

BIBLE - CONTRADICTIONS

Present climate

Before I consider the issue of contradictions in the bible, it is important to paint something of a context or milieu. The age we live in has seen an unprecedented attack on the integrity of Scripture, so much so that its profile in homes, communities and societies at large is much diminished. While those who do not understand its value would argue that it has reached its sell by date, they would probably be unaware of the extent to which it has informed and underpinned everything that is great in the west, politically, socially, scientifically, technologically to mention but a few.

Events and movements in history are not random, and the developments we have seen within the last 200 – 300 years are critical in understanding the development of this criticism.

Skepticism and the age of scientific reason

Age of scientific reason. Particularly post-enlightenment. We underestimate the extent to which this has penetrated our thinking, and to be sure, it has revolutionized life. We have pushed back the limits of disease, we have extended life spans, we have managed to make knowledge immediately available to all and much, much more. One must not underestimate this change. Five hundred years ago, in most of Europe you would have relied on the church to interpret any form of truth for you. You might not even have had access to the scriptures. You would have regarded anyone like Copernicus or Galileo heretical, because of the beliefs the church handed down to you would have discredited them. Life would have been filled with superstition, and generally a dearth of knowledge.

In many ways, we have swung around with dizzying speed, with a switch that is quite alarming.

A look at minuet, and criticism based on a scientific mode of reasoning. Theory of evolution, much like the Copernican revolution, has cast doubt on all canonical statements of truth. Truth can be formulated in the laboratory, and is arrived at through processes of empirical investigation, inductive and deductive reasoning.

Post Marxism

While Marxism is something of the past – in fact the only Marxists left are in South Africa – it left an indelible mark. One of the foundational beliefs was that religion is the opium of the masses, a tool whereby people are subjugated and forced into exploitative relationships with their bosses. Certainly, church history provided lots of fuel for this – think of Tetzels indulgences. Furthermore, Christian National Education. In the mid 70's, John Vorster used Romans 13 as a text for substantiating his claim that resistance to the govt of the day was resistance to God.

Doubt has been cast on the integrity of the Christian religion, in the minds of the secular thinkers. The bible is therefore seen as something carefully constructed by men and used as a tool for subjugation.

Post Modernism

As we heard from Mike Faeron the other night, we live in the age of deconstruction and unraveling. Truths that people took for granted during the 60's are now completely under the spotlight, and have been called into question by the likes of Foucault, Baudrillard and Derrida. They have rejected what they call "totalizing epistemologies", or blanket beliefs that dictate to you and I how to live our lives.

To be sure, the average person in the street picks up the crumbs that these theorists leave once they have had their meal, and a little knowledge is very dangerous. Even though these influences often even contradict each other – they have one thing on common – skepticism regarding claims to revealed truth. The evil one is very clever; he will obscure their differences, but highlight ways in which they attack Biblical truth. Christians are then caricatured – or made fun of. Words like "repent" and "convert" becomes archetypal symbols of an age typified by lack of wisdom, by fanaticism and suspicion. We now live in an enlightened age, and age that can work out the truth for itself, and not one that has to rely on revealed truth.

Hence – widespread skepticism.

Before I discuss the types of contradiction, allow me to highlight one further feature that has helped this onset of skepticism – Christians have retreated into the laager. While the blossoming of science and its offerings is a thing directly attributable to the impact of God's truth on the world, Christians have become so scared to defend the faith, that they have hidden away in holy huddles, and the scientist who is a Christian is hard to find nowadays. Likewise, the politician who is a Christian. They have abrogated this territory and given it over to the world. The evolution debate seems largely unopposed! Chaos theory is unopposed. The net result is that Christians are now viewed as 'mystics', people who must be respected as the Hindu is respected – they need their religion. There is a great divorce between rational thinking and religious endeavour. So now, if you try to argue a point about the world being created in 7 days, you're seen as a kind of mystic who doesn't understand the finer points of science. This has only been like this for a few hundred years. Even by non-Christians many hundreds of years ago was the Bible seen as an authority on issues of science.

TYPES OF CONTRADICTIONS

CONTRADICTIONS ON DETAIL

Who came to Jesus, a centurion or Jewish elders?

According to Matthew 8:5-13, a centurion approached Jesus directly to request the healing of his sick servant. Luke 7:2 says that some elders of the Jews were sent. It wouldn't have been uncommon for a Roman centurion to send Jews, familiar with the culture of Jesus, to request the healing first, and then to make a direct personal request.

Entering or leaving Jericho

Matt 20:29 states that Jesus and His disciples were leaving Jericho when He healed the two blind men. Mark 10:46, 47 agrees, but suggests that there was only one blind man. Luke mentions one blind man, but indicates Jesus was entering Jericho.

It's fairly simple to resolve the difference. Mark mentions the name of a blind man, whereas Matthew and Luke refer to blind men. Furthermore, there is an old Jericho and a new Jericho. Jesus was going from one to another. We only found out, by the way, about the two Jerichos through archaeology. Imagine all the doubt we could have avoided had we not waited until archaeology discovered it.

PROPHECY

The virgin birth

Isaiah 7:14

¹⁴“Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.¹

Prophecy often has a twofold application. Firstly, it speaks of an immediate time, and it also speaks of another. For example, David is referred to as the “son of man” in the psalms, but Christ takes that inscription and uses it for himself. If one believes in the bible as God’s revelation of himself, then the connection between the new testament and old testament renditions of the phrase is obvious.

CONTRADICTIONS WITH HISTORICAL FACT

Sargon, King of Assyria

¹In the year that Tartan came to Ashdod, when Sargon the king of Assyria sent him, and he fought against Ashdod and took it, ²

Critics were careful to consider this a fanciful figment of Isaiah’s imagination, an invention, because all archaeological and other historical records do not reflect his existence.

In 1843 a French archaeologist by the name of Paul Botta discovered a great palace guarded by huge winged bulls nearly five meters high. The walls were lined with great slabs of stone carved with pictures and cuneiform writing. The writing was a clear indication of the existence of the King Sargon. One of the references, interestingly, records his seizure of Samaria, where he captured 27290 people. This siege was started by Shalmaneser V (referred to in 2 Kings 18:9) and completed by Sargon completed his work after he died two years later.

Belshazzar’s feast

Critics held, for many years, that the book of Daniel was in error, because no king by the name Belshazzar had ever been found in any ancient document apart from Daniel 5:1. In

¹*The Holy Bible, New King James Version*, (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, Inc.) 1982.

²*The Holy Bible, New King James Version*, (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, Inc.) 1982.

the complete list of Babylonian kings, the king at the time should have been Nabonidus – this according to the archaeological clues. In fact, in 1850, a German scholar wrote that Belshazzar was simply a figment of the imagination of the writer of the book of Daniel.

In 1854, sir Henry Rawlinson was given a small cylinder discovered in Ur of the Chaldees; on it was an inscription by Nabonidus, King of Babylon. The inscription was a prayer for the good health and long life of the king, and for “Belshazzar, my eldest son. He was referred to as the “crown prince”, but still the critics said he wasn’t king.

In 1876, sir Henry discovered jars filled with letters (tablets), where Cyrus, King of Persia, of his invasion of Babylon, where he took Nabonidus as prisoner. He also added that, on a certain night, the king died, while Nabonidus was prisoner. This king could only have been Belshazzar, and the night could only have been the fateful night when God announced Belshazzar’s demise on the walls of his palace.

Furthermore, it becomes obvious why Daniel was offered the position of 3rd highest in the kingdom. Belshazzar was acting king.

CONTRADICTIONS WITH SCIENTIFIC FACT

Because it is often claimed that the Bible does not speak the language of science, and that its assertions are not scientific in nature, the natural assumption is that it is inaccurate, that it lacks detail and is therefore false.

It is important to understand the role of science as opposed to the role of revelation – that seems to clear many of the misconceptions up. Probably, the theory of evolution is a fairly good case study here.

Scientific analysis and discovery of truth rests on a number of processes, two of which I will mention here. Inductive thinking is essential to the scientific process. In inductive thinking, many examples are gathered together in order to reach a conclusion. The more examples that are gathered, the higher the probability that the conclusion will be correct. I will assume, therefore, that all swans are white, because I have never seen a black swan. The more swans I see, the higher the probability becomes. However, there always remains the possibility that I will see a black swan, and that will render my theory obsolete.

That’s the second process I want to bring to your attention. It is known as falsifiability. The more falsifiable a theory is, the more it stretches into the unknown, the more it affords us, ironically. Take the theory of the swans. All swans are white. That is my theory. I have stuck my neck out quite far in saying that, because I cannot claim to have seen all swans in existence. I can only claim to never having seen a black swan. Ironically, this is a very vulnerable theory, but a good one nonetheless.

Now, let’s look at where it has worked in science, and where it has, in my opinion, not worked. Newton’s theory of gravitation, where he postulates that all bodies with mass attract each other, is highly falsifiable. It hasn’t been disproved yet. You have not found

that out yet, but it is a wonderful theory. It helped put us on the moon. Every day, however, it runs the risk of being falsified, and yet it has held.

Evolution, on the other hand, is a poor theory, in that no matter what you say to an evolutionist, he makes an exception. How did the eye evolve? Is a famous one. It is interesting because the eye is one of the few organs where there is a collection of different types of tissue, and the possibility of them coming together randomly to structure the wonderful gift of vision is impossible. Their only answer to date is: "It took millions of years."

Consider what happens every time they find a skull that doesn't fit the theory. They still haven't found one that should fit the description of ape-man, by the way. They add another branch to a very complex diagram. I'm sure you have all seen those diagrams with a time line attached – where there are branches of a tree and various apes and humans at stages. Every year, there are a few more branches to accommodate the new discovery.

I wish I could go into it in more detail, but suffice to say, we have looked at two examples of where science is helpful and can go terribly wrong.

Science is not revelation – it is discovery. That is exactly where it is different. People cannot apply the tools in science to an analysis of the bible. The bible is a given – it is laid down as revealed truth, and many people play an endless game of using inductive, deductive thinking and falsifiability trying to prove it. It is as if they are using the wrong spectacles. It is one reason why I get very worried when people always speak of the latest archaeological discovery that validates biblical truth, as if they are on an endless quest to prove it. But they never stop, because science was never meant to validate revelation.

Consider the following example. Time magazine recently reported on an archaeological discovery. An ossuary was found with the following inscription on its side:

James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus.

This is touted to be the first physical evidence of Christ. All other evidence of Christ is of a record nature – written records, both in the bible and with historians. Why are we encouraged by it? Not because it proves him some more, but because it reminds us of him. But if we were to base our trust in him on this, it wouldn't be long before someone raised the question – can you be absolutely sure this is the James who is the half brother of Jesus? And to be honest, we can't. We can't even be 100% sure this is not a fake! We believe in Christ because he has been revealed to us.

We cannot approach Scripture and test its authenticity with these inferior tools. And yet, there are many who claim to be Christians using these very tools to cast doubt on Scripture's authenticity.

Language used in the bible

The same principle can be applied whenever science misinterprets something in the bible, using a scientific discourse in order to explain poetic language. It's something like a scientist trying to explain the beauty of a rainbow using the language of science. It just doesn't do it properly. It's like using one dimension to explain 3.

For example, accusations are often leveled at the bible in terms of its simplistic rendition of the shape of the earth – Isaiah 11:12

¹² He will raise a signal for the nations,
and will assemble the outcasts of Israel,
and gather the dispersed of Judah
from the four corners of the earth.³

Psalm 75:3

When the earth totters, with all its inhabitants,
it is I who keep its pillars steady.⁴

However, the poetic language is one side; at other points the bible is surprisingly accurate, while the authors were not even aware of what they were saying:
Consider Isaiah 40:22

²² It is he who sits above the circle of the earth,
and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers;
who stretches out the heavens like a curtain,
and spreads them like a tent to live in;⁵

Notice in this verse is not without its poetic language, but a reference to “circle” is clearly a reflection of the shape.

⁷ He stretches out Zaphon over the void,
and hangs the earth upon nothing.⁶

³*The New Revised Standard Version*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers) 1989.

⁴*The New Revised Standard Version*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers) 1989.

⁵*The New Revised Standard Version*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers) 1989.

⁶*The New Revised Standard Version*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers) 1989.

CONTRADICTIONS IN THEOLOGY

James vs Paul on works and faith.

In the book of Romans, Paul insists that it is by faith alone that we are saved, and this is the gift of God. Critics are quick to jump in on this and insist that it is out of context with James, who says we are saved by works.

This is easily resolved, in that there are numerous ways to explain the language of James and Paul. James does not disagree with Paul, but he does say that the performance of good works is clear evidence of faith. Consider the following analogy. You visit someone's house, and their driveway is long. As with people with long driveways, the gate is probably also large and automated. Upon asking the person at the front door "How did you get here", some may answer "through the gate" and others may answer "up the pathway".

I'm not going to carry on there. I have said enough, but you do need to know that there are thousands of other objections, and the implication is that if just one of them is wrong, then the authenticity of the bible collapses altogether. Beware of the following:

CARROT AND DONKEY

Whenever you explain one apparent contradiction, another arises.

THE THIN EDGE OF THE WEDGE

There are two ways to approach a contradiction – one from the perspective of faith, and another from the perspective of skepticism. What often happens is that skepticism is at the core, and without exception, the questions start with simple contradictions, but end up doubting the most important doctrines, the resurrection, the second coming, indeed, even the coming of Christ.

HOW REMARKABLE SCRIPTURE IS

There is no book in history that spans such a long time, has so many authors, weaves God's dealings with man into historical fact as much, and is as widely read as the bible. It is truly a remarkable book – and deserves serious contemplation. Please notice, however, the double standards of those who would not accept it. It is an excellent historical record, by all accounts, but because it talks about God's intervention in such a real and palpable way – its uncomfortable. It makes demands on their lives.

THE REAL REASONS WHY PEOPLE FIND CONTRADICTIONS

It is too close for comfort

If it is accurate, and if God's working in history is what it says it is, then this book is a very difficult book to deal with. Ultimately, its central message of God's plan of redemption is too demanding. Rather read quaint accounts of eastern philosophy, where it is all fantasy and allegory. Escape from the penetrating gaze of scripture to the fanciful fields comfort – eastern religion, or even hard, cold science.

Carl Sagan – the Cosmos.

Pride – legends in their own minds

I have met a number of the critics, and I have to say that there is a lot more on their agenda than a simple, innocent desire to find the truth. There is a pride that is based on an assumption of superiority, of higher intelligence. Indeed, many of them are bright (to use the current jargon), but brightness is a far call from insight, intelligence very different to wisdom.

¹⁶All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness⁷

¹God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, ²has in these last days spoken to us by *His* Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; ³who being the brightness of *His* glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, ⁴having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.⁸

Have you been spoken to by the Son. Kiss the Son, lest he become angry.

Rejoice, with trembling.

⁷*The Holy Bible, New King James Version*, (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, Inc.) 1982.

⁸*The Holy Bible, New King James Version*, (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, Inc.) 1982.