matter is there is no evidence in the whole Bible, nor outside the Bible, to give us this historical scenario. There has not yet been found any evidence in Scripture or outside of Scripture that there were false teachers who were women in the church of Ephesus. Interestingly enough, in Acts 20 and in the book of Ephesians and in several other places, including the book of Revelation, where there's a letter to the Ephesians, there's many evidences that there were men who were false teachers in Ephesus, but there's no evidence that there were women who were.

And therefore, the interpretation of these people trying to get what they're trying to get out of that verse requires that they have a historical background that guides their interpretation, but unfortunately for them, that historical background is not able to be

confirmed. We don't really know if there were false teachers who were women in Ephesus. And we won't always know exactly.

Some people try to reconstruct from what is in the passage, out of their own imaginations, what they think may have existed in the background, and that doesn't help. But take another case where we can get some light from a historical background. In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul gives instructions about women wearing head coverings.

And there's a lot of dispute among evangelicals even today as to whether women should wear head coverings when they pray and prophesy, because Paul basically says they should. But at the same time, he closes his discussion on that subject by saying in verse 16 of 1 Corinthians 11, If anyone seems to be contentious on this, we have no such custom, nor do the churches of Christ. Now, what is he saying? Is he saying that the churches of Christ in general don't have the custom of the women wearing head coverings when they pray and prophesy, and all those other things he's just described in that chapter, that that's not a universal custom throughout the church, and therefore it would apply perhaps to the Corinthian church and maybe some others in its region, but not to all churches? Or is he saying that we have no such custom, namely, no such custom of rejecting this teaching? That is to say that he would be affirming that all churches do follow this and no one should challenge it, even in Corinth.

Well, there are people who would affirm both from Paul's statement, we have no such custom. In fact, the NIV, without any authority from the Greek text at all, actually changes Paul's statement to, we have no other custom, simply because apparently the NIV translators believed that Paul was saying a certain thing, so they changed his words to make it say it better. But that's not very honest in my opinion.

The fact is, Paul said, we have no such custom. But who has no such custom? What custom do they have? Well, does this mean that all cultures and all Christians followed the customs that he's writing there, or does it mean they all did not, except for Corinth and a few others? Well, we can understand it better if we know something about the historical setting. We know, for example, that the customs he describes do fit with the Greek practices, and Corinth was a Greek church in Greece.

But we also know that those customs were not agreeable with the Jewish practices. It is true that Jewish women covered their heads, but it is not true that it was always a shame for a Jewish woman to shave her head, and it was not true that it was a shame for a man in Jewish culture to have long hair. Paul, in the same discussion about head covering, says it's a shame for a man to have long hair.

Now, Paul says it's a shame for a woman to shave her head, it's a shame for a man to have long hair, and this is all part of his discussion about the customs of head coverings and so forth. Well, we know that in Jewish custom, and we have this from Josephus as well as the Bible itself, there was the option of a person taking the Nazarite vow. This

could be done by a man or a woman.

A person who took the vow was voluntary, but a person who took such a vow was separated unto God for a period of time that they would designate. During that time, they would be restricted from certain activities, including the cutting of their hair. So they would not cut their hair, maybe for years.

Some people were Nazarites from birth. Samson was, Samuel was, John the Baptist was. They were Nazarites from the womb.

They never cut their hair. Now, this was not only permitted in the Old Testament, it was endorsed with great approval. In Numbers chapter 6, the Nazarite vow was laid out.

And we might say, well, that was, of course, Jewish custom. Did the churches follow it? The Apostle Paul took a Nazarite vow. It's recorded in the book of Acts.

He took a Nazarite vow. And when he came to Jerusalem, there were four Christians in the Church of Jerusalem who had taken the Nazarite vow, and James said, why don't you go pay their fees as part of their process here so that you can make the Jews happy with you. But here were four Christians who took a Nazarite vow, and Paul was willing to go and help them pay their fees for the sacrifice and stuff associated with it.

Now, the Nazarite vow involved not only the growing out of hair, but at the end of the period of the vow, there was the shaving of the head and taking the hair and burning it on the altar as an offering to the Lord, the hair of their separation. This means that anyone who took a Nazarite vow would at one point grow their hair long and another point shave their head. Now, if it was a woman who took the vow, at some point during the vow, she'd shave her head.

If it was a man who took the vow, at some point he'd have his hair long, which means in the Jewish culture of Paul, in the historical background, the Jews, like Paul himself, did not follow the customs that he is recommending the Corinthians follow in 1 Corinthians. So when he says, we have no such custom, nor do the churches of Christ, it appears to give strength by knowing the historical and cultural background. It appears to give strength to those who say, well, Paul is giving instructions that apply to the Corinthian church and perhaps some others in their cultural setting.

But he is saying that is not a universal thing for all cultures and all churches. Now, we would not we'd be kind of left without knowing if we didn't know something about the historical and cultural background of Paul and his readers. There are many other times when knowing something about this helps to interpret a passage that might otherwise be confusing.

We have not yet, of course, come to the consideration of contradictory passages, just general understanding of passages that are hard to understand. A third rule or canon of

interpretation is let the, if you have a passage that is unclear on a subject, but another passage that is clear on the same subject, of course, you gain your information from the clear passage and interpret the unclear in light of what you know from the clear passages rather than vice versa. A violation of this would be what many Christians do.

They want to know what the end times are going to be like. So they go to the book of Revelation and read them with great zest. Some people, it's the first and only book of the Bible they read after converted.

They read the book of Revelation because they're so fascinated with end times. Well, they read the book of Revelation, which by all accounts is an unclear book, right? I mean, it's not real clear. If you've read the book of Revelation, you know that it's not exactly crystal clear what it's talking about a lot of the time.

And yet many people will read the book of Revelation, they'll form an opinion of what they think it means, though it's unclear. And then when they read the rest of scripture and there's any reference to the second coming of Christ or any of these issues, they will impose on these other passages an idea that they derive from reading the book of Revelation. They will get their whole eschatological scheme from reading the book of Revelation alone.

And then when they read back into other passages that are not as unclear as Revelation is, they are not able to take them at face value because they have to, they have forcibly bring these clear passages into conformity with their opinions they derive from an unclear passage. There's a good reason why Revelation is the last book in the Bible. It is because it is best to form our understanding of these issues from the clearer books that are not so symbolic.

For God, through Paul or Jesus, has given us very plain statements about the resurrection and the rapture and the issues of antichrist and the end of the world and those kinds of things. And then, when from these clear passages we have gained an understanding, we come to Revelation which is unclear and say, okay, I can start making sense of this now because I know what the Bible teaches generally on these subjects. Revelation, therefore, must be saying the same thing and therefore my interpretation of these unclear things should conform to what the Bible clearly teaches elsewhere.

It's always more sensible to interpret the hard to understand passages in light of the passages that are not hard to understand. And a connecting thought to this, which is similar, is let the New Testament interpret the Old Testament. And that is really just a corollary of the third principle because the New Testament is more clear than the Old Testament in many respects.

Now, I should clarify that. I don't mean to say that the New Testament writings are clearer than, let us say, the stories in the Old Testament. The stories in the Old

Testament are straightforward and not hard to understand.

But the Psalms and the Prophets, especially the Prophets of the Old Testament, are extremely difficult to understand at times. And it is there, probably more than anywhere else in the Bible, that tremendous confusion has arisen in the churches in terms of how to understand the Prophets. Well, Peter tells us in 1 Peter chapter 1, verses 10 through 12, that the Old Testament Prophets didn't even understand what they were writing themselves because it was not for their generation to understand, it was for us, Christians, to understand.

And that which was not clearly understood by the Prophets themselves who wrote has been made clear to us by the writings of the Apostles. In the New Testament, in other words. Let me read the passage where Peter says that.

1 Peter 1, verses 10 through 12, Peter says, Of this salvation the Prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you. He's talking about the Old Testament Prophets, continuing to discuss the process of their inquiry. He says, They were searching what, or what manner of time, the Christ, or the Spirit of Christ, who was in them, was indicating when he testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.

That is to say, the Old Testament Prophets, the Spirit of Christ in them, prophesied of the suffering of Christ and the glories that should follow, which is the Church Age. But they didn't understand it, and they inquired and asked God, Could I have more clarity on this, please? What is this about? But it says in verse 12, To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us, that is to us, Christians, they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven. Things which even the angels desire to look into.

Now, Peter is saying that the prophets themselves were scratching their heads over the meaning of their own oracles. But fortunately for us, we live in that time where the understanding has been made clearer by those who preach the gospel to us through the Holy Spirit. And Paul says similar things to what Peter says.

Paul frequently talks about the mystery that was not made known to the sons of men and to the former generations, but is now revealed to the holy apostles and prophets through the Spirit. He says that in Ephesians 3 verses about 3 through 5. And he says it again, he says it at the end of Romans. He says it in Colossians.

He says it in 1 Corinthians 2. Paul frequently refers to the fact that his gospel message was kind of concealed in the Old Testament, but revealed in the New Testament through the Christian apostles. If that is true, then what it means is that much of the Old Testament prophecy is unclear as you read it in the Old Testament, but made clear by the apostles in the New Testament. It would therefore follow, if it is proper to interpret

the unclear in light of the clear, the unplain or the obscure in light of the plain, then we would interpret the Old Testament in light of the New Testament.

The New Testament is plainer. And we understand what the truth is and what the prophets were saying by what the apostles tell us they were saying. Then when we go back to the prophets, we impose on them the understanding that the Holy Spirit gave the apostles, and we can understand them better.

Now you might say, all of this, do we need to know this? Of course you need to know this. By the way, you might be surprised when there are Christians who take just the opposite view. There are Christians who believe that you need to interpret the New Testament in light of the Old, not vice versa.

But we don't have time to go into that right now. The point is, these are some very plain, general principles of understanding Scripture. Now I want to move on to the issue of resolving passages in Scripture that appear to be discrepant or contradictory to each other.

Now the first thing we need to realize is that a difficulty in understanding how two Scriptures harmonize is not the same thing as proving they contradict each other. If there are two statements that seem different from one another in their content, and it's not clear exactly how to harmonize them, that's not the same thing as saying that they contradict each other. They might, but they might not.

That has to be explored further. And it should not be thought a flaw in the Bible that there are passages that we misunderstand, that there are passages difficult to understand. You know, Peter himself said he found some of the things Paul wrote hard to understand.

He didn't consider that a flaw in Paul. He considered it a flaw in us. But in 2 Peter 3, verses 15 and 16, 2 Peter 3, verses 15 and 16, Peter says about Paul, And consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation, as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you.

As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures. Now, notice Peter says, Paul's writings are essentially talking about the same things I'm writing about here. He says he's saying the same things Paul says.

But going off just for a moment on Paul's writings, he says, you know, some of the things Paul writes are frankly hard to understand. And there are people who exploit this unclearness in Paul to twist it and to corrupt it and to try to make it say something it isn't saying. These people, he says, are untaught and unstable, and they twist these

statements of Paul to their own destruction as they do the rest of the Scriptures.

But notice they do so because, why? The passages are hard to understand. Now, Peter is not making a criticism of Paul's writings. He actually calls them Scripture here.

But he is simply alerting us to the fact that though the writings may have no flaws in them, there may be a difficulty in our understanding them. Not because they are flawed, but because our understanding is deficient. But if our understanding is deficient, it does not follow that we should just give up and say, well, I guess I can never understand this.

At least that's not the approach I'm inspired to do. If I find something I don't understand, then I still do find those things that I don't understand. I'm made the more eager to study them out.

If I don't understand it, it's because my understanding is deficient, but I'm not doomed to live the rest of my life with the level of understanding I now have. That's the whole fruit of study, is to understand better. But the critic of the Bible who thinks he finds contradictions, generally speaking, has only found a passage difficult to understand.

And he is usually not very committed to trying to understand it. He's more committed to trying to interpret it as a flaw, because he usually doesn't want to believe the Bible is the word of God. There's a quote here from Martin H. Fransman, which I have excerpted because it is, I think, a good statement of the general principle I've just made.

He says, there is nothing surprising in the fact that there are Bible difficulties. There is no other book so old, so remote from us in time and culture, and so varied in form and content that is read and read with profit by so many people not particularly well equipped to deal with ancient documents. The surprising thing is, not that there are difficulties, but that there are so many women and men of goodwill who learn to read the record of God's Son without serious difficulty.

And that is quite plainly so. It's not surprising that we, who have not had special training in ancient languages and ancient cultures and ancient documents, it's not surprising that we read such ancient documents from an ancient culture and we find some things hard to understand. Peter was of the same culture, spoke the same language as Paul, and he found things hard to understand.

We're from a different culture, speak a different language, and we're far removed from it in history. Don't be surprised if some things are hard to understand. What's amazing is that there is so much ability to understand on our part.

It seems like it would be much more difficult to understand than it is. And he says that's the more surprising thing, that so many men and women of goodwill actually learn to read the record of God's Son without serious difficulty. Now, let's talk about contradictions.

A general approach to passages which might be said to contradict one another should be met with certain attitudes and awareness and just clear thinking. First of all, we need to realize a contradiction exists only when two statements cannot both be true. The fact that two statements have different information in them does not mean they can't both be true.

If you find a statement in one gospel that says an angel met the women at the tomb of Jesus and told them that Jesus had risen, and you find another gospel telling us there were two angels there, you have different information. Actually, two of the gospels on that point tell us there was an angel there. The other two gospels tell us there were two angels there.

This has bothered some people. Whoa, a contradiction here. One passage says there was an angel.

The other says there were two angels. Well, wait a minute. Before we call that a contradiction, I mean, maybe so.

Maybe a couple of those gospel writers were misinformed, in which case we have to throw out their record. It's not reliable. But wait a minute.

Is it impossible for both to be true? Is it impossible for there to be an angel there and for there to be two angels there? Of course it's not impossible. If I told you that I was just in Idaho last weekend for three days at a camp meeting, and then you overheard me talking to someone else another time and said, my family and I were in Idaho at this camp meeting, would you think I contradicted myself just because one time I said I was there, another time I said my family and I were there? What's the difference? In one case, I'm simply giving more detail, more facts. I'm not being deceptive in either case.

It just depends on how much of the detail I feel I need to give to communicate what I'm saying. If there were two angels at the tomb and one of them spoke to the women and said certain things, then the gospel writer who said an angel was there and he said this, he is not denying that there was a second angel standing by who didn't say anything. And, I mean, you might say, well, that sounds like a fancy solution to a big problem.

It's not a big problem. It happens all the time we speak that way, and there's no dishonesty in it. There's no flaw in it.

We have to ask ourselves, these two passages that have different information for each other, does the difference constitute a contradiction? If they can both be true, you can't really say that there's necessarily a contradiction there. A second thing to consider about contradictions is it is not essential, in the defense of the infallibility of the scripture, to determine how any given problem is in fact to be resolved. It is enough to have a plausible explanation.



There may be more than one possible explanation to an apparent discrepancy. However, the presence of even one plausible solution removes all grounds for the charge that a contradiction exists. There are certain passages in the Bible that have been said to contradict each other by the skeptics.

In some cases, you could resolve it by appeal to one explanation, or you could resolve it equally easily by appeal to an entirely different explanation. Sometimes there's two or even three different explanations. Probably they're not all the right one, but three explanations may, each of them in their own right, remove the problem.

It may be solved by this explanation, it might be solved by this one, or by this one. Probably not all three are the right explanation, but one of them probably is, or at least one of them could be, any of them could be. And therefore, even if we don't know which explanation is the right one, the presence of even one plausible explanation means that no one can honestly say that these passages must be seen as contradictory.

If you have at least one plausible way to resolve it, then you have vacated the charge of any validity. Now, the fact that we don't know which explanation solves it, that just means that we don't know everything. It doesn't mean that the passage is a problem.

It just means we're not sure exactly which of the possible explanations removes the difficulty. Third, even when a plausible solution to a difficulty has been suggested, one is not compelled to accept the legitimacy of that solution. In the final analysis, the verdict on the Bible's infallibility will rest on the reader's predisposition to believe or disbelieve.

Now, here's what I mean by that. In the following material that we're going to cover, I'm going to give you at least, I haven't counted them up here, but it looks like it's probably close to 30 examples, and more could be given, but approximately 30 examples of cases where the Bible is thought by some to contradict itself. I am going to show you that there are extreme, reasonable, plausible explanations of these passages that will remove the difficulty and remove any grounds, any basis for the charge that these passages really contradict each other.

However, once I've given a possible explanation, the critic is entitled to say, well, I don't accept your explanation. I mean, your explanation could be right, but I have the right to reject it. I think you're just being, you know, blindly loyal to the Bible, and I prefer to believe that your solution isn't the right solution, and that there still is an unsolved problem here.

Well, they can do that. A person can legitimately reject a suggested explanation, a suggested solution, if they don't think it's convincing. And in each case that we're going to look at, I'm going to give a suggested solution.

To my mind, the solution is very plausible. A critic could say, ah, but I think you're just

playing fast and loose. I don't accept that explanation.

Well, the explanations I'm going to give are very reasonable, but the decision rests with each individual to decide whether they're going to accept the solution or retain their view that there's a problem here that's unsolved. So you cannot necessarily, by these explanations, you cannot prove to someone that there's no problems in the Bible, but you can certainly prove to your own satisfaction or anyone who's honestly wondering, you can prove that the charge of contradiction is not a valid charge necessarily. Fourth, one who believes the Bible to be true should not be afraid to confront difficulties, since the truth will always have the best argument on its side.

And if the Bible could be validly proven false, one who loves the truth would not wish to continue believing in it. On the other hand, if the Bible is true, its ability to overcome all challenges will simply demonstrate its truthfulness more dramatically. So if someone comes to you and says, I have found a problem in the Scriptures, don't suddenly break into a sweat and say, uh-oh, how am I going to defend the Bible now? Realize that close examination of a responsible and intelligent heart will yield legitimate information.

And if the Bible is in fact the Word of God, as you probably believe it is, and I do, if it is true, in other words, the emergence of more information is only going to be in favor of the Scriptures. And if it turns out that more information undermines the Scriptures, then hey, maybe they're not true, maybe we should go somewhere else instead of the Bible for answers to life. That is at least, I think, the honest person's approach.

But I don't think that anyone by taking such a course will ever be forced to abandon their faith in the Scripture. It's the opposite way. Now here are some hermeneutic principles that will help clear up apparent discrepancies.

One is give the author credit for at least having average intelligence. Now this, I believe that many of the writers of Scripture had superior intelligence. The Apostle Paul was a brilliant man.

Moses was a brilliant man. Solomon was clearly a brilliant man. David didn't seem to be any slaggard when it came to intelligence.

I think most of the people, Isaiah was probably an extremely literate and well-educated man. It's not necessary to believe these men were all of superior intelligence, but it certainly isn't very charitable to suggest they were of lower than average intelligence. We don't have any reason to believe that.

The fact that the disciples believed in the resurrection of Christ doesn't mean that they were gullible men or that they were stupid. They may have had very good reasons to believe in the resurrection of Christ. For example, they saw him and touched him.

That seems like a pretty good reason. But what I'm saying is, in many cases where there

is the charge that the Bible contradicted itself, really, in order for that to be the case, it would necessitate that the writers were pretty stupid. Just plain stupid.

There are several examples from the writings of Paul that are sometimes given. I'll just show you two of them offhand. One is in 1 Corinthians chapter 14.

1 Corinthians chapter 14 where Paul is talking about the order in the church and the use of the gifts in the church in an orderly fashion, where he largely focuses on the discussion of tongues and prophecy functioning in the church. In this discussion he says in verses 22 and 23, Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe, but to unbelievers. But prophesying is not for unbelievers, but for those who believe.

Therefore, if the whole church comes together in one place and all speak with tongues, and there come in those who are uninformed or unbelievers, will they not say that you are out of your mind? But if all prophecy and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all. And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed. And so, falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you.

Now, in verses 23 through 25, Paul seems to say that if an unbeliever comes in the church, he will be more convicted and more affected by the exercise of the gift of prophecy in the church than by tongues. If everyone is speaking in tongues, he may just think you're nuts. But if everyone is prophesying, it may have a positive effect on him, the unbeliever.

The problem is that in verse 22, he says that tongues are for a sign to the unbeliever, and prophecy is for a sign to believers. So, here's where the problem arises. It looks like Paul is saying in verse 22, tongues has its greater effect on the unbeliever, and prophecy on the believer.

But the illustration he gives afterwards seems to turn it around and give the opposite. A lot of people have thought there's a contradiction here. Now, I believe this can be resolved without serious difficulty, but I'm not going to spend the time to do it right now.

I simply want to give this as an example of the principle that we need to give the writer credit for having at least average intelligence. If there is in fact a contradiction here, then Paul was pretty stupid. He must have been writing in his sleep or something, because he said it would appear he said one thing in one verse, and the very next breath, the very next pen stroke, he says the opposite and contradicts himself.

People generally don't do that, unless they're extremely inattentive or simply don't have the power to sustain a logical discussion. We know Paul was not incapable of sustaining a logical discussion. The book of Romans is a very good example of his ability to argue with a seamless logic.

And therefore, even if we could not quite make out how these verses in 1 Corinthians can be resolved, and I think we can, but I'm saying that even if we could not, instead of saying there's a contradiction here, we should say, well, I think Paul probably was not a total idiot. Therefore, whatever he meant in these verses, maybe I'm not grasping it, but whatever he was saying, it probably was not really a contradiction. He probably meant this in a way that doesn't contradict, or else he's just plain stupid, stupider than I am, stupider than most people are.

And that's not a very charitable judgment. It is always possible that he meant something by it, which in his own mind was not at all contradictory, and if we understood correctly, we wouldn't have a problem with it either. Again, I will not at this point explore the possible solutions.

There are some, but I'm just using this as an illustration of giving the guy credit. Instead of saying there's a contradiction, say, well, if there is, he'd have to be a dollard. He'd have to be a total moron.

And I'm not willing to say he was that, even if I'm not a Christian, I shouldn't say that about Paul, because he wasn't. And therefore, I should say, rather, maybe I'm the moron. Maybe I'm the one who don't quite, I'm not quite grasping what he's getting at here.

But certainly he could not have contradicted himself in the space of two sentences. I mean, a person might contradict himself when he's talking on one occasion about something, and some other occasion he might forget what he said on that occasion and say something that's contradictory to that. People do that all the time, but not usually within the space of two successive sentences.

Likewise, in Philipians chapter 3, there's another instance of this. Now, by the way, a lot of the passages in the Bible that historically have been challenged by critics as contradictory, a lot of the problems existed because everyone was using the King James Version, which, by the way, I have no problem with the King James Version, it's a wonderful version. But it is the case that sometimes the choice of words in the King James Version is what led to the appearance of a problem where, in the Greek, it could be translated differently and remove the difficulty.

For example, this is a case like that. In Philipians chapter 3 and verse 12, Paul said, Not that I have already attained or am already perfected, the King James said, already perfect, but I press on that I may lay hold on that for which Christ Jesus has laid hold of me. But then, down in verse 15, he said, Therefore let us, as many as are mature, the King James also said perfect there, have this mind.

Now, in the King James, you can see there appears to be a contradiction. In verse 12, it says, I'm not yet perfect. But in verse 15, it says, those of us who are perfect, meaning himself too.

Now, is he perfect or is he not perfect? Well, the difficulty here arose from the fact that the word perfect in the Greek can mean complete or mature or perfect. Any of those words are adequate translations of the Greek word. And sometimes, in some contexts, it means one of those and sometimes another.

When it says in Hebrews chapter 6, let us go on to perfection, Hebrews 6, verse 1, it doesn't mean, literally, in the context, it means to maturity. Because he is just coming out of a discussion of how immature the readers were. They could only drink milk and not meat and so forth because they were babes.

So he says, let us go on to perfection, the same word. He means maturity. Sometimes it means maturity.

Sometimes it means absolute perfection. Sometimes it just means completeness. As in Hebrews 11, where it says that they, the Old Testament saints, could not be made perfect without us.

What I think that means is that the Old Testament saints' number was not complete without us being added to them. Their perfect means complete. So you've got the same Greek word can have a variety of meanings.

In order to clarify that, see, the King James was not flawed when it had Paul say, I am not yet perfect, in verse 12. And then it says, those of us who are perfect, in verse 15. That was a very adequate translation of the Greek word.

They were not mistranslating. However, it's more likely that Paul's meaning was, I am not yet perfected, but I am among those who are mature. Same Greek word, different concept.

He was a mature Christian, but he was not absolutely perfect. And that is almost certainly what Paul's meaning was. But if someone were to say no, Paul meant the same thing in both places.

I am not yet perfect, but three verses later it says, I am perfect. Again, this would require that he'd fallen asleep while he was at his writing desk and had forgotten in verse 15 that three verses earlier he'd said the opposite. It's much more charitable and reasonable to figure that a man of at least average intelligence would not contradict himself in so short a space.

And that his meaning should be understood in a way that does not make him contradict himself, which would be a very unusual thing, maybe an unheard of thing for a man to do of average intelligence or better. So the first rule of resolving or dealing with what appear to be contradictions is at least give the writer's credit for having at least average intelligence. Secondly, be as fair in assuming the author's honesty as you would that of anyone else whom you have no reason to distrust.

This is where a lot of people go wrong. They feel like the author has said something contradictory because he's getting himself caught in a fib. He told the truth on one occasion, but on the other occasion he forgot what he had said.

And he's like all liars. When people lie, they end up saying things contradictory to each other because they don't remember what they said to one person. And since they're making up a story anyway, they say it differently over here.

And oops, I accidentally contradicted myself because I was lying. And that happens all the time with liars. They always catch themselves in contradictions.

Well, in order for this to be the case with the Bible writers, we'd have to assume that some of them are liars. But we don't have any real reason to believe any of them are liars. We might not like what they say if we're a skeptic.

We might not wish to believe what they say. But we can't really say that we have evidence that these men are liars. Now, when you read most books, not Bible books, just secular books, or when you read newspapers or magazines, it may be that you're not 100% sure these guys are honest.

You may have come to distrust the press, and there's reason at times to do so. You can often find a slant that's not entirely honest there. But until you find such, you basically, you generally say, well, I'm going to assume that there's some germ of truth here, that this person isn't entirely a liar.

Unless I find some reason to distrust him, I'm going to gain information for what he says without having the worst possible way of looking at it. And in the Bible, sometimes where there are claimed to be contradictions, it would require not only that the person had poor intelligence, but maybe he has got good intelligence, but he's just not very honest. And we need to be careful about that.

We need to not reach conclusions about the passage that would require us to say this man is lying, unless we have reason to believe he's a liar. Not everyone lies, especially not all Christians. And some people, by the way, just reject a great deal of what's written in the Gospels - the Jesus Seminar do this - they reject 80% of what Jesus is recorded saying in the Gospels.

They say that was all made up by the Church later. In other words, the Church said that Jesus said this, but they didn't really say it. And you say, well, why would you distrust it? I mean, what's the point? They say, well, it was written by religious people.

It was written by Christians. Well, my response is, since when does becoming a Christian make someone automatically a liar? I don't see why the fact that these people were Christians automatically makes us assume that they're going to lie about Jesus. Maybe the fact that they're Christians is due to the fact that the things they said about him are

really true, and that's what convinced them to be Christians.

I mean, that's also a possibility. But when someone brings a negative judgment of the integrity of the writer to the passage without really having adequate evidence against them, that's something we don't do with other writers, and it shows bigotry rather than sincere scholarship or an attempt to understand the truth. Now, this third category is going to take us most of the rest of our time, and that is, if passages seem to contradict one another, consider the following.

Now, in your notes, I've given you 12 considerations. Under each of them, I've given examples where people have thought the Bible contradicts itself, but by taking this consideration into consideration, you can see that the Bible does not necessarily contradict itself. There are several... I've given, as I say, a number of examples.

Usually two or three examples for each consideration. Though, as you go through the Bible, you will find additional cases. Like I said, one writer collected 900 cases where people thought the Bible contradicted itself.

There's a lot of times, more than the examples I'm giving here, where you will find instances where the Bible might appear to contradict itself. But in every case I'm aware of, and I've read the Bible through many, many times and looked carefully at these things, in every case I'm aware of, one of these 12 considerations will resolve the problem. Let me... We're not going to take them all in this session, but this will have to spill over into our next session as well.

But let's start working through some of these. One consideration that will solve some problems is an awareness of the ambiguity. Know what ambiguity means? It means it could mean one thing or another thing.

It's not precise. The wording allows more than one possible interpretation. The ambiguity of a statement sometimes allows for more than one possible meaning.

Let me give you a very classic example of this. Now, once again, depending on what translation you use, you may not see the problem in your translation. These problems all appear in the King James because for the years that most critics were amassing this list of contradictions, they were looking at the King James.

Most of them did not read Greek or Hebrew, and the translation most available then for centuries was the King James version. So the problems usually appeared in the King James. What has happened is modern translators who translate the New King James and the NIV and the New American Standard, they are well aware of those areas in the King James that critics found fault with.

And in many cases, the new translations have fixed them in legitimate ways so that you don't actually find the problem in them. I think in this case, though, you can still see the

problem in the New King James. If you turn to Acts chapter 9, in verse 7, it says, this is describing the conversion of Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus.

One of the details it gives is in verse 7, Acts 9, 7. The men who journeyed with him stood speechless. This is when Jesus was conversing with Saul there and saying, why do you persecute me, and so forth. The men who journeyed with Saul stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no one, or seeing no man, literally.

They heard a voice, but they saw no man. Okay, well, no problem there in itself, but when you compare that with another passage talking about the same event, there's a bit of a smack. In Acts chapter 22, in verse 9, Paul is now, much later, giving the report of his own conversion to the Jewish audience, and he's telling this part of the same story.

And in doing so, he says this, in Acts 22, 9, and those who were with me indeed saw the light and were afraid, but they did not hear the voice of him who spoke to me. Now, many perceptive readers have gotten caught on this. Hey, wait a minute.

Hey, I thought over in chapter 9, verse 7, it said, they heard a voice, but they didn't see a man. This one says, they saw the light, but they didn't hear the voice of him who spoke to me. It sounds as if one is just a flip-flop of the other, and here's a case where it appears to be a true contradiction, because he says they didn't hear, and one, he says they did hear, and the other one, he says they didn't see, but over here he says they did see.

So, did they see something, or did they not see something? Did they hear something, or did they not hear something? Now, believe it or not, this one is fairly easily resolved by appeal to the fact that some of the words are ambiguous in the Greek. Now, this is not a desperate attempt. This is quite simple and legitimate.

It says, for one thing, let's talk about what they saw, first of all. It says in Acts 22, 9, they saw the light. Okay, there was a bright light from heaven, it blinded Saul for three days.

His companions saw the light. What does the other passage say in chapter 9, verse 7? It says they didn't see any man. Well, those statements can both be true, can they not? I mean, you could see a light and not see Jesus, not see a man, the form of a man, if it just was bright light from heaven.

Saul saw Jesus before he was blinded, and he appeals to that fact later in his writing, he says he saw Jesus, but his companions didn't see Jesus, they just saw a light. Okay, that's not in itself a big problem. The bigger problem is what did they hear or not hear? Because in chapter 22, verse 9, it says they did not hear the voice of him who spoke to me.

That is, of course, the voice of Jesus. They didn't hear the voice of Jesus. Now, over in chapter 9, verse 7, it says they heard a voice, but he says they didn't hear the voice of



him who spoke to me.

Is there any way to resolve that? Well, how many voices were there in that conversation? If you recall, there were two. There was the voice from heaven, and there was the voice of Saul answering back, and there was a conversation going on between Jesus and Saul. Certainly one possible solution would be that they heard a voice, as it says in chapter 9, verse 7, namely, they heard Paul's voice.

They heard his side of the conversation, like hearing one side of a telephone conversation and not hearing the other side. That's possible. In fact, I know of a modern-day case where there was someone having a conversation with God, and a person who was nearby heard only one side of it.

But I won't get into that now. But the point is, that is at least a possibility. It could be said that they heard a voice, namely, Saul's voice, but it's also true they didn't hear the voice of the one who spoke to Saul.

This would solve the problem instantly, although I'm not sure that's the best solution. There's another possibility. And this arises from the ambiguity of the Greek word phonei, which is translated voice in both places.

Phonei in the Greek is the ordinary word for voice. It's also the ordinary word for noise or sound. We get our word phone from it.

It means sound. Now, it's possible that in Acts 9, 7, a better translation would be they heard a sound, but they saw no man. And then over in 22, 9, it says they saw a light, but they didn't hear the voice of him who spoke to him.

Now, the word hear, akouo, in the Greek, also can mean to hear with understanding, to understand. When Jesus says, why is it you can't hear my words? He means, why don't you understand my words? When he says, hearken, or hear me, he means listen with attentiveness and understand. It is the case that the word akouo, which is translated hear, can be translated to understand, or at least to convey that notion.

So that he could be saying, if these Greek words that have more than one possible meaning were interpreted so, in 9, 7, he could be saying they heard a sound, but they didn't see any man. And in the other verse, 22, 9, they say they saw a light, but they didn't understand the voice. They may have heard a sound, but to them it was just a sound.

To Paul, it was a voice, intelligible. He was conversing with them. But they didn't hear it as a voice.

It was not intelligible to them. They didn't understand it. You know, there's another case like that in the Scripture, in John, chapter 12, where God spoke from heaven to Jesus and

said, I have glorified it, and I will do so again.

And the Scripture says, some stand by and said it thundered. It was that they heard something, but they didn't hear it as a clear voice. They heard a sound.

They heard a noise. They thought it thundered. But in fact, there were others who actually recognized it as a voice, and they said, oh, an angel has spoken to them.

In John, chapter 12. We won't turn there now. But the point is, it is not unreasonable to assume that if God is speaking with an audible voice to somebody, that bystanders might hear a noise, a sound, and not yet understand the words.

So there's a variety of ways we could solve this. It all depends on whether it means this, or whether it means that. All the various means are possible, because there's an ambiguity.

The word *akuo* is ambiguous. Does it mean hear, or does it mean understand? The word *phonate*, does it mean voice, or does it mean a sound? Could be either one. We don't know which.

Now, whenever you have a case like this, and where the words are ambiguous so that you could take them one way or another, it's obvious that a person who's got a disposition toward finding a fault will take that option of the meaning of the words. That will make it contradictory, because they want to find a fault. But a person who doesn't have that negative predisposition will take another option, equally valid, that removes the difficulty, you see.

Of course, the wording actually could be contradictory. It could be that one passage is trying to say that they heard a voice, and the other passage is trying to say they didn't hear a voice, in which case there'd be a contradiction. But there's no reason to assume that that's the right understanding when other valid meanings of the words are available.

Now, let me say this also. People who would like to find this as a contradiction are not considering, they're not clear thinkers. Remember that both passages are written by the same man, Luke.

And while it may be possible for a man to contradict himself in the space of, what is it, 11 chapters difference between them, between the two passages, he might forget what he said, yet it's not likely that Luke would have two different opinions at the same time of what happened when Paul was converted. Remember, he got all his information from Saul himself. Luke was a constant companion with Paul.

In fact, Paul, I'm sure, read the draft of both Luke and Acts, because Luke wrote them while he was traveling with Paul. And since Paul was the chief subject of the latter

chapters of Acts, I'm sure that Paul was curious to know what was said about him. In fact, probably all the information Luke had, he had by interviewing Paul about it, or from Paul telling his story.

Now, what I'm saying is that long before Luke ever started to set his pen down to write the book of Acts, he probably already had a knowledge of what happened when Saul was converted. He'd been traveling with Paul for years. Probably heard the story many times.

It's very unlikely that when Luke wrote Acts chapter 9, he had one opinion about it, and by the time he got to chapter 22, he had an entirely different opinion about it. What I'm saying is the reasonable suggestion is that Luke already had a clear opinion about what happened, derived from his own acquaintance with Paul, long before he wrote either passage. And it's very unlikely that he would think one thing when he wrote chapter 9, and think the opposite thing when he wrote chapter 22.

So, I mean, one could argue that that is the case, but it seems to me less likely than some other alternative. There are cases like this where you can take it one way and see a contradiction, or with equal legitimacy, take it another way, and there's no contradiction whatsoever. A person who is not predisposed toward finding problems is not going to make such a blunder.

For example, if Luke is of average intelligence, he's not going to make such a blunder. If he's an honest man, which we have no reason to doubt, from anything he's written or anything that's come down from him, we have no reason to call him a dishonest man, then he will tell the truth of what he knows. Therefore, there's no reason for us to assume the worst when a passage is ambiguous and could be taken either in a way that contradicts or a way that doesn't.

Another example of this, and one frequently people stumble over, is who was the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary? This is, in general, the problem that many people have recognized with the two genealogies of Christ, the one in Matthew chapter 1 and the one in Luke chapter 3. They are very different from each other, and one could say contradictory if they are both trying to say the same thing and are failing to do so. But that's the big question. If you look at Matthew chapter 1, verses 1 through 16, you'll find a series of names of father, son, father, son, going down starting with Abraham and moving on down all the way through Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called the Christ.

That's how it is stated in verse 16. Jacob begot Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ. Now, there can be little doubt if you read these verses, that what Matthew is giving us is the genealogy of this man Joseph.

It actually tells us Jacob begot Joseph. Now, that's not the same Jacob in the Old Testament who also begot a man named Joseph. This is a later Jacob and a later Joseph.

But the point here is there can be no question Matthew is giving us Joseph's genealogy and traces it back to Abraham. But there's another genealogy that is more ambiguous. Taken one way, it would be seen as contradicting Matthew's genealogy.

Taken another way, it would not. But it is sufficiently ambiguous to allow different options. In Luke chapter 3, beginning at verse 23, it says, Now Jesus himself began, New King James says, his ministry at, the King James just says, Jesus himself began to be about 30 years of age.

Being, as was supposed, the son of Joseph, the son of Heli, the son of Methath, and so on, going all the way down to Adam at the end of the chapter. Now, we don't have to read further to see where the problem lies. In Matthew chapter 1, we are told that Joseph's father was who? Jacob was the man's name.

According to Luke chapter 3, verse 23, who is Joseph's father apparently? Someone named Heli. The problem doesn't stop there. If you read the whole genealogy, you've got an entirely different family line.

It's not just Heli is the wrong name, but all the names that led up to Heli are different than the names that led up to Jacob in Matthew. So, you've got two entirely different lineages here. Both of them look as if they are speaking about the lineage of Joseph.

If they are both giving us the lineage of Joseph, then we've got some kind of a problem to resolve here, possibly even a contradiction. A man can't have two actual fathers. A man can't have his father be Jacob, who comes from one line, and his father is also Heli, who comes from another line.

They can't both be true. There's a contradiction here. If they are both giving us Joseph's genealogy, but that's a big if.

You see, the ambiguity of verse 23 allows that it may not be that Luke is giving us Joseph's genealogy. There's no ambiguity in Matthew. Matthew makes it clear.

Jacob begot Joseph. That's Joseph's genealogy. What do we have here? How many of you are reading the King James or the New King James? Almost everyone? Everyone, okay.

So you can see what I'm about to see. I'm just going to talk about punctuation. The punctuation is not in the Greek.

When you find parentheses or commas or quotation marks, those are added by the translator. They're not found in the Greek text. In some translations, what I'm about to observe would not be visible because the punctuation is given differently in some translations.

But here in the New King James, it says, Now, Jesus himself began his ministry at about

30 years of age, then in parentheses, being as in parentheses, as was supposed. The son of Joseph. Now, you know, there is something parenthetical here.

There is something that belongs in parentheses, but the parentheses are not in the Greek. The translators have had to make a judgment call as to what part of the sentence belongs in parentheses, and they've placed them where they placed them. Now, when you have a parenthesis, it means that the material before the parenthesis naturally is continued without a break by the material after the parenthesis.

The parenthesis is like an aside. You could leave it out entirely and the sentence would go smoothly. If you read the sentence leaving out this parenthesis, as was supposed here, it would read, He was about 30 years of age, being the son of Joseph, the son of Heli.

Now, obviously, that cannot be what Luke intended to say because Jesus was not the son of Joseph. Earlier, in chapter 2, he makes it clear Jesus was born of a virgin. Joseph had nothing to do with Jesus coming into existence.

Therefore, it does not make sense to put the parentheses where they are here because if this is a correct parenthesis, you could be able to omit it and read the sentence without it, and it would make good sense, right? That's what a parenthesis is. Could Luke possibly have intended to say that Jesus was the son of Joseph when he had said the opposite in the previous chapter and disagrees with everything the Bible teaches? Obviously not. But there is some parenthesis intended.

What if we extended the parenthesis? What if we put within the parenthesis these words, As was supposed the son of Joseph. In other words, you move the end of the parenthesis from where it is to place it after the word Joseph. What would you have then? You would have him saying in parenthesis that people suppose that he was the son of Joseph.

Now that would be a fact. That would be true. That's a complete thought.

But if you read the statement then as a flow of thought without the parenthetical material, it would be saying Jesus was 30 years of age being the son of Heli. Now, you should note also there's some parenthesis here. Excuse me, not parenthesis, but italics.

Have you ever noticed that? All the italicized words in your Bible? A lot of people wonder about that because when we use italicized words in modern books, it's usually for emphasis or to make the statement stand out. But that's not what it means when you find italics, these slanted letters, in your Bible. When you find words in italics in the Bible, the translators are telling you these words are not in the Greek or the Hebrew text.

They are supplied by the translators who are just honest enough to tell you that they've added them. But they do so because they believe that the text implies them or that the text would not read as a complete sentence without them. There are passages that if

you just gave all the Greek words only from the passage, it would be choppy and it wouldn't be smooth and some things would be left out.

So the translators have taken the liberty at times to add a few words that they believe are implied. But they're not dishonest about it. They'll put them in italics so that you'll know they put them in.

They don't want to fool you. So this is something you can always know when you see italicized words in your Bible. These words in italics are not found in the Greek manuscripts or in the Greek text.

They are supplied as a service to the reader by the translators. That's why if you're looking at the New King James, by the way, in verse 23, the words, *His ministry at*, right? You see, those are in italics. That means they're not in the Greek.

In the Greek it just says, Now Jesus himself began at about 30 years of age. They added the words *His ministry* because that's, they believe, what the meaning of the sentence is. But the words *His ministry* are not in the Greek.

But notice also throughout the whole genealogy, including later in verse 23, the expression *the sun* most of the time are in italics. Now the word *sun*, first time it appears in verse 23 is not in italics, but the second time it appears at the end of the verse it says *the sun* is italics. And if you look at every verse after that in the chapter, *the sun*, *the sun*, are in italics.

It means those words aren't there in the Greek. It means that in the Greek it just says, He lie of Mephat, of Levi, of Melchi, and so forth. No the *sun* in the Greek text.

It just says this person was of this person, of this person, of this person. Now you do have the word *sun* without italics just before Joseph, as was supposed son of Joseph. Okay? But if you leave out the italicized words and extend the parenthesis to include everything up to the word Joseph, which is not very confusing and certainly not an illegitimate thing to do in consideration, you would then be saying this.

Jesus was about 30 years of age being of Heli. Not the son of Heli because the *sun* is in italics. It's not in the Greek.

It just says he was of Heli. Now in parenthesis it says he was as supposed son of Joseph. That's what everyone thought.

They thought he was the son of Joseph. But in fact he was not the son of Joseph. He was of Heli.

Now I'm sure this is somewhat confusing to you if it's new to you. If you've thought these things through before it may be just old hat. I don't mean to be confusing.

I'm simply trying to say if you were translating this and not using an English translation, if you're a Greek scholar, you could decide to put the parenthesis elsewhere because they're not in the Greek. And you could leave out the word the son if you wish to because it's not in the Greek either. And you would then have a statement that Jesus was supposed to be by everybody, everyone supposed he was the son of Joseph.

But in fact Jesus was of Heli, of Nephatic so far. Which means that Jesus' actual bloodline came through Heli, not Joseph. Now we don't know anything else about Heli from the Bible.

It's the only place his name appears. But we could deduce something reasonably. Because Luke has already told us in the previous chapter that Joseph was not Jesus' father but he was born of a virgin.

The only father in the literal sense that Jesus had was God. But it's not as if he didn't come through human lines. He did come through human lines.

Which line? His mother's line. Jesus did have human ancestry through his mother but not through Joseph. And therefore it is reasonable to assume although it may sound very complex and like a fancy explanation to me it's just reasonable that Luke is not here telling us Joseph's genealogy.

He's telling us Mary's genealogy. Now we can't prove this because we don't have any other place in the Bible that says that Heli was the father of Mary. But neither do we have Mary's father's name being any other thing than Heli either.

We don't know. All we can say is that Luke has already told us that Jesus had only one human parent. And that was Mary.

And now he's telling us that although people thought or supposed that he was of Joseph he was really of Heli. This would mean that Heli is Jesus' nearest male ancestor. Genealogies usually trace through the male part of the family line so Heli would be Jesus' nearest male ancestor.

Your nearest male ancestor is who? Your father. But Jesus' nearest male ancestor was his maternal grandfather. Mary's father.

Before I go any further is anyone confused as this plain as can be? It seems plain to me. Now, this theory is possible but it's not required. It would be possible to say no, Luke just made a mistake and he contradicted Matthew.

No, Luke is indeed trying to give Joseph's genealogy but he just blew it and got it wrong or got it different than Matthew therefore we have a contradiction. A person could say that even after I've given my explanation they could say no, I reject that explanation I still choose to see this as a contradiction. But why? And let us ask is it more reasonable

to see it as a contradiction which is an option or is it more reasonable to accept an explanation like that which I've given? Let me give you several reasons why I think my explanation is far more reasonable than the opposite.

One of them is, as I've already said Luke has already expressed his conviction in chapter 2 that Jesus didn't have a human father he was not of Joseph. So it would be very strange for him to say to us in Luke chapter 3 that Jesus was the son of Joseph. That would be very strange for him to contradict himself within the space of two chapters.

But there's more. Suppose we take for the sake of argument the view of the critic that Luke was trying to give Joseph's genealogy and so was Matthew. They would both have to go to the same records to get it.

I mean, neither of them had it memorized and they're sure not going to make it up off the top of their head. They would have both had to go to the temple records and get Joseph's genealogy and if they had they would have gotten the same one because Joseph only had one. It's clear they got different people's genealogies.

Furthermore, in the birth narratives Matthew always follows the story from Joseph's side. Luke, you will see, always follows the story from Mary's side. Therefore, it's not surprising if Matthew would give us Joseph's genealogy which is his side of the story and Luke would give us Mary's genealogy which is her side of the story.

Furthermore, if Luke doesn't give us Mary's no one does and we would never know for sure whether Jesus was really descended from David a requirement from the Messiah. Mary is descended from David if this is her genealogy. If it's not, we have no idea whether she was or whether Jesus was.

So for these reasons, it seems more likely that Luke is going to give us Mary's genealogy than Matthew's. We're going to have to stop there we've just run out of time and we'll go on to these other considerations but these are examples of places where the material is ambiguous it could mean one thing or another. Taken one way, yeah, there is a contradiction.

Taken another way, no problem. I prefer to take it the way where there's no problem. We'll go on and consider the rest next time.