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Bible Difficulties

I. Introduction to Bible Difficulties

A. Goals

1. Primarily, to minister to believers:
 - a. By building confidence and faith in the Bible as God's inerrant Word (John 17:17).
 - b. By providing an understanding of difficult passages (Acts 8:30-31).
 - c. By developing our ability to think through challenges posed by skeptics.
2. Secondarily, to minister to unbelievers:
 - a. By motivating us to share God's Word with unbelievers.
 - b. By increasing our boldness in discussing difficulties with unbelievers (Ephesians 6:19; Colossians 4:1-6).
 - c. By building our discernment regarding how to approach unbelievers (Proverbs 26:4-5).
 - d. By providing specific solutions to potential questions (1 Peter 3:15).

B. Presuppositions

1. God cannot err:
 - a. It is impossible for God to lie (Hebrews 6:18).
 - b. God cannot deny himself (2 Timothy 2:13).
 - c. God himself is truth (John 14:6).
 - d. God is not a man that he should lie (Numbers 23:19).
 - e. God's word is truth (John 17:17).
 - f. All of God's word is truth (Psalm 119:160).
2. The Bible is God's Word:
 - a. New Testament documents are historically accurate.
 - 1) New Testament manuscripts are reliable copies.
 - 2) New Testament authors are reliable witnesses.
 - b. Jesus calls the Old Testament the Word of God (John 10:35).
 - c. Paul wrote that the Scriptures are the Word of God (Romans 9:6).
 - d. The writer of Hebrews declared the Scriptures to be the Word of God (Hebrews 4:12).
 - e. Paul wrote that all Scripture is inspired by God (2 Timothy 3:16).
 - f. God's Word proceeds from God's mouth (Matthew 4:4).
 - g. Men wrote the Word of God through the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:20-21).
3. Conclusion: If God cannot err,
And if the Bible is God's Word,
Then the Bible cannot err.

C. The Biblical basis for inerrancy

Definition: God superintended the human authors so that using their own individual personalities, they composed and recorded without error His revelation to man in the words of the original manuscripts.
(Charles Ryrie)

1. The Scripture carries divine authority:

- a. "It is written" (Matthew 4:4,7,10)
- b. It is unbreakable (John 10:35)
- c. It is imperishable (Matthew 5:17-18)

2. The Scripture is God's Word:

- a. It specifically claims to be the Word of God (John 10:34; Hebrews 4:12)
- b. It is inspired or breathed out by God (2 Timothy 3:16)
- c. It is called the "oracles of God" (Romans 3:2; Acts 7:38)

3. The Scripture claims to be completely truthful:

- a. Numbers 23:19
- b. Romans 3:4
- c. Titus 1:2
- d. Hebrews 6:18
- e. 1 John 1:5,6

4. The Bible is historically and scientifically true:

- a. Matthew 12:40
- b. Matthew 19:4
- c. Matthew 24:34-39
- d. John 3:12

5. What the Bible says, God says:

- | | | | | |
|----|-----------------|-------------|-----------|----------------|
| a. | The Bible said: | Genesis 2:2 | God said: | Matthew 19:4-5 |
| b. | The Bible said: | Psalm 95:7 | God said: | Hebrews 3:7 |
| c. | The Bible said: | Psalm 2:1 | God said: | Acts 4:24-25 |
| d. | The Bible said: | Psalm 2:7 | God said: | Hebrews 1:5 |
| e. | The Bible said: | Psalm 97:7 | God said: | Hebrews 1:6 |
| f. | The Bible said: | Psalm 104:4 | God said: | Hebrews 1:7 |
| g. | The Bible said: | Isaiah 55:3 | God said: | Acts 13:34 |
| h. | The Bible said: | Psalm 16:10 | God said: | Acts 13:35 |

6. What God says, the Bible says:

- | | | | | |
|----|-----------|--------------|-----------------|---------------|
| a. | God said: | Genesis 12:3 | The Bible said: | Galatians 3:8 |
| b. | God said: | Exodus 9:16 | The Bible said: | Romans 9:17 |

7. Comparison between Christ and the Bible:
- a. Both have human and divine aspects.
 - b. Both the divine and human are united.
 - 1) The two natures of Christ are united in the same person.
 - 2) The two natures of Scripture are united in the same propositions.
 - c. In both Christ and the Bible, the human side is without error.
 - d. Both Christ and the Bible are called the Word of God.

Conclusion: If Christ can be human and without flaw, then the Bible can be human and without flaw. Of course there are many differences and the Bible is not to be worshiped.

D. Defective views concerning the inspiration of the Bible:

1. The Biblical writers were great inspirational men, much like other inspirational authors of other works throughout history.

Problem: God would not have revealed himself to man.

2. The Biblical writers were inspired by God, not the text itself.

Problem: a. 2 Timothy 3:16 says the text is inspired.

- b. Other inspired believers today could write a book or song with the authority of the Bible.

3. Certain portions of the Bible are inspired by God.

Problem: a. Which parts are inspired? How do we know?

- b. "All Scripture is inspired" (2 Timothy 3:16)

4. Only the Biblical concepts are inspired but not the words.

Problem: a. There is a necessary link between correct words and correct concepts.

- b. Jesus argued for His deity on the basis of the word "Lord" from Psalm 110:1 (Matthew 22:41-46).

- c. Jesus vindicated himself from the charge of blasphemy on the basis of one word from Psalm 82:6 (John 10:34).

- d. The Lord noted even the tense of a word (Matthew 22:32).

- e. Paul argued from point of the grammar (Galatians 3:16).

- f. Even the smallest stroke of the pen is Scripture (Matthew 5:18).

5. The Bible is inspired by God and points to Christ, but in a fallible way.

Problem: This would make God guilty of communicating error.

6. The Bible is inspired in its purpose and is inerrant in its communication of God's purpose. It is not necessarily accurate in all its historical facts and parallel accounts.

Problem: If God is not reliable in the details that we can understand and evaluate apart from God's specific revelation (i.e. earthly matters), what confidence do we have in what he has told us that cannot be known apart from God's specific revelation (i.e. spiritual matters)? Cf. John 3:12.

E. Common criticisms of inerrancy

1. It is not taught in the Bible.

Answer: Yes it is (see above).

2. It is derived deductively, not inductively.

Answer: It is true that inerrancy is a conclusion derived from direct teachings of Scripture. However, the doctrine of the Trinity is also arrived at by the deduction of two teachings. The Scripture says there is one God and calls the three persons God, therefore the doctrine of the Trinity. The Scripture says God cannot err and the Bible is the word of God, therefore the doctrine of inerrancy. Deduction is not invalid.

3. It is important but not essential.

Answer: While it is not technically essential to salvation, inerrancy is logically essential to salvation. If you lose this fundamental doctrine, you place all other doctrines in jeopardy. To deny inerrancy is to attack:

- a. The character of the Father who originated the Word.
- b. The reliability of the Son who affirmed the Word.
- c. The ministry of the Holy Spirit who inspired the Word.
- d. The stability of the Church which is built on the Word.

There is a logical connection between inerrancy and salvation but not an essential one. For example, the Jehovah's Witnesses believe in inerrancy, but this does not mean they are saved. You can be saved without explicitly believing in certain crucial doctrines (e.g. the virgin birth), but you cannot be consistent and do so.

4. It is a recent invention, not taught by the church fathers.

Answer: It was taught by the church fathers. Nowhere in the church fathers do we see any evidence that they doubted the inerrancy of the Scripture. The divine origin, the authority and the inerrancy of the Bible were never questioned.

5. It is limited in scope to spiritual truths.

Answer: Historical truth and spiritual truth are inseparable. Many spiritual doctrines are based on historical events (virgin birth, crucifixion, resurrection). The New Testament affirms the historical and factual truth of the Old Testament.

6. It is a bad term because it is negative and not found in the Bible.

Answer: Negative terms are often clearer. For example, many of the ten commandments are negative. How do you say “thou shalt not murder” in positive terms?

7. Inerrancy is a divisive doctrine.

Answer: a. All doctrines divide the adherents from the opponents.
b. It is better to be divided by truth than united by error.
c. It is not the one who affirms the doctrine who causes division but the one who denies the doctrine of inerrancy.

8. It involves a non-existent authority since we do not have the original text.

Answer: The original exists in good copies. It is not that the copies provide us with only 99% of the original but more like 101%. In other words, we have too much not too little. We have all of what existed in the original text but occasionally, due to error in the copying process, we have to decide which reading was actually in the original text.

9. Why must there be flawless originals if flawed copies are sufficient?

Answer: a. Because God cannot speak error and He spoke the original.
b. God can permit error but he cannot produce error.
c. For example, God cannot create a fallen Adam but He can create a perfect Adam and allow him to fall. Likewise, errors by copyists do not mean the original was in error.

10. Why did not God preserve the copies from error?

Answer: He did preserve the copies from all doctrinal error and all substantial error. This is like asking why God did not preserve man from sin. Just because we don't know the purpose does not mean God does not have one.

11. Inerrancy dies by a thousand qualifications.

Answer: There are only two qualifications:

- a. Only the original documents are inerrant.
- b. Only what is taught as true is true.

12. It is impossible to prove inerrancy wrong.

Answer: If we could find an unquestionable error in either a good copy or in an original it would render this doctrine false. (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:12ff.). In actuality, it is the errantist view that is really unfalsifiable since only the spiritual aspects are considered to be true. How can you prove a spiritual belief in the Bible to be wrong?

13. It is wrong to conclude that if one error is found then none of the Bible can be accepted or true.

Answer: Do not confuse a fallible book which may make a mistake with a divine book which cannot make a mistake. If there is one error in the Bible then it undermines its claim to be the Word of God, since God cannot speak error. It still may, as only a human book, contain much truth. It just cannot be considered absolutely trustworthy.

14. There are contradictions and errors in the Bible.

Answer: Name one.

II. General Principles for Dealing with Bible Difficulties

A. **Do not assume that the unexplained is not explainable.**

It should not surprise us that we may not be able to easily explain everything stated in the Bible. The Bible was written thousands of years ago, in a different culture, language and geography. As such it poses certain challenges to the modern reader. As we study and learn more we find more of what was at one time confusing becomes clearer.

Science, for example, continues to discover answers to previously unexplainable phenomena. Indeed, it is because it is unexplainable that we are motivated to push to find a solution. No scientist gives up the pursuit of science simply because of an apparent contradiction.

We too should approach the Bible with expectation that what seems to be unexplainable may soon be explained. When we find difficulties, we continue to study in hope of gaining insight. However, if we assume alleged discrepancies to be actual discrepancies, we will cease studying.

For example, some considered the first five books of the Old Testament to be written well after the time of Moses since there was no known writing found from Moses' day. Today we know that writing existed at least a couple of thousand years before Moses.

Also, the Hittites were unknown to historians and therefore in doubt by some until their library was found in Boghazkoy, Turkey in 1906. The home of Abraham, the city of Ur was unknown until 1854. These give us confidence that having no current explanation does not need to mean the Bible is in error.

B. **Do not presume the Bible is guilty until proven innocent.**

Any piece of literature is given the benefit of the doubt. We do not assume an author is incorrect at the outset of our reading. All communication is typically given the benefit of the doubt. However, skeptics fail to give the Bible the benefit of the doubt by considering potential discrepancies to be proven actual discrepancies.

C. **Do not confuse our fallible interpretations with God's infallible revelation.**

While God's word is perfect (Psalm 19:7) and cannot be broken (John 10:35), man's interpretations are imperfect and are many times altered even by the interpreter himself.

For example, many scientific beliefs in the past are now considered to be erroneous by scientists today. Therefore, we should not be surprised if many scientific beliefs in the present will be considered to be erroneous by scientists in the future. It would be foolish to consider the present state of modern science to be the final authority on truth.

Since man's interpretations both in the realm of science and the Bible are faulty, it should not surprise us to find contradictions between accepted interpretations of each. While fallible human opinions on science and Scripture may be contradictory, God's world and God's word do not contradict.

D. Understand the context of the passage.

The meaning of the text is determined by its context. The most common reason for misunderstanding the Bible is taking it out of its immediate, book and Bible context.

An example of this is Philippians 2:12, "Work out you salvation with fear and trembling." This should not be read to mean we achieve salvation by our works for the following reasons:

1. The immediate context states that it is God who is at work in us to cause us to desire and act for His good pleasure.
2. The book context uses the word "salvation" in terms of physical deliverance (Philippians 1:19), practical sanctification (Philippians 2:12) and ultimate glorification (Philippians 1:28; 3:20), but not in terms of positional justification.
3. The Bible context clearly teaches that we are saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5-6; Romans 4:5).

E. Interpret difficult passages in light of clear passages.

When passages are difficult to understand it becomes even more essential to interpret Scripture with Scripture. We can often find great insight if we compare cross-references.

Once again, the clear passages on salvation by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5-6; Romans 4:5) help us understand Philippians 2:12 "work out your salvation."

F. Do not based teaching on an obscure passage.

Important doctrine in the Scripture is taught clearly and typically in more than one place. The rule of thumb goes, "the main things are the plain things and the plain things are the main things." We should never conclude that a difficult passage must be read to contradict a clear passage.

An example of an obscure passage is in 1 Corinthians 15:29 where Paul speaks of those who were baptized for the dead. There have been over 200 explanations of the meaning of this including:

1. The Mormon view that living people should be baptized to ensure salvation for those who have died.

2. Others who are being baptized into the church to take the place of those who have passed on.
3. One's own baptism with a view toward his own death and burial with Christ.
4. A practice not of Paul but of those who denied the resurrection.

When a passage is so debatable it is hard to show it as an example of a mistake in God's word.

G. The Bible is a human book with human characteristics.

Because the Scripture was written by men, it reflects their own style, personalities and perspectives. The writers were not merely God's secretary.

The authors used human sources for their material (Luke 1:1-4, Acts 17:28; 1 Corinthians 15:33; Titus 1:12).

The authors used human literary styles (mourning in Lamentations, legal contracts in Deuteronomy, simple Greek grammar in John, complex Greek grammar in Hebrews).

The authors included their personal interests and perspectives (e.g. David in Psalm 23 wrote from a shepherd's point of view, Luke writes from a medical interest, Chronicles is from the perspective of a priest).

The authors even included their memory lapses (1 Corinthians 1:14-16) and emotions (Galatians 4:14). We must not expect the Bible to achieve a level of expression higher than that which is normal of a human document.

H. Do not assume a partial report is a false report.

In reporting of events, it is normal for some details to be left out. It is practically impossible to include all information that could be included. Partial information is not in itself considered to be false, only to be partial.

This becomes important when we find the Gospel accounts recording the same event from different viewpoints to different groups of people. The following confession of Peter is even recorded in different words:

Matthew: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (16:16)

Mark: "You are the Christ" (8:29)

Luke: "The Christ of God" (9:20)

Which did he actually say?

First of all, it is possible that he said what Matthew recorded and Mark and Luke edited his words.

To illustrate:

Matthew: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (16:16)

Mark: “You are the Christ [the Son of the living God]” (8:29)

Luke: “[You are] the Christ [the Son of the living] God” (9:20)

Mark and Luke would then be making a partial report but still communicating the essence of the statement. In addition, Peter was probably speaking in Aramaic and therefore each writer is translating as well as reporting.

It is important to keep in mind the writers are only reporting the words, not creating the words. What they report is in accordance with journalistic standards. They were not communicating incorrectly, just partially.

I. Do not demand that New Testament citations of the Old Testament always be exact quotations.

It is acceptable in literature for the essence of a statement to be given without using the exact same words. A citation does not need to be a precise quotation. The New Testament citations of the Old Testament fall into different categories:

1. Sometimes there is a change of speaker. Zechariah 12:10 records the Lord saying, “they will look on Me whom they have pierced.” John cites this by saying, “they shall look on him whom they have pierced (John 19:37).
2. Sometimes the writers cite only part of the Old Testament text. Jesus did this in Nazareth (Luke 4:18-19, citing Isaiah 61:1-2).
3. Sometimes the New Testament paraphrases or summarizes the Old Testament text or blends two texts into one (Matthew 2:6 with Micah 5:2 and 2 Samuel 5:2; Matthew 27:9-10 with Zechariah 11:12-13, Jeremiah 19:2, 11 and Jeremiah 32:6-9; Mark 1:2-3 with Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1).
4. Sometimes the New Testament applies a text in a different way than the Old Testament did. Hosea 11:1 relates the exodus of Israel as “Out of Egypt have I called My Son” and Matthew 2:15 applies this to the Messiah.

The New Testament does not err in citing the Old Testament.

J. Do not assume that divergent accounts are false accounts.

If two accounts of the same event differ, it does not necessarily mean that one or both of the accounts are mistaken.

For example, Matthew 28:5 says there was one angel at the tomb after the resurrection, while John 20:12 says there were two. If Matthew had said there was only one angel, the accounts would be in conflict.

Also, the account of Judas’ death is said to be by hanging himself (Matthew 27:5) and by falling headlong and bursting open with his bowels gushing out (Acts 1:18). It is possible for both to be true.

K. Do not presume that the Bible approves of all it records.

The Bible does not commend all it includes. The Bible truly and accurately records even the lies of Satan and Rahab. The truth of Scripture is found in what it affirms. This does not mean that an action is approved of simply because it is recorded.

L. Remember that the Bible uses non-technical, everyday language.

Using the language of the reader does not preclude science but discusses science in common language. Just as we are not in error to speak of the sunrise and sunset, it is not unscientific or wrong for Joshua 10:12 to speak of the sun as standing still.

M. Do not assume round numbers are false numbers.

The Bible, like most ordinary speech, sometimes uses round numbers. In a scientific document, round numbers may be inappropriate but in a narrative account, round numbers may be common.

N. Remember that the Bible uses different literary devices.

Several books are written in poetic style (Job, Psalms, Proverbs), the synoptic Gospels include parables, Paul uses allegory (Galatians 4), Jesus used satire (Matthew 19:24, 23:24), and figures of speech are found repeatedly throughout the Bible.

It is not a mistake for a writer to use a figure of speech; it is a mistake for the reader to take a figure of speech literally.

O. Only the original text, not every copy of Scripture, is without error.

While no error has been found in the original text, the copying process may result in an occasional error in some copies.

An example of this is 2 Kings 8:26 which says King Ahaziah's age is twenty-two while 2 Chronicles 22:2 gives his age as forty-two. If his age was really forty-two he would be older than his father at the time. We may therefore conclude by the context that a copying error led to the age of forty-two in 2 Chronicles. The NASB and NIV have accounted for this copying error and provided the age of twenty-two.

Unlike English, the ancient Hebrew language did not have a set of numerals. They spelled out each number and some of the words and letters are similar. This difficulty was compounded as time progressed as the ancient alphabet changed and became less familiar to the copyists. It is remarkable that God has preserved his written revelation in spite of humans.

P. Do not confuse general statements with universal statements.

Unqualified general truths should not be taken as forbidding exceptions to the generalization. The book of Proverbs has many examples of general statements:

“When a man’s ways are pleasing to the Lord, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.” (Proverbs 16:7)

Of course, even Jesus had enemies! This proverb teaches that one who acts pleasing to God will minimize the damage that some enemies may inflict.

“Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it.” (Proverbs 22:6)

However, some godly men such as David, Eli and Job had wayward sons. This proverb is a general principle, not an absolute guarantee. Proverbs, by their literary nature, are guiding wisdom, not universally binding imperatives.

Q. Later revelation supersedes previous revelation.

A change in God’s revelation does not mean He made a mistake that He is correcting. Just like we have differing rules for our children depending upon their age, God has differing rules of conduct for his people during different periods of time.

For example, in the Garden of Eden the dietary restriction was to not eat from a specific tree (Genesis 2:16-17) and to eat only fruit and vegetables (1:29). Under the Law of Moses, certain foods were described as being unclean and forbidden to eat. In the church age, food is no longer considered to be unclean (Acts 10; 1 Corinthians 10:31). These later revelations were different commands for different people at different periods of time.

While God cannot change a command that reflects his unchangeable nature (for example, he cannot command us to hate one another), He can change commands that are for the purpose of raising His children.

III. Solutions for Specific Bible Difficulties

A. Difficulties in the Old Testament Books of the Law

1. **How could there be light before the sun was created (Genesis 1:14)?**

The sun is not the only source of light in the universe. Also, it is certainly possible for God to provide light apart from the sun. Some also consider the sun existing before the fourth day but was not yet visible until the fourth day, as the mist cleared. However, to claim an error in the Bible based on our current observations of the universe assumes that these same physical attributes of the universe must have always been present. These assumptions cannot be proven because the creation is an historical event, not a scientific (i.e. reproducible) event.

2. **Is the Bible wrong in describing the creation of the world in six days when we know from science that the world took billions of years to form (Genesis 2:1)?**

There is not a contradiction of fact, only a conflict of interpretation. Either many interpreters of the Bible are mistaken to insist Genesis teaches the earth was created in six 24-hour days, or most modern scientists are mistaken to insist the world is billions of years old. Not only does the Scripture required interpretation but scientific data does as well.

Those who uphold the authority and accuracy of the Bible and who seek to understand Genesis 1-2 in the context of the modern scientific consensus claim the Bible allows for the universe to be billions of years old with the following arguments:

- a. There may be a gap between either Genesis 1:1 and Genesis 1:2, or between the days themselves. Matthew 1:8 (cf. 1 Chronicles 3:11-14) is an example of other gaps in the Bible.
- b. The Hebrew word for “day” (YOM) is also used for a period of time longer than 24 hours. For example, Genesis 2:4 uses the term for the whole six day creation period.
- c. “Day” is sometimes used to mean long periods of time, such as “On day is as a thousand years (2 Peter 3:8; Psalm 90:4).
- d. On the third day trees grew from seeds to maturity (Genesis 1:11-12).
- e. On the sixth day Adam was very busy (being created, sleeping, naming all the animals, looking for a wife, being involved with the creation of Eve).
- f. God rested on the seventh day and continues to rest (Hebrews 4:4). Thus the seventh day is thousands of years long.

Those who claim that modern science has come to flawed conclusions and who believe God created the earth in a literal six days reason from the following arguments:

- a. The days of Genesis each have a “morning and an evening,” which is quite a clear way of saying a twenty-four hour day.
- b. The days were numbered, which is only done when it means a 24-hour day in the Bible.
- c. Exodus 20:11 compares the six day creation with the six day work week.
- d. There is no natural way for life to survive millions of years from day three to day four without light.
- e. There is ample scientific evidence to support an earth that is only thousands of years old.

The literal six day view seems to have the best Biblical support.

3. Why does Genesis 1 say that animals were created before humans when Genesis 2:19 depicts animals being created after humans?

Genesis 1 provides the order of the creation events, while Genesis 2 tells us more about those events. Genesis 2 does not give a specific time-line, it rather focuses on the naming of the animals which had already been created. Genesis 2:19 does not say that the animals were created after man was created. The second chapter only gives us more detail about the specific events which were outlined in chapter one.

4. Where did Cain get his wife (Genesis 4:17)?

Cain must have either married his sister or perhaps a niece. Adam fathered sons and daughters (5:4) and if not Cain, then one of his brothers must have married a sister in order for humans to procreate and not die off.

5. Did Adam’s children commit incest (Genesis 4:17)?

No. This is a case of misunderstanding progressive revelation. Incest was not specifically forbidden until Leviticus 18:6; 20:17, thousands of years later. Also, when Abraham told the Egyptians that Sarah was his sister, he implied that she could not be his wife (Genesis 12:13; cf. 20:12). However, in Cain’s day incest was not forbidden.

Furthermore, the genetic defects associated with incest would not be as significant for Cain since Adam was created genetically perfect and the genetic disorder has probably occurred gradually over long periods of time.

6. How can angels marry women and father children (Genesis 6:1-4) when Matthew 22:30 tells us that angels do not marry?

The identity of the “sons of God” in Genesis 6:1-4 has been interpreted in three major ways:

- a. Many view the sons of God as fallen angels who married women. The term “sons of God” as it is found in Genesis 6 is only used of angels in the Old Testament (cf. Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7). Also, 2 Peter 2:4-5 and Jude 6-7 may identify angels with this incident. However, those who hold view must believe the angels took on real human bodies in order to procreate.
- b. Others believe the sons of God were great and renown men, giant and mighty (Genesis 6:4). This avoids the problem of angelic offspring.
- c. Another view is that the sons of God were dynastic rulers who married women. However, this view finds its support for the use of the term “sons of God” meaning kings in literature from the ancient Near East, not from the Bible.
- d. Another interpretation which avoids the problem of angels marrying women is to understand the sons of God as godly men of the line of Seth who married ungodly women. While the godly are called “sons” in the Old Testament, this view would be an exception to the technical understanding of “sons of God.” However, it is consistent with the established godly line of Seth (Genesis 4:26) and with the warnings against marriages between the godly and ungodly.

This passage has been much debated and it is difficult to make a dogmatic conclusion. However, each of these explanations deals adequately with the alleged discrepancy of angels marrying women. The principle of not basing a teaching on an obscure passage should hold in this case. One commentator, Albertus Pieters, noted, “So far as I am concerned, this passage is unintelligible.” While this Scripture certainly has an accurate interpretation, it is not quickly derived.

7. Why does Genesis 10:5, 10:22 and 10:31 indicate there were many languages but later Genesis 11:1 indicates the whole world spoke one language?

Genesis 10 describes the overall development of racial differences and the dispersion after the flood. It takes us up to the time of Abraham. After a general overview of the dispersion, Genesis 11 reverts to a pivotal incident in the dispersion at the Tower of Babel. Thus the episode of the Tower of Babel was an event that took place within the time-frame of Genesis 10. This literary approach is also seen in the first two chapters of Genesis, where the creation is described generally, followed by the specific creation of man.

8. Why did God allow Abraham to prosper when he lied about Sarah being his sister (Genesis 12:10-20; cf. 20:1-18)?

- a. Abraham’s wealth was given Pharaoh, it was not given as a reward by God for his lie.
- b. It is possible that the next twenty years of trial for Abraham were divine discipline for this event.
- c. God blesses us in spite of our sin, not because of our sin.

9. Is the Bible mistaken when it places the Philistines in Palestine 800 years before any known reference to them by outside sources (Genesis 21:32-34)?

While it is true that there is no existing evidence that the Philistines existed at the time of Abraham, it is wrong to conclude that they did not exist then. We simply lack supporting evidence. Our present lack of information should not discourage us any more than it should have before the Elba tablets were found, which proved the existence of Sodom and Gomorrah.

10. Why did God command Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac when God condemned human sacrifice in Leviticus 18 and 20 (Genesis 22:2)?

- a. In Leviticus 18:21 and 20:2 the specific prohibitions were against offering children to the pagan god Molech. Abraham was not offering Isaac to Molech.
- b. It is not morally wrong for God to command the sacrifice of our children. Indeed, God so loved the world He offered His own Son as a sacrifice for sin (John 3:16).
- c. God never planned for Abraham to actually kill Isaac. In fact, the Lord intervened to prevent the killing (Genesis 22:12).
- d. Abraham believed God's command meant Isaac would be raised from the dead (Hebrews 11:17-19; cf. Genesis 22:5).

11. How could Abraham have children naturally when it took a miracle to have Isaac years earlier (Genesis 25:1-2)?

Genesis 17:17; 18:12 does not say Abraham was too old to have children but that Sarah was past childbearing age. There was no way for Abraham to know if he were fertile or not. Since Abraham was only 100 years old and lived to be 175, he could have naturally remained fertile. Even if it took an earlier miracle to restore Abraham's fertility, the restoration may have continued for years.

12. How can Jacob see God face to face when no man can see God (Genesis 32:30 cf. Exodus 33:20; Deuteronomy 5:4; John 1:18)?

The phrase "face to face" is a figure of speech meaning personally or intimately. Since man has seen the essence of God directly, Jacob's encounter should be understood relationally rather than physically.

13. Why are the list of the twelve tribes of Israel inconsistent between Genesis 46, Numbers 26 and Revelation 7?

The following is a breakdown of the list of the tribes in the three different passages:

<u>Genesis 46</u>	<u>Numbers 26</u>	<u>Revelation 7</u>
Reuben	Reuben	Reuben
Simeon	Simeon	Simeon
Levi	—	Levi
Judah	Judah	Judah
Issachar	Issachar	Issachar
Zebulun	Zebulun	Zebulun
Joseph	—	Joseph
—	Manasseh	Manasseh
—	Ephraim	—
Benjamin	Benjamin	Benjamin
Dan	Dan	—
Gad	Gad	Gad
Asher	Asher	Asher
Naphtali	Naphtali	Naphtali

Jacob only had twelve sons (listed in Genesis 46), but in Genesis 48:22 he granted Joseph a double portion of the inheritance. Therefore, when the land was divided, Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh received the inheritance. The tribe of Levi functioned as priests and were not given a land inheritance so that they would be spread throughout the land.

In Revelation, the tribe of Ephraim is placed back under the name of Joseph and the tribe of Dan is omitted. The omission of Dan may be due to their decision to take land not allotted to them by force in Judges 18. Levi receives an inheritance possibly because there is no longer a need for a priestly tribe since Christ serves as the high priest forever.

14. How could God bless the Hebrew midwives for disobeying the government and lying to Pharaoh (Exodus 1:15-21)?

By commanding the midwives to violate God's law by murdering innocent babies, the King of Egypt had opposed God's moral law and the midwives were right to obey God rather than man (cf. Acts 5:29).

Their response to the King's inquiry may have been truthful. They did not reveal their full intentions to the King and therefore apparently misled him to think they were attempting to apply his edict. It may be going too far to accuse the midwives of lying since they may have actually communicated correct information. Nevertheless, the Lord blessed them because they feared God (1:21), not necessarily because they withheld part of the truth.

15. How could Moses have turned all the water to blood if the magicians had some left to do the same thing (Exodus 7:20-24)?

The text does not say all the water was turned to blood, but all the water in the Nile River. There was still well water. In fact, the Egyptians dug around the river to find water to drink (7:24).

16. If all the livestock of Egypt died (Exodus 9:1-7), how did some survive (Exodus 9:19-21)?

The plague was apparently limited to the livestock in the field (9:3). It did not affect the livestock that was in shelters or stalls at the time.

17. If it is wrong to make any likeness of what is in heaven (Exodus 20:4-5), why did God command Moses to make one (Exodus 25:18-22)?

The command against graven images is with regard to worshiping idols. The cherubim that Moses was to make were for the purpose of decoration, not for religious worship. They were forbidden to worship any other god or any other image of god. Since the cherubim were not given as images of worship they did not violate the command.

In addition, the cherubim carving would not be worshipped by the people because it was to be located in the most holy place, where they were forbidden to go any time. Only the high priest entered in once a year on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16).

18. Why does Leviticus 13:47-59 give laws concerning leprosy in garments when leprosy is an infectious disease caused by bacterium and does not affect inanimate objects such as clothing?

Leprosy, also known as Hansen's Disease, is not the same type of infection described in the Old Testament and translated "leprosy." Modern leprosy is a bacterial infection. Old Testament leprosy was a more general term for a noticeable or disfiguring skin disease. Leviticus 13 shows symptoms unknown to modern leprosy (13:6, 7-8, 24, 30).

A fungus or mold can attack clothing or walls in a way similar to skin diseases that affect humans. It can spread on contact and have a very disfiguring affect. The inanimate objects that were contaminated were to be cleaned and if necessary, destroyed.

This difficulty is cleared up if we correctly understand the meaning of the term "leprosy."

19. Numbers 1:46 describes a census taken on the first day of the second month. According to Exodus 40:2, Moses took the census on the first day of the first month. Which is correct?

These are most likely two different census. The first census was taken for religious purposes and the inventory of the tabernacle (Exodus 38:21), while the second census was taken for military purposes, with regard to the number of men able to go to war for Israel (Numbers 1:3). Both census counted the same number of 603,550 because they were taken so close together.

20. According to Numbers 25:9, 24,000 died in the plague of judgment at Baal-Peor but 1 Corinthians 10:8 gives the number as 23,000. Which number is correct?

One explanation of this difficulty is that 1 Corinthians 10:8 is referring to those who died in one day and Numbers 25:9 gives the total for the entire plague.

Another possible explanation is there are two different events. 1 Corinthians 10:7 is referring to the idolatry of Israel at the golden calf (Exodus 32). Exodus 32 does not state the total number of people that died so 1 Corinthians 10:8 would provide us with the number of 23,000. This would then be a different judgment than Numbers 25 at Baal-Peor.

21. How can a loving God command Israel to completely destroy the Midianites (Numbers 31)?

They had corrupted God's people by leading them into idolatry at Baal-Peor (Numbers 25). It was necessary to totally eliminate this evil influence from Israel. The moral justification is that God has the right to give and take life. Since the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23), God's judgment was reaped more quickly by the Midianites due to the nature of their sin.

22. How could Moses have written Deuteronomy when many scholars consider it written a thousand years after his death (Deuteronomy 1:1)?

- a. The book claims to be written by Moses (1:1; 4:44; 29:1).
- b. Joshua considered Moses the author of Deuteronomy (Joshua 1:7).
- c. The OT attributes Deuteronomy to Moses (Judges 3:4; 1 Kings 2:3; 2 Kings 14:6; Ezra 3:2; Nehemiah 1:7; Psalm 103:7; Daniel 9:11; Malachi 4:4).
- d. The NT attributes Deuteronomy to Moses (Acts 3:22; Romans 10:19; 1 Corinthians 9:9).
- e. Jesus attributed Deuteronomy to Moses (Mark 7:10; Luke 20:28).
- f. The details of the book show the author had a firsthand involvement with the events.
- g. Studies of similar covenants of the Ancient Near East demonstrate that Deuteronomy was written during the time of Moses.

If Moses did not write Deuteronomy the credibility of the Bible would be impinged.

23. How could Moses have written about his death in Deuteronomy 34?

The last chapter of Deuteronomy was most likely written by Joshua shortly after Moses' death as an epilogue. However, it is certain within God's power to enable Moses to write his own obituary.

24. Exodus 19:11 tells of Moses receiving the Law at Mt. Sinai while Deuteronomy 4:10 claims that Moses received it at Horeb. Where did Moses really receive the Law?

The Old Testament uses both names for the same general place. Several explanations have been proposed and all are possible:

- a. The two names are interchangeable.
- b. Sinai is the older name and Horeb is a later name for the same place.
- c. Horeb is the mountain range and Sinai is the specific mountain.
- d. Sinai is the mountain range and Horeb is the specific mountain.

B. Difficulties in the Old Testament Books of History**1. Why does God approve of Rahab's lie (Joshua 2:4-5; cf. Hebrews 11:31, James 2:25)?**

Certainly God saved Rahab as she protected the spies and aided the overthrow of Jericho. She is testified to as an example of faith in Hebrews 11:31 and James 2:25.

This passage is different than Exodus 1:15-21 because it is clear here that Rahab did indeed lie. However, God may have blessed her in spite of her lie, not because of her lie. Nowhere is there any evidence to suggest God approved of her lie.

Her demonstration of faith was found in her protection of the spies even at a potential great cost to her family. Even as a gentile, she believed that God would destroy Jericho and in this she is honored.

Some would consider that she was in an unavoidable moral conflict and that she rightly discarded the lesser law to keep a higher obligation. While this may have been her thinking, she could not have known what the plan of God was for her circumstance. God is certainly able to resolve her situation as he saw fit and she should not presume the result God would intend.

2. How could God have wanted Joshua to wipe out the population of Jericho (Joshua 6:21)?

- a. The destruction of Jericho is smaller than the annihilation of Sodom and Gomorrah, which was itself smaller than the judgment of God upon the people of Noah's day in the flood. God has been willing to bring great judgment upon a population.
- b. The Canaanites were far from innocent. Leviticus 18:19-30 describes them as immoral and defiled.
- c. God was patient for 400 years before their guilt merited complete destruction in judgment (cf. Genesis 15:16).
- d. God's destruction of even the babies could be viewed as an act of mercy by removing them from such an unholy environment and bringing them into heaven (cf. 2 Samuel 12:23).
- e. Total elimination was necessary to protect the remaining evil from influencing the nation of Israel toward sin.
- f. The God who gave life can take it by his sovereign will (Job 1:21).

3. If God does not punish the sons based on their father's sins (Ezekiel 18:20), why did he punish Achan's family for Achan's sin (Joshua 7:15-25)?

There are two possible explanations:

- a. Achan's children were not put to death because the reference to "burning them" in verse 25 speaks of the silver, gold and garment he had taken (7:21,24), not of the children.
- b. Joshua 7:25 is best read "they had stoned them with stones" (NASB), seeming to indicate the family was judged with Achan. They would then be guilty of being accomplices in the sin since they likely knew of his deed and his hiding of the stolen items.

4. How is it possible for the sun to stand still for a whole day (Joshua 10:12-14)?

The clear answer from those who believe in the power of God is that God stopped the rotation of the earth for a whole day and also stopped any catastrophic events that this might have caused. While we may not know the exact details of how this was done, we can accept that it was done.

However, there have been many explanations given over the years by those who discount the power of God:

- a. The sun did not actually stop but only appeared to stop.
- b. The sun "did not hasten to go down" or it slowed down so the rotation required forty-eight hours instead of twenty-four.
- c. The word "stopped" should be translated cease or be silent. Thus the sun ceased pouring down its heat on the army so they could fight under more favorable conditions.
- d. The prayer of Joshua occurred in the very early morning and God's answer was a hailstorm (10:11) which obscured the daylight for the entire day. Therefore Joshua had a long night rather than a long day.
- e. The sun refracted due to a cosmic effect during the night to make it look like a day.

To give scientific support for the plain reading of the passage, Harry Rimmer reports some astronomers have concluded that one full day is missing from our astronomical calculations. Pickering of the Harvard Observatory traced this missing day back to the time of Joshua.

Also, ancient Egyptian, Chinese and Hindu sources report a long day. There is certainly no proof this was not an actual event.

5. Joshua 15:8 places Jerusalem in the territory of Judah. Joshua 18:28 lists Jerusalem in the territory of Benjamin. Which is correct?

Both are correct. Jerusalem was in the land of Benjamin but bordered Judah. Jewish tradition held that the altars and sanctuary were in Benjamin, while the courts of the temple were in Judah. A modern example would be Kansas City, which is in both Kansas and in Missouri.

6. How could God allow Jephthah to offer his daughter up as a burnt offering and how could he be regarded as a man of faith in Hebrews 11:32 (Judges 11:29-40)?

While many take this to mean Jephthah offered his daughter's life, it is better to understand this as an offering to remain a virgin for life and not become a human sacrifice. Several reasons lead to this conclusion:

- a. The text does not say he killed his daughter in a sacrificial offering.
- b. We too are offered to God as living sacrifices (Romans 12:1), not dead ones.
- c. It was a great sacrifice for his daughter to be set apart for temple service and not marry and continue the lineage through his only child. Jephthah acted honorably by being faithful to this vow even though it would mean he would have no descendants.
- d. The daughter's response to the vow was to weep over her virginity for two months, not to weep over her death (11:38). There would be no reason to mourn her virginity if she were to die in two months for she may have sought to marry during this time.
- e. The conclusion of this story is that she had no relations with a man (11:39). This is a pointless statement if she were put to death.
- f. It would be murder to Jephthah to kill his daughter because of a vow he took.

7. Which is the correct number in 1 Samuel 13:1? The KJV says "Saul reigned one year." The NIV says, "Saul was thirty years old when he became king and he reigned over Israel forty-two years." The NASB reads "Saul was forty years old when he began to reign and he reigned thirty-two years over Israel."

The problem here is the Masoretic text manuscript omits the number. The verse reads, "Saul was the son of ... years when he became king, and he reigned two years over Israel. The various renderings are attempts by the translators to fill in the missing information based on other biblical texts. This is then not an error but an omission.

8. Why does God tell Samuel to lie in 1 Samuel 16:2?

It is clear that God approved of a policy of withholding information from King Saul that would have moved him to violence if he had known it.

Samuel's answer, "I have come to sacrifice to the Lord" was a true statement in that it corresponded to the facts of why he came and what he did. In addition, he had another reason for coming which he did not reveal. If he had been asked if he had another reason for coming and if he denied that he did he would have lied.

It is not always necessary in every case to tell everything about which we know. In fact, often it is impossible to tell all the truth due to memory lapses. But what we do communicate must be truthful. Secrecy and concealment are not the same as duplicity and falsehood. The duty to tell only what is true does not necessarily in every case include the obligation to tell the whole truth about the matter, particularly with lives endangered or if another's confidence is being betrayed.

9. Who killed Goliath, David (1 Samuel 17:50) or Elhanan (2 Samuel 21:19)?

2 Samuel 21:19 has been corrupted by a copyist. A parallel passage in 1 Chronicles 20:5 gives us the actual episode — Elhanan killed Lahmi the brother of Goliath. The copyist problem in 2 Samuel 21:19 can be traced to a confusion over three words and letters which when read in Hebrew in a certain way could have resulted in the error.

10. How could a good God send an evil spirit to Saul (1 Samuel 18:10)?

Because God is absolutely sovereign, the actions of any spirit would be ultimately subject to God's authority. By this time Saul had already rejected God and God had already rejected Saul. The sending of the spirit was similar to God's allowing Satan to afflict Job. God allows evil but always to accomplish His purposes.

11. Saul's death is recorded as coming through suicide as he fell on his sword in 1 Samuel 31:4. However, 2 Samuel 1:6-10 describes his death as coming from an Amalekite. Which is correct?

Two solutions have been proposed for this problem:

- a. Some claim both stories are true. Saul attempted suicide but was not yet dead when the Amalekite came to complete the job.
- b. Perhaps a better explanation is the 1 Samuel story is the correct version and the story in 2 Samuel 1 is a true record of a lie by the Amalekite who thought he could gain favor with David. Supporting this is 1 Chronicles 10 which gives the same explanation as 1 Samuel 31. The major problem with this is 2 Samuel 1 does not state that the Amalekite lied and that David put him to death for his confession.

12. Does 2 Samuel 12:23 teach that infants go to heaven, in spite of being guilty of sin (Romans 5:12)?

Not only is it obvious that all children at some young age are incapable of moral discernment but Isaiah 7:16 gives further evidence of this. It is also clear that God judges us based in part upon our knowledge (Luke 12:47-48; Matthew 11:20-24). Infants who have no moral understanding are judged according to this understanding.

However, while they have not committed personal sins, they are still reckoned guilty as part of the human race for Adam's sin (Romans 5:12), and they are still stained with original sin (Ephesians 2:3). The question therefore is, does God extend forgiveness and redemption to infants?

Practically all theologians argue that at least some infants who die do not go to hell, but not all believe that every dying infant goes to heaven. The views are as follows:

- a. Only the elect infants go to heaven.
- b. Only the infants who would have believed in Jesus go to heaven.
- c. All infants go to heaven.
- d. Unbaptized infants go to limbo (Roman Catholic).

David believed in life after death and the resurrection (Psalm 16:10-11) and he appears to believe this will hold true for at least his infant in 2 Samuel 12:23. Beyond this passage, there is very little Scripture which we can even make an inference about this issue in the Bible. Since there is no explicit teaching it is impossible to be dogmatic in any view.

13. How could God allow Solomon to have so many wives when He condemns polygamy (1 Kings 11:3)?

There is no doubt that God does not approve of polygamy:

- a. "You shall not multiply wives" (Deuteronomy 17:17).
- b. God created one man and one woman (Genesis 2:21-25).
- c. Jesus reaffirmed the intention of marriage (Matthew 19:4).
- d. "Let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband" (1 Corinthians 7:2).
- e. An elder must be the "husband of one wife" (1 Timothy 3:2).
- f. Cases of polygamy are punished in the Bible (Genesis 4:19-23, 1 Chronicles 14:3).

Much like divorce, God did not approve of polygamy but long-suffered with the practice because of the hardness of man's heart (cf. Matthew 19:9). The Bible only records Solomon's polygamy, it does not approve of it.

14. How could 1 Kings 11:4 describe David's heart as being wholly devoted to God when he committed adultery with Bathsheba and murdered her husband Uriah?

First, we are justified by grace, not by works. We are not righteous through any acts which we have done but are declared so through the grace of God. David's heart was loyal to God because of his faith.

This verse contrasts the faith of David with the idolatry of Solomon. Solomon was enticed by his many wives to forget the God of Israel and worship other gods. David, on the other hand, worshiped the one and only God.

15. What happened to the missing prophetic books referred to in Chronicles? Did we lose inspired books of the Bible?

A number of books are mentioned in Chronicles:

- a. The Book of Kings (I Chron. 9:1; II Chron. 16:11; 25:26; 27:7; 28:26; 32:33; 35:27; 36:8).
- b. The Chronicles of King David (I Chron. 27:24).
- c. The Chronicles of Samuel the Seer (I Chron. 29:29).
- d. The Chronicles of Nathan the Prophet (I Chron. 29:29).
- e. The Chronicles of Gad the Seer (I Chron. 29:29).
- f. The Records of Nathan the Prophet (II Chron. 9:29).
- g. The Prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite (II Chron. 9:29).
- h. The Visions of Iddo the Seer (II Chron. 9:29; 13:22).
- i. The Records of Hozai (II Chron. 33:19).

The prophets were an educated group able to read and write. Samuel led a company of prophets (1 Samuel 19:20). The moral educators of Israel naturally kept a record of events in addition to the prophecies that God may have given them. These records were not themselves inspired by God but only noted in the inspired text.

If the Bible cites an uninspired text, it does not do so to regard it as inspired. Paul even cited pagan poets (1 Corinthians 15:33; Titus 1:12). In doing so he is not affirming their inspiration. He is only incorporating a truth that they may have uttered into his inspired book.

C. Difficulties in the Old Testament Books of Wisdom

1. How can God hate those who do iniquity in Psalm 5:5 when He loves the world (John 3:16)?

God does not hate in the way that man hates. Hate for God is not an emotional dislike but a judicial act of judging righteously the sinner who has separated himself from God. It does not contradict God's love, since God has also sacrificed His own Son for the very sin of those workers of iniquity.

2. Why does the subtitle of Psalm 30 call the psalm "A Song at the Dedication of the House of David" when the psalm makes no reference to the temple but rather to God's grace in time of trouble?

First, the subtitles are not part of the inspired text. They were added by scribes at a later time in the same way that modern translators add subtitle to chapters or sections of the Bible.

Second, some have suggested that a few of the subtitles in Psalms are not titles but in fact postscripts. If this is the case, then the statement about the House of David would be a description of Psalm 29 rather than Psalm 30. The content of Psalm 29 fits a psalm of dedication much better than Psalm 30.

3. How can David say the righteous do not beg bread in Psalm 37:25 when obviously some of those starving are Christians?

- a. This is a statement about David's own personal experience ("I have not seen"), not a promise for all Christians.
- b. The Psalms are, like Proverbs, wisdom literature. They not intended to be a universal promise but a general rule of life. Those who are righteous will rarely be needing to beg for food.
- c. The Old Testament Law provided for the poor to glean in the fields (cf. Leviticus 19:10; Deuteronomy 24:21). Since the poor could find food this way there was even less of a reason to beg for bread.

4. Will the earth perish as taught in Psalm 102:26 (cf. Luke 21:33; 2 Peter 3:10) or will it be established forever as taught in Psalm 78:69 and Psalm 104:5?

The Hebrew word for "forever" can be understood to mean a long or indefinite period of time. It is best to understand this as a very long time, or as the closest thing to forever man can understand.

However, the earth will abide in its elements which will be reformed in a new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 21:1). The present decaying earth will be destroyed and reconstructed in to a world in which righteousness dwells.

5. How could the Bible rejoice at little babies being seized and dashed against rocks (Psalm 137:9)?

The psalmist is rejoicing over God's justice that would reward the Babylonians according to the cruelty of the own deeds. The Babylonians would reap what they had sown as the Medes and Persians would conquer them with the very same brutal acts as they had performed. He is rejoicing over the righteous justice of God, not over the dashing of babies.

6. How can Proverbs 22:6 say if a child is trained in the way to live he will not leave it when he is older when experience tells us this is not true?

Proverbs are wisdom literature and must be interpreted accordingly. The author was not stating absolute guarantees but rather truthful advice and guidance for wise living. This proverb is a general truth that may have an occasional exception due to special circumstances. It is not a promise but a proverb.

7. Does Proverbs 24:11 justify breaking the law to stop abortions when it says to "deliver those who are being taken away to death, and those who are staggering to slaughter, O hold them back"?

- a. We are commanded to obey the government (Romans 13:1; 1 Peter 2:13) and the only exception is when believers are being compelled to sin, not when others are being permitted to sin.
- b. Proverbs 24:21 speaks of fearing the king which implies civil obedience, not disobedience.
- c. Those being led away to death in Proverbs 24:11 are the victims of those breaking the law, while abortion is occurring today in accordance with the law.
- d. There is no biblical support for believers to illegally take away legal rights of others because they believe the laws to be unjust. The apostles, for instance, lived under a government which performed many unjust acts. They did not seek to prevent the plethora of injustices but rather they commanded obedience.
- e. If it is right to rescue lives by blocking clinic doors, then why is it not also right to rescue them by bombing clinics or by killing abortionists?
- f. The same line of thinking should bring us to block the doors of cults who are leading people to spiritual death and worshiping false gods.
- g. Two wrongs do not make a right and the end does not justify the means. We should not disobey the government (actively or passively) when they write laws that permit others to sin.

8. Proverbs 22 - 24 is similar to an Egyptian writing found in 1888. If this is a copy of the Egyptian book, how can it be written by Solomon (Proverbs 1:1; 25:1)?

- a. The differences in the writings are greater than the similarities.
- b. Many scholars have concluded that if there was any borrowing, it was the Egyptian source that borrowed from Proverbs.
- c. Since the two books deal with the same subject matter, this may alone account for the similarities.
- d. God is the source of all truth, wherever it is found. While unlikely, God may have guided Solomon in the use of other human sources in writing God's Word. God could still superintend and co-author the process.

9. How can two contradictory commands in Proverbs 26:4-5 both be true?

These would be contradictory if not for the qualifying phrases. It depends upon the circumstances as to whether or not we should answer a fool. Wisdom dictates whether we should answer so that the fool will not think he is wise or whether we should not answer the fool when we too would become foolish.

10. Proverbs 22:15 describes foolishness as correctable and Proverbs 27:22 describes foolishness as not correctable. Which is correct?

The foolishness of a child is much more correctable than the foolishness of an adult. Furthermore, there are degrees of foolishness. Some foolishness is beyond hope.

11. Why do Evangelical Christians spiritualize the Song of Solomon when they also advocate the literal method of interpretation?

There are three main interpretations of the Song of Solomon:

- a. The allegorical view which sees the book as depicting God's love for His people, particularly Israel.
- b. The typical view which understands the books as describing Christ's love for His church (cf. Ephesians 5:28-32).
- c. The literal view which believes the book is a historical description of Solomon's love for his Shulamite bride.

The last view is probably the best because it is consistent with the literal method of interpretation and does not contradict but rather complements Scripture. It is a beautiful example of romance which exalts the biblical view of sex and marriage. It is valid to see this literal love story as a picture of God's love for His people since Paul teaches that marriage pictures Christ's love for His church in Ephesians. However, to see it as a prediction of Christ's love for the church appears to be reading a meaning into the text.

D. Difficulties in the Old Testament Books of Prophecy

1. How can Isaiah 7:14 be a prophecy about Jesus Christ when Isaiah 7:16 and Isaiah 8:3 indicate the text is speaking about another child which fulfills the prophecy?

The prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 was fulfilled in the short-term by the birth of Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz as a sign that God was with His people for their physical deliverance. The prophecy was given in 735 B.C. and before the child was old enough to know good from evil (7:16), Assyria defeated Judah's enemies, Damascus and Samaria, in 732 B.C.

The prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 is fulfilled in the long-term by the birth of Jesus Christ as a sign that God would deliver His people from their spiritual bondage to sin at the crucifixion. Thus Isaiah 7:14 is a two-fold prophecy, having a double reference.

2. Why does the Matthew 1:22-23 quote Isaiah 7:14 as "Behold, the virgin shall be with child" when Isaiah 7:14 does not mean specifically "virgin" but rather "young woman" or "maiden"?

The Hebrew word for virgin (*almah*) in Isaiah 7:14 is not as specific a word as is found in Genesis 24:16 in which Rebekah is described as a young woman who has never had sexual relations. However, *almah* is always used its seven occurrences in the singular to mean a maiden who is unmarried and chaste. For example, Genesis 24:43 uses *almah* as referring to the virgin Rebekah. Therefore, while Isaiah 7:14 uses a less precise word for virgin, it still is the equivalent meaning.

In fact, this less precise word for virgin is an ideal word because it is able to refer to both the bride of Isaiah who was a virgin until her wedding and to Mary who was a virgin until after the birth of Christ.

3. How can God the Son be called "The Everlasting Father" in Isaiah 9:6?

- a. Isaiah 9:6 is not providing a formula for the doctrine of the Trinity.
- b. The phrase is more literally translated "father of eternity." It is therefore best taken in the sense of Christ as the creator of the world. As John 1:3 says, "all things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being."

4. How can Isaiah 14:12 be a reference to Lucifer or Satan when the entire context of chapter fourteen is a proverb against the king of Babylon, not Satan?

The Hebrew word translated as "Lucifer" in the KJV or star of the morning in the NASB or morning star in the NIV, literally means "shining one." The King James Version get "Lucifer" from the Latin Vulgate translation.

The clear reference of this passage is to the king of Babylon (Isaiah 14:4). There is some debate about which king of Babylon. Some even see the king of Babylon as a personification of the entire kingdom of Babylon. Regardless, the prophecy had immediate significance for the people of Isaiah's day as God was promising them that their enemy, the king of Babylon, would be ultimately destroyed.

While the prophecy does not appear to be speaking clearly to Satan, it certainly speaks against a kingdom that is controlled by Satan. Furthermore, it is possible that the king of Babylon pictures the final demise of the evil one (Revelation 20:1-10).

Some even see Jesus statement in Luke 10:18, "I was watching Satan fall from Heaven like lightning," as being an allusion to Isaiah 14:12 which would then describe Satan's initial fall. Tertullian (160 - 230) and Gregory the Great (540-604) were the first to present this view. This may be possible but it may also be reading more into the text than what is stated. It is difficult to be dogmatic with this questionable view.

- 5. How can the wicked "not perceive the majesty of the Lord" in Isaiah 26:10, when Isaiah 40:5 says "the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all flesh will see it together"? Which is true?**

The wicked do not recognize the glory of God voluntarily. Yet while they do not perceive God's majesty today, they will see it in the future judgment when all will stand before Him (cf. Isaiah 45:23; Philippians 2:10).

- 6. How could Isaiah specifically name Cyrus as the king of Persia when he would not become the king until about 150 years after this time of Isaiah (Isaiah 44:28)?**

This is a clear example of predictive prophecy. Since Isaiah wrote very specific prophecies about Christ (7:14; 9:1; 9:6-7; 40:3-5; 50:6; 52:13-53:12) it should not concern us that Isaiah predicts Cyrus also. In fact it should strengthen our confidence in the Word of God.

- 7. How can Jeremiah be inspired by God if the original manuscript of Jeremiah perished (Jeremiah 36:28)?**

The original manuscript had an "original duplicate!" In other words, when the original was destroyed, God inspired another one just like it.

To be exact, it is not accurate to say that only the original manuscript is inspired but also the original text is inspired. For example, an exact copy of the text of an original manuscript is just as inspired by God as the original. It is the text that is inspired (2 Timothy 3:16). Likewise, the existing manuscripts are inspired when they accurately reproduce the original.

Therefore, it is not inconsistent to understand an exact reproduction to be inspired by God.

8. Was the sin of Sodom selfishness according to Ezekiel 16:49 and not homosexuality?

Sodom's sin was both selfishness and homosexuality for several reasons:

- a. Genesis 19 clearly describes their perversion as sexual.
- b. Homosexuality and selfishness are related sin in that fleshly passions are being satisfied outside of God's moral law, for the pleasure of the person.
- c. Ezekiel 16:50 calls their sin an "abomination" which carries a sexual connotation. Homosexual sins are called an abomination in Leviticus 18:22.
- d. Homosexual activity is called "sodomy" after the sexual perversion at Sodom.
- e. Jude 7 calls the sin of Sodom "sexual immorality."

9. How can the prophecies of a future sacrificial system be true when the New Testament declares that animal sacrifices have been abolished by the atoning death of Christ (Ezekiel 40-48; cf. Hebrews 10:1-9)?

Some interpret these chapters in a spiritual sense and see their fulfillment in the death of Christ. However, this view is defective on several counts:

- a. The high degree of detail does not fit a spiritual interpretation.
- b. This reads the New Testament back into the Old Testament rather than understanding the Old Testament text as it is written.
- c. If these chapters are spiritualized, then we could spiritualize most of the Old Testament prophecies as well, including those fulfilled the first coming of Christ. If the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies that the New Testament describes have been literal, it follows that all prophecies in the Old Testament can be expected to be fulfilled literally as well.

Seeing these sacrifices as being fulfilled literally can be harmonized with the death of Christ by understanding them in a memorial sense rather than in an atoning sense. Rather than looking forward to the death of Christ for sin as the Old Testament sacrifices looked, these sacrifices will look back on the death of Christ, much as the Lord's Supper looks back on the crucifixion today. The Book of Hebrews speaks of abolishing animal sacrifices in an atoning sense, not in a memorial sense.

The Lord's Supper proclaims the death of Christ "until He [the Lord] comes" (1 Corinthians 11:24-26). These sacrifices will proclaim the death of Christ after Christ has come. Ezekiel 40-48 will be fulfilled literally like other yet to be fulfilled prophecies given to Israel when Christ returns to earth to reign for the 1,000 year millennium.

10. How could a holy God command Hosea to marry a harlot (Hosea 1:2)?

- a. There is some question about whether Hosea married a harlot or married a woman who was to become a harlot. Even so, God knew she would become a harlot and commanded Hosea to marry her as an object lesson for all Israel.
- b. Harlotry is not condoned but strongly condemned (Hosea 4:11-19).
- c. Hosea was commanded to marry her, not to commit adultery with her. He was to be faithful to her even though she would fail him.
- d. Leviticus 21:14 commands only priests to not marry a harlot, not everyone. In fact, Rahab the Harlot is part of Christ's legal genealogy.

11. How could the story of Jonah and the great fish be true (Jonah 1)?

- a. Certainly those who understand that God is able to do the impossible can accept the story of Jonah as a historical event.
- b. There have been accounts of humans that survived being swallowed by whales, although the reliability of these stories are open to question. Also, many believe Jonah died and was resurrected.
- c. Some ancient coins have been discovered with an inscription of a man coming out of a fish's mouth.
- d. 2 Kings 14:25 mentions Jonah and affirms his prophetic ministry. If a historical book affirms a prophetic ministry, it seems to support accepting the historical events of the prophetic book itself.
- e. The most compelling reason to accept the historical account of Jonah comes from Matthew 12:40. Jesus bases his prediction of His death, burial and resurrection on the historical event of Jonah and the fish. If Jesus did not believe in the historicity of Jonah he would have been foolish to compare the proof of his ministry — the resurrection — with a fictional account.

12. Why does Jonah 3:3 greatly exaggerate the size of Nineveh as 50 to 70 miles in diameter (about a three days walk) ?

While the inner walls of Ninevah were less than eight miles in circumference and less than two miles in diameter, the city and its surrounding, stretched for many more miles beyond the wall.

The most likely possibility is that Ninevah would be a three days walk if Jonah was to go to every area of the city. Thus he did not go straight through the city as quickly as possible. This is how the city could be a three day walk and still be much smaller than 50 miles. This makes sense since he was going to Ninevah to proclaim judgment. He would be required to go to the entire city, not just walk through the city (cf. Jonah 3:4).

13. How can a good God not answer those who cry out to Him (Micah 3:4), particularly when Christ said “everyone who asks, receives (Luke 11:10)?

God does withhold answers from those who doubt (James 1:6) and from those who ask with wrong motives (James 4:3). God also may withhold his promised blessings when they are conditional promises. Many of His blessings, particularly in the Old Testament, were condition upon obedience (cf. Exodus 19:5). Statements about God must be read in their full biblical context.

Likewise, God never promises to heal everyone in this life of all medical problems (cf. 2 Corinthians 12:8-9). He never promises to make us financially wealthy, regardless of how much faith we muster.

Those who are faithful to Him He always grants His promised blessing. He does not always promise the same blessing to those who are unfaithful. Furthermore, He does not always promise everything we may claim He has promised. We must be careful not to assign God’s reputation to a promise that He never made in the first place.

E. Difficulties in the New Testament Gospels

1. **Why does the New World Translation translate John 1:1 “the word was a god”? How can we be sure that Jesus is God from this passage?**

The alleged reason the Jehovah’s Witnesses have translated John 1:1 as “the word was with God and the word was a god” instead of “and the Word was with God and the Word was God” as orthodox translations render this verse is because in Greek the definite article (“the”) is present in the first reference to God but is missing from the second reference to God. Therefore, they believe the first reference, which includes the definite article, is referring to The God (Jehovah) and the second reference is referring to a god (Christ).

There are several problems with the New World Translation’s rendering of John 1:1:

- a. A noun in Greek may be definite even though it does not have the article with it. There are nine different types of Greek grammatical constructions which allow a noun to be definite although there is no article.

In fact, in the opening clause of John 1:1 we read, “In the beginning” and yet “the” is not in the Greek text. Even the New World Translation does not translate this as “in a beginning.”

- b. The New World Translation is inconsistent in following its own principle that God without the article should be “a god.” The word “God” (THEOS in Greek) occurs 282 times in the New Testament without the article and in 94% of those occurrences, the New World Translation renders it as “God”! In the Gospel of John, “God” is without the article twenty times and is translated “a god” in only John 1:1 and John 10:33.

John 1:18 gives a good example of the Jehovah Witnesses problem with this translation. To be consistent, the NWT would have to translate John 1:18, “No one has seen a god at any time. Yet they can not translate John 1:18 this way because Jesus was seen by men. Other examples are John 1:6; 1:12; 1:13; 8:54; 9:16; 19:7.

- c. E. C. Cowell wrote in the Journal of Biblical Literature in 1933. “Definite predicate nouns which precede the verb usually lack the article...” This is known as Cowell’s Rule and it showed that it is very possible for a noun under certain circumstances (like John 1:1) to be definite even though the lack the article. Note this does not prove that John 1:1 must be translated “God” rather than “a god”, but it does prove that it is very possible.

John places a noun without a definite article before a verb in a sentence a total of 54 times in his gospel. This grammatical construction is clearly a favorite of his. In none of the other 53 occurrences should the noun be translated indefinite. An example is John 1:49, “You are [the] King of Israel,” cf. John 5:27; 9:5; 10:36.

- d. The Jehovah's Witnesses have so strained to prove that Jesus is not God that they have proved too much. Since they suppose themselves to be strict monotheists, they have nevertheless subscribed to polytheism by considering Jesus as "a god." In their militant denial of Trinitarianism, they have painted themselves into a polytheistic corner.

As Robert H. Countess, a leading authority on the New World Translation, has written,

"The New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures must be viewed as a radically biased piece of work. At some points it is actually dishonest. At others it is neither modern nor scholarly. And interwoven throughout its fabric is inconsistent application of its own principles enunciated in the Foreword and Appendix."

John clearly teaches that Jesus is God in other passages in his gospel (cf. 8:58; 10:30; 20:28). In addition, the New Testament teaches the Deity of Christ in many places. Unfortunately, the NWT has also adjusted their translation to their doctrine in other cases (e.g. Hebrews 1:8, Colossians 1:15-18; Titus 2:13).

2. Why does Luke 3:23-38 give a different ancestral tree for Jesus than Matthew 1:1-16 does? For example, Luke 3:23 says Jesus' grandfather is Heli, but Matthew 1:16 says his grandfather is Jacob.

Matthew traces the line of Jesus through his legal father, Joseph. Luke traces the line of Jesus through his actual mother, Mary. Since Matthew's purpose is to present Jesus as the official Messiah, he presents Jesus as from the lineage of King David and goes only back to Abraham, the father of the nation. Luke's audience, however, is Greek and therefore Jesus' line is traced all the way back to Adam, the father of all men.

We can discern that Luke gives Christ's maternal genealogy and Matthew gives his paternal genealogy through the following clues:

- a. Matthew traces the line of Jesus through Joseph to King Solomon, who rightfully inherited the throne from his father David. Luke traces the actual line through David's son Nathan. Jesus descended legally through Solomon but naturally through Nathan.
- b. Luke does not say he is giving the lineage through Joseph but rather he notes that Jesus was "supposedly" the son of Joseph. Thus Jesus was only thought to have been the biological son of Joseph. The true lineage came through Mary.

These genealogies can be confused because they have some names in common (Shealtiel, Zerubbabel), but keep in mind these were common names. For example, Luke's genealogy has a repeat of the names Joseph and Judah.

3. Is Joram the father of Uzziah, as Matthew 1:8 indicates, or is he the father of Ahaziah, as we learn from 1 Chronicles 3:11-12?

Ahaziah is the immediate son of Joram and Uzziah was the distant “son” or descendant. Just as the word “son” can also mean “grandson” in the Bible, “begot” does not necessarily refer to one generation. “Begot” means “became the ancestor of” and “begotten” means “is the descendant of.”

To summarize the genealogies:

<u>Matthew 1:8</u>	<u>1 Chronicles 3:11-12</u>
Joram	Joram
—	Ahaziah
—	Joash
—	Amaziah
Uzziah	Uzziah (also Azariah)
Jotham	Jotham

Therefore, Matthew does not give us a complete chronology but an abbreviated genealogy of Christ’s ancestry.

4. Why does Matthew 1:9 list Uzziah as the father of Jotham when 1 Chronicles 3:12 and 2 Kings 15:1-7 says Jotham’s father was Azariah?

Uzziah and Azariah are two different names for the same person. 2 Kings 15:32 and 15:34 show Jotham’s father is Uzziah. So does 2 Chronicles 26:1-23; 27:2; Isaiah 1:1; 6:1 and 7:1.

The Bible sometimes describes the same person by two different names for different reasons. Examples are Paul (Saul), Gideon (Jerubbabel), Daniel (Belteshazzar), Jehoiachin (Jeconiah), and Peter (Simon).

5. Why does Matthew say there are fourteen generations from captivity in Babylon until Christ when he lists only thirteen generations (Matthew 1:17)?

Jeconiah is counted in the fourteen generations from David to the deportation to Babylon and also in the fourteen generations from the deportation until Christ.

The purpose of fitting the genealogy into three sets of fourteen generations is a memory technique which helps the reader focus on David. In the first set, David rises to the throne, in the second set, the Davidic throne is lost at the captivity, and finally, the throne is regained with Christ.

Matthew may have derived the number of fourteen from the Hebrew spelling of David. In Hebrew, the letters have a numeric value and the Hebrew spelling of David adds up to fourteen.

Therefore, this is not an error of counting but a literary device to bring a special emphasis to King David.

6. Was the announcement of the birth of Christ made to Mary (Luke 1:26-33) or to Joseph (Matthew 1:20-21)?

An announcement was made to both of them. Mary was the first to know since she was told she would conceive (Luke 1:31), while Joseph was told after Mary had become pregnant.

It makes sense that Mary would be told ahead of time, since she would be the first to know she was pregnant. Joseph would also need a message from God, since he would have known the baby was not his.

Other examples of a pair of visions include Peter and Cornelius in Acts 10 and Saul and Ananias in Acts 9. Sometimes God reveals Himself to more than one person about the same event.

7. Why are the magi commended for following the star (Matthew 2:2), when the Bible condemns astrology as a form of idolatry (Leviticus 19:26; Deuteronomy 18:10; Isaiah 8:19)?

The Bible condemns astrology because it is a superstitious belief that the movement of stars and planets can be used to foretell events. The star in Matthew 2 was not foretelling an event but announcing that Christ had been born.

Also, no worship of false gods or of the power of “fate” was involved. In fact, the magi came to worship Christ (Matthew 2:2), not idols. The star was certainly a divine, supernatural occurrence sent by God for special guidance.

That God will again use heavenly wonders again at the second coming (Joel 2:28-32; Matthew 24:30) demonstrate His willingness to use the sky and stars, in spite of the misuse of nature by idolators.

8. Luke 1:5 says Elizabeth was from the priestly tribe of Aaron. Luke 1:36 says Elizabeth was a relative of Mary, who was from the tribe of Judah (Luke 1:39; 3:30). How is this possible for Elizabeth to be from two tribes?

Being related to someone does not mean you are from the same tribe. Elizabeth and Mary could have been related by marriage. Intermarriage between tribes was permitted and even Aaron married someone from the tribe of Judah.

9. Did Luke err when he referred to a worldwide census at the birth of Christ (Luke 2:1) under Caesar Augustus while history records a census much later, around 6 or 7 A.D. (cf. Acts 5:37)?

Luke, a reliable historian, describes a census that was typical of those taken in his day. People who Rome had conquered were required to owe allegiance to the emperor and it was common for a census to be taken to levy taxes or to recruit for military service. As Herod and Augustus developed a strained relationship, it is not surprising that a census may have been taken.

At the time of Christ there was a regular pattern of census taking every fourteen years. A census was begun around 8 or 7 B.C. which stemmed from Emperor Augustus. Census taking was a massive project which took years to complete. The census of 8 B.C. could have easily been delayed by organizational difficulties until 4 or 5 B.C., particularly as it trickled down to the local level.

Finally, it was not unusual to require people to return to their place of origin or where they owned property. A decree in 104 A.D. required this type of travel. Luke's description is compatible with the methods of census taking and should be considered a reliable record of an event not otherwise recorded.

10. Why does Luke 2:2 say the census was during Quirinius' governorship of Syria when he did not take that position until 6 A.D.?

There are three possible solutions to this problem:

- a. Quirinius was a noble military leader during the time Quintilius Varus was the governor of Syria (7 to 4 B.C.). Since Varus was untrustworthy, Caesar Augustus entrusted Quirinius with special authority over Palestine, making him in practice the governor, if not in office.
- b. A Latin inscription found in 1764 is believed to show two separate reigns of Quirinius as governor of Syria. Thus he may have been governor at the time of Christ's birth while also taking the governorship in 6 A.D.
- c. An awkward but possible reading of the Greek text could be "This census took place *before* Quirinius was governing Syria."

Since all of these are possible, it is difficult to charge Luke with an error, particularly when considering his proven skill with minute historical detail in other occasions.

11. How can Matthew so alter such an important verse as Micah 5:2 when he quotes it in Matthew 2:6?

There are several minor variations in Matthew's wording of Micah 5:2:

- a. Matthew replaced "Ephrathah" with "land of Judah." Ephrathah was an older name for the area around Bethlehem and Matthew gave the reader a more broader and clearer geographical designation — land of Judah.
- b. Matthew describes Bethlehem as "by no means the least" while Micah calls it "little." Matthew does not contradict Micah but rather paraphrases Micah to bring out his point. Micah writes that Bethlehem is small in size when compared to other towns and yet will be the town from which the Ruler of Israel will come. Matthew describes Bethlehem's significance, not its size, in writing that it is not the least. While Micah states that Bethlehem is little in size, he implies that Bethlehem is great in stature. Matthew states that Bethlehem is "not the least" in stature, implying it is little in size.

- c. Matthew adds the phrase “who will shepherd My people Israel.” This phrase is actually taken from 2 Samuel 5:2 and is added to strengthen his point. Other places where the New Testament combines Old Testament verses together to make a point are Matthew 27:9-10, which combines Zechariah 11:12-13, Jeremiah 19:2, 11, and Jeremiah 32:6-9; and Mark 1:2-3 which combines Isaiah 40:3 with Malachi 3:1.

These alterations show Matthew is only paraphrasing and not making an exact quotation. Nevertheless, the Old Testament is accurately represented.

12. Why did Matthew 2:23 mistakenly say “what was spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, ‘He shall be called a Nazarene.’” when no Old Testament prophecy like this exists?

It is important to note that it was not a prophet that spoke this but prophets (plural). Therefore, we should not necessarily expect to find this statement in a single verse. It is a general truth communicated through several prophets about Christ reflecting qualities of a Nazarene. Several suggestions have been given as far as how Christ would have fulfilled this statement:

- a. Some say Jesus fulfilled the righteous requirements of the Old Testament Law (Matthew 5:17-18; Romans 8:3-4), one of which was a commitment to a Nazarene vow to be separate for the Lord (Numbers 6:2). However, Nazarene and Nazarene are different words and there is no evidence that Jesus took this specific vow.
- b. Some look to the word “Nazareth,” meaning “branch” and say that many prophets spoke of the Messiah as the “Branch” (Isaiah 11:1; Jeremiah 23:5; 33:15; Zechariah 3:8; 6:12).
- c. The best view understands the town of Nazareth as a despised place as evidenced by Nathaniel’s response, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:46). This seems most appropriate because the fulfillment is in reference to the city of Nazareth and the One coming as a Nazarene was predicted to be scorned and rejected by men (Isaiah 53:3; Psalm 22:6; Daniel 9:26; Zechariah 12:10).

13. Why do Matthew 4:5-10 and Luke 4:5-12 record the temptations of Christ in the wilderness in a different order? Which order is correct?

Matthew is describing the temptations in chronological order and Luke is describing them topically to progress to a climax. Matthew uses “then” in 4:5 and “again” in 4:8, which in Greek suggests a sequential order of events. Luke uses a simple “and” to separate the temptations, which allows for a progression which is not chronological.

Why Luke chose the order he did is a matter of debate. Some have suggested he wanted to end the temptations in Jerusalem since this is a theme of the book — Jesus progressing to Jerusalem. Others have considered the middle temptation of a shortcut to world power as a lesser temptation than displaying His supernatural power before the throng at the temple.

14. Before Jesus' baptism John the Baptist says he did not know Christ (John 1:31, 33). Yet in Matthew 3:13-14, John recognized Jesus before he baptized Him. Which is it?

The problem can be cleared but by a consideration of what John meant by "recognize." There are two possibilities:

- a. John knew Jesus by His reputation but not by recognition.
- b. John knew Jesus by personal acquaintance, not by divine manifestation.

The second option is most likely since Jesus and John were related (Luke 1:36). While John may have known Jesus through their family, he never knew Jesus as He was revealed in His baptism when the Spirit descended on Him and when the Father spoke from heaven (Matthew 3:16-17).

15. John 3:17, 8:15 and 12:47 say that Jesus did not come into the world to judge the world. Yet John 5:22; 5:27 and 9:39 say Jesus came to execute judgement. Did Jesus come into the world to judge the world or not?

These verses are in different contexts and two distinctions will help to clear up this difficulty:

- a. References to Jesus sitting in judgment usually refer to the second coming, while references to his coming for salvation and not judgment have his first coming in mind.
- b. The reason Christ dwelt among us was to seek and to save that which was lost (Luke 19:10). The effect of Christ's coming is judgment upon those who do not receive Him.

Therefore, Christ came into the world to save the world. Those who do not receive His salvation bring judgment upon themselves. This judgment will be pronounced at the second coming of Christ. The sense in which Christ came to judge at His first coming is as those who hear and reject are divided from those who hear and believe.

16. Why does Matthew depict Jesus sitting down on a mountain when He gave the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:1), while Luke says he stood on a level place (Luke 6:17)?

First, we must assume that these two accounts are referring to the same event. Since they have much of the same content, are in the same geographical area, are spoken to the same people and have many of the exact sayings, it is probable that they report the same event.

The mountain location only refers to the general area where the sermon was given, not the particular spot from which Jesus spoke. It would make sense to understand Jesus as speaking from a level place on the side of a mountain. This would make a natural amphitheater for the multitudes to hear Christ's words.

The apparent discrepancy between Christ standing and sitting can be cleared up if they refer to different times during the same event. There are at least two possibilities:

- a. Jesus was sitting at the beginning, as Matthew records, when his disciples came to Him. Later, when the great multitude gathered around He naturally stood to project His voice, as Luke records.
- b. Luke may be referring to Jesus' standing before He gave the sermon and while He was still healing people (Luke 6:17-19). When the disciples came to Him, He then sat down and turned His attention to them. This fits the order of Luke's account and reconciles Matthew's account also.

17. Why does Matthew's beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12) differ from Luke's (Luke 6:20-26)?

If these are two separate messages then there is no discrepancy involved here. If they are the same message then we can harmonize them in the following way:

- a. Luke account differs from Matthew's due to its brevity. Luke does not include as much material as Matthew does.
- b. Jesus may have said much more than either writer recorded. Each writer is most likely selecting from a larger body of teaching to communicate a theme.
- c. Luke and Matthew place a different emphasis on Jesus' words. Luke stresses the significance for those who are poor. Matthew stresses the poverty of the spirit, which the poor have as a result of being oppressed by the rich.

18. Why does Jesus say He did not come to abolish the Law but to fulfill the Law (Matthew 5:17-18)? Don't we also see Christ approving of His disciples when they break the Sabbath (Mark 2:24) and Christ declaring all foods clean (Mark 7:19)? Don't Christ disciples reject circumcision (Acts 15; Galatians 5:6; 6:15)? And doesn't Paul say "You are not under Law but under grace" (Romans 6:14) and the Ten Commandments have been taken away in Christ (2 Corinthians 3)?

Several distinctions should clear this up:

- a. Jesus fulfilled all the Law of Moses while He was on earth, including sacrifices (Matthew 8:4), feasts (Matthew 26:19), and festivals (John 7:10). He did violate the false traditions of the Pharisees, who were teaching as doctrines the precepts of men (Matthew 15:9). But in regard to the Law, Jesus came to earth to fulfill the Law and He did so perfectly (Romans 8:2-3). New Testament verses that speak to the Law being fulfilled refer to after the Cross, when there is "neither Jew nor Greek" but when all are one in Christ (Galatians 3:28).

- b. Not only did Jesus fulfill the Law but the Law was given in the context of the nation of Israel. For example, Ten Commandments were given with a reward of living long in the land (e.g. Exodus 20:12) and the Sabbath was given as a sign of the covenant between God and Israel (Exodus 31:17). The Law of Moses was given to Israel and for Israel.
- c. The Law reflected the character the God and as such the moral principles embodied in the Ten Commandments and the Law are now contained in another context in the New Testament.
- d. Since we have been united with Christ in his death (Galatians 2:20; Romans 6:5), we have died to the Law (Romans 7:1-6). In our death with Christ we have been released from the Law.
- e. Since we are released from the Law of Moses to serve the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2), we are no more under the commands and penalties of the Law than a Californian driving a car in California is under the motor vehicle laws of the State of New York. While there may be similarities in the traffic laws, the jurisdiction is different.
- f. Christ did not abolish the Law, He released us from the Law. The Law continues but we have died. It is in this that we have been released, not in the abolishing of the Law.

In conclusion, Christ fulfilled the Law on earth. His death released us from the Law so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter (Romans 7:6).

19. Should Christians give anything to anyone who asks them (Matthew 5:42, Luke 6:30)?

We must understand the context of this statement. Jesus is addressing the legalistic misinterpretation of the Old Testament which taught revenge based on the statement “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” (Exodus 21:24; Leviticus 24:20; Deuteronomy 19:21).

The law of retaliation was given to protect the innocent and to make sure retaliation did not go beyond the offense. Jesus taught the righteous man does not push his rights to the limit of the law but loves his enemy and gives to help him.

The context of the Scripture gives qualifications for giving, such as:

- a. We should not give to people that which will harm them. No good father would give a serpent to his child (Matthew 7:10).
- b. We should not give to those who are able to work but refuse to work. Paul said “If anyone will not work, neither let him eat.” (2 Thessalonians 3:10).
- c. We are called to provide for our families (1 Timothy 5:8). We must continue to provide in the midst of our giving.

Jesus did not expect his listeners to take His statement without qualification any more that He expected them to take literally to cut off their hands and pluck out their eyes if they cause them to stumble (Matthew 5:29-30).

- 20. Why are we warned to not practice our good works before men in Matthew 6:1, when just a few verses earlier we are told to practice our good works before men (Matthew 5:16)?**

There is a big difference between being noticed by people when we do good things, and doing good things in order to be noticed by people. What we should beware of is self-promotion, where we attempt in any way (overtly or subtly) to glamorize our activity for the sake of publicity. If we seek reward for our work here on earth, then we will have our reward in full on earth. It is to be expected that the people we are serving will notice our work and will glorify God.

- 21. If Jesus taught that prayer should be in private (Matthew 6:6), why does the Bible commend public prayer?**

Jesus did not condemn public prayers but prayers said in order to be seen by men. It was not the place of prayer that was at issue, but the purpose of prayer.

- 22. Why does Jesus tell us to pray, “and lead us not into temptation” (Matthew 6:13), when the book of James tells us “God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone” (James 1:13)?**

God does not directly tempt anyone to sin. He may allow us to be moved toward temptation but He is not responsible for the temptation. In other words, He can test us, but He will not tempt us. When we are tempted, we are drawn by our own lusts. We pray that God will guide us through the minefield of sin in this world. We are asking God to help us to “make no provision for the flesh” (Romans 13:14).

- 23. Why does Jesus tell us not to judge (Matthew 7:1-2) when later He tells us to judge (John 7:24) and in fact the apostles are seen judging others as well (1 Corinthians 5:12; 6:2-4)?**

Matthew 7:1-2 is not speaking of judging in and of itself, but rather of hypocritical judging. We ought to never judge someone else by a standard we do not live by ourselves. In fact, we ought to never judge someone else by a standard that God does not judge people by either.

The statement, “By your standard of measure it will be measured to you” is critical. We are already judged by God’s standard. We can be judged more strictly if we begin to demand more from others than God demands from us. This form of legalism is a common snare that Christians fall into.

Rather, we should judge other righteously, that is, according to God’s truth. To not judge others righteously is to actually to fail to love them. We must make a judgment about their spiritual need in order to effectively share the gospel with others. To love others in so many ways necessitates some conclusion concerning their need.

- 24. In the account of the centurion seeking the help of Jesus, Matthew indicates the centurion came to Jesus (Matthew 8:5) but Luke says the centurion sent others on his behalf (Luke 7:3, 6). Which is correct?**

In the first century, when a representative was sent to speak for another, it was as if the one who sent him was speaking. Even today, if the president sends an ambassador, the ambassador is going in the president's name.

Therefore, when Matthew states that the centurion came and entreated Jesus, he was truthfully communicating the one who made the request. He just did not add the specific information regarding his representative.

- 25. How can hell be a place of darkness (Matthew 8:12; 22:13; 25:30) when it includes fire (Revelation 20:14) and flames (Mark 9:48)?**

While hell is a literal place, not every description of it should be taken as literal. The Bible uses figures of speech to portray the horrors of hell. Outer darkness and fire are used to convey a different type of torment. We should not necessarily conclude hell has fire or darkness.

- 26. Why does Matthew 8:28-34 report that two demoniacs came to Jesus when Mark (5:1-20) and Luke 8:26-39 says only one approached Him?**

Mark and Luke do not say only one demoniac approached Jesus. They both say that one did. That one who came to Jesus came along with another. Whenever you have two, you also always have one.

- 27. Where were the demoniacs healed, in the country of the Gadarenes (Matthew 8:28-34) or in the country of the Gerasenes (Mark 5:1-20; Luke 8:26-39)?**

Actually, in all three gospels variant manuscripts exist for each of three possible readings:

- a. The country of the Gadarenes. Gadara was five miles southeast of Galilee. Josephus said that Gadara had territory and villages that bordered the lake.
- b. The country of the Gerasenes. Gerasa was a city some thirty miles southeast of Galilee, quite a long way from the Sea of Galilee. Many however believe the country of the Gerasenes refers to a small town on the eastern shore of Galilee, named Gersa.
- c. The country of the Gergesenes. Gergesa was also a town on the eastern shore.

Matthew's gospel has the best manuscript evidence for "Gadarenes," weaker evidence for "Gergesenes," and very weak evidence — only in translations — for "Gerasenes." Mark's gospel has strongest manuscript evidence for "Gerasenes," and weaker evidence for "Gadarenes," and "Gergesenes." Luke's gospel has good manuscript evidence for all three possibilities.

The following points are important in sorting out this difficulty:

- a. Origen (c. 250) argued in his commentary on the book of John that both Gerasa (the town 30 miles away from the Sea of Galilee) and Gadara were too far away to be possible. In his opinion, Gergesa was the best reading. Origen's influence certainly had an influence on some of the scribal transmissions.
- b. Gerasa may be mistaken as Gergesa if not spoken carefully. This may also account the reading of Gergesa.
- c. Gadara was a regional capital. It even had its own coins, which sometimes displayed a ship. This tells us that Gadara considered the sea part of its region.
- d. There was a desire on the part of some of the copyists to harmonize all three readings as "Gadarenes." Many later manuscripts show all three gospels are reading "Gadarenes" because copyists undoubtedly changed Mark and Luke to follow Matthew. This explains why the King James Version gives all three gospels as reading "Gadarenes," since it is translated from later manuscripts.

The best conclusion is that all three are speaking of the same territory but that Matthew is not as specific but is rather speaking of a larger general area. Matthew's reading of Gadarenes is referring to a broader region than the strict city limits and Mark and Luke are referring to the country around the town of Gersa, by the Sea of Galilee.

28. In Luke 9:50, Jesus says that "he who is not against us is for us," but in Luke 11:23 He says, "he who is not with Me is against Me." Are those who are neutral concerning Jesus considered with Him or against Him?

The King James Version translates the pronouns in Luke 9:50 as "us" but nearly all Greek manuscripts older than the eighth century have "you" (plural), not "us." This is why more recent translations read, "for he who is not against you is for you." The reason for the textual variation is that by the eighth century the pronoun for "you" and "us" was pronounced exactly the same.

Also, the contexts of these verses are different. The question in Luke 9 is whether a person who is not one of the twelve disciples should be allowed to cast out demons in the name of Christ. The people in Luke 11 are directly against the Lord by claiming He is casting out demons by power of the ruler of the demons.

Those who are not against Christ's disciples are not to be opposed. No person is Christ's exclusive representative. However, those who are not with Christ are indeed opposed to Him and will be judged. There is a big difference as to how we should be thinking about those who are not working with us and about those who are not serving Christ.

29. If Jesus is the all-powerful God, then why could He not do a miracle in Mark 6:5?

Just because Jesus possessed all power does not mean that He always chose to exercise His power. For example, God cannot sin even though He is all powerful. Another example is when Jesus chose to limit His power when He became man.

The “could not” in Mark 6:5 is a moral limitation, not a limit on His power. Jesus chose to limit His power because of their unbelief (Mark 6:6). He was not an entertainer and did not cast pearls before swine. He had the ability and in fact performed some miracles in Mark 6:5.

30. Why did Jesus seek to conceal His identity in public in Matthew, Mark and Luke and yet he forthrightly told the woman of Samaria that He was the Christ (John 4:26)?

First, there is a difference in location. Jesus was in Samaria, not Judea. The Jews of Judea viewed the Messiah as the one who would deliver them from the political oppression of Rome. Jesus did not want that role and He sought to delay His impending arrest in order to train His disciples.

Second, there is a difference in audience. There was only one woman that He spoke with in Samaria, not the masses of Jews in Judea. He was safer in revealing himself in this setting than in the other settings.

31. In John 8:14 Jesus said, “Even if I bear witness of Myself, My witness is true.” But in John 5:31 He says, “If I bear witness of Myself, My testimony is not true.” Is Jesus’ testimony regarding Himself true or false?

There are two ways of understanding John 5:31:

- a. Jesus is saying in effect, “Even if you don’t accept My testimony when I make claims about Myself, you should accept John the Baptist’s testimony about Me, since you approve of his ministry.” The Living Bible takes this interpretation in its paraphrase.
- b. Jesus’ testimony is true but not legal without two or three witnesses. The witnesses are John the Baptist (John 5:32-35), the witness of Christ’s miracles (John 5:36), the witness of the Father (John 5:37-38) and the witness of the Word of God (John 5:39). The NASB takes this interpretation by adding the word “alone” to John 5:31 and adding an explanation to the word “true” as “admissible as legal evidence.

The second explanation is perhaps best. Jesus was the Truth and everything He said was actually true. But His testimony about required witnesses to be officially received by the Jews. The context of John 5 seems to fit this interpretation.

32. Why does Jesus speak of cannibalism in saying we should eat His flesh and drink His blood (John 6:52-58)?

The literal method of interpretation does not mean that everything said is to be taken literally but rather as normal speech which communicates plainly. It allows for figures of speech and advocates the maxim, “when the plain sense makes good sense, seek no other sense.” In this passage, the plain sense does not make good sense.

There are many reasons why the words of Jesus in John 6:52-58 were literally meant to be taken figuratively:

- a. It is absurd to take Jesus’ words about eating His flesh literally.
- b. Jesus is not speaking of physical life but “eternal life” (John 6:54).
- c. He contrasts Himself as the “Bread of Life” with physical bread which the Jews ate in the wilderness (John 6:58).
- d. In every other case where Jesus describes himself with the qualifier “I am,” He is speaking figuratively. For example, He says “I am the true vine” (John 15:1) but He does not have leaves! He says, “I am the door” (John 10:9), but does not have hinges!

33. Did Jesus lie to his brothers when He told them He was not going to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles when He actually was going (John 7:8-10)?

In John 10, Jesus’ brothers urge Him to make Himself known publicly. Jesus did not do this because it was not time for this yet (John 7:8). The Jews were actively seeking to kill Him (7:1). Jesus separates Himself from His brothers in 7:8 because He did not want to go with them and be known openly (7:4).

When Jesus went to the feast, He did so in secret, not publicly (7:10). Therefore, when Jesus said He was not going to the feast, He meant He was not going *at that time, with His brothers, for their purpose*, His way of going to the feast was not their way and he indeed did not go right then with them.

34. Why do Bibles do recent editions of the Revised Standard Version set John 7:53 - 8:11 off from the rest of the text and why does the New English Bible put this passage at the end of the Gospel? Doesn’t this undermine the credibility of the Bible?

There are many reasons why John 7:53 - 8:11 is a questionable text:

- a. The passage does not appear in the oldest and most reliable Greek manuscripts.
- b. Many Greek manuscripts which include the story of the woman caught in adultery place it in a different place in the Bible — after John 7:36, after John 21:24; after John 7:44, after Luke 21:38, and after Luke 24:53.

- c. Some of the manuscripts which do include this passage as John 7:53 - 8:11 place an asterisk or other symbol indicating the copyists believed the passage to be doubtful.
- d. John 7:53 - 8:11 is not found in the best manuscripts of the earliest translations of the Bible into Old Syriac, Coptic, Gothic and Old Latin.
- e. This passage is not cited by most of the early church fathers, including Clement, Tertullian, Origen, Cyprian and Cyril.
- f. Most scholars believe the style of this passage does not fit the rest of this book and that it interrupts the flow of the book. However, it is on this same basis they have many erroneous conclusions about who wrote or did not write certain books of the Bible.

While there is good reason to doubt the authenticity of this story, it is certainly possible that it is authentic. Many believe it to be and it certainly contains no doctrinal error and fits with the character of Jesus.

The questionable nature of this passage does not undermine the Bible because on the whole its manuscript reliability is remarkable accurate. In fact, we should not shy away from honestly dealing with this passage since the credibility of God's word is built as we come to understand it accurately.

35. Does Jesus teach in John 10:34 that men are or can become gods?

Jesus had just declared Himself equal with God the Father in John 10:30. The Jews sought to stone Him for making Himself out to be God in John 10:33. Jesus quoted Psalm 82:6 which refers to earthly judges who are unjust as "gods." They are given this title because the word of God came to them, that is they were divinely appointed. The term "gods" did not mean they were actual deities but rather that their authority was from God.

A comparison can be seen from references to the sons for Israel, the sons of Ammon and the sons of Judah. The designations are often shortened to Israel, Ammon and Judah. Likewise, those divinely appointed judges could be called gods as a shortened form of the title the sons or people of God.

The Oneness of God was central to the Old Testament as Deuteronomy 6:4 "Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one!" was widely memorized. The term "gods" in Psalm 82:6 (cf. Exodus 21:6; 22:7; Psalm 8:5; 82:1; 138:1) was naturally understood as a term of divine appointment, not of multiple deities.

Jesus' point is that He is being charged with blasphemy for calling Himself the Son of God by people whose Scripture calls men "gods." If these men of the Old Testament are called "gods" and divinely appointed, then Christ's critics are inconsistent by saying that He is blaspheming by calling Himself the Son of God, for He too was set apart by God.

36. Does Jesus teach that He is merely a man among men in John 10:34-36 by equating Himself with the earthly judges?

It is important to understand what Jesus means by observing the context. Jesus already stated His equality with God in John 10:30. The response of the Jews was to stone for the sin of blasphemy. It was the charge of blasphemy that Jesus was answering, not the question of His Deity. The Jews had not even considered His claim to Deity and so He only answered their charge of blasphemy (John 10:36).

Christ's argument does not say "Psalm 82 speaks of men as gods; therefore I, being in common with other men, am able to use the term for myself." Rather He argues, "If in any sense the Psalm may apply this term to men, then how much more should it apply to me," thus invalidating their charge of blasphemy. It is an argument from the lesser (the judges) to the greater (Christ). His Deity is reemphasized in John 10:38 when He says He is in the Father and the Father is in Him. If Christ was in anyway clarifying that the Jews had misunderstood His claim to Deity in John 10:30, He did a poor job because they continued to seek to seize Him.

37. Did Jesus come only for the Jews (Matthew 10:5-6; Matthew 15:24) or did He also come for the Gentiles (John 10:16; Matthew 28:19)?

This apparent contradiction is solved by understanding the timing of Jesus' ministry. Jesus' initially came to His own, the Jews, but His own did not receive Him (John 1:11). While there were exceptions, such as the disciples, the Jews, as a whole, rejected the Messiah and crucified Him.

While Christ's primary ministry was to the Jews before His rejection, He still was seen ministering to Gentiles early in His ministry (e.g. the Samaritan Women of John 4). As the life of Jesus drew to a close we see the Gentiles becoming more responsive (e.g. the Canaanite Woman in Matthew 15:21-28) while the Jewish leaders are growing more hostile.

The message of Christ came to the Jew first, and then to the Gentile. This order of priority meant He first gave Israel the opportunity to receive Him and since they did not do so, they are now cut off until His ministry to the Gentiles is complete (Romans 11:19-26).

38. Did Jesus command the disciples not take a staff (Matthew 10:10) or did He allow them to take one (Mark 6:8)?

A closer examination indicates that Jesus prohibited the disciples from acquiring a staff in Matthew 10. Mark's account says they are to take nothing except a staff, which a traveler would commonly possess. Mark 6:8 says they make take the staff they already have, Matthew 10 says they should not take an extra staff. Jesus called the twelve to go out without special equipment or preparations but with the slightest provision. He was not telling them to necessarily discard even the walking stick they would have been carrying or to take off the tunic they would have been wearing.

39. Did Jesus promise to return to earth during the lifetime of the disciples when he said, “you shall not finish going through the cities of Israel, until the Son of Man comes” in Matthew 10:23?

There have been many interpretations attempting to clear up this difficult verse:

- a. Some, like Albert Schweitzer, see Jesus as believing the end of time would come before the disciples would return. Jesus then adjusted His beliefs after this statement since He was wrong. This is a flawed explanation.
- b. Some see the disciples going through the cities of Israel as the Gospel is now being spread to the whole world before the end comes (cf. Matthew 24:14). They believe the preaching of the gospel will bring about the kingdom of God. However, this verse is regarding the cities of Israel, not the world. To avoid this problem some copyists simply (and wrongly) left out the words “of Israel.”
- c. Some see this verse as a projection into the future of the ministry of the Gospel in the tribulation period. This view somewhat diminishes the problem of the cities of Israel, since ministry in the tribulation will be focused in Israel. However, the Gospel will still be going to the entire world also. Another problem with this view (as well as the previous view) is that there is no clear indication that this verse is referring to some future point in time. If however this passage refers to the future, this is a more compelling interpretation.
- d. Another view is read this passage literally and immediately, with the understanding that the disciples actually went into the cities of Israel and Jesus actually rejoined them after their ministry. This view has the problem of “until the Son of Man comes” sounding much like the second coming of Christ. However, this phrase is never use in Matthew to describe the second coming. Therefore, this is a very plausible interpretation.

This seeming discrepancy is then solved by either understanding “until the Son of Man comes” as occurring after their initial ministry, not in an eschatological sense, or by understanding “you shall not finish” as referring to the future disciples of Christ and not those to whom Christ was speaking. Either of these interpretations would clear up the problem.

40. If Jesus was crucified on a Friday and rose from the dead on a Sunday, how could He have been in the grave for three days and three nights (Matthew 12:40)?

Tradition holds that Jesus died on Friday at 3:00 p.m. (the “ninth hour”), and rose again from the dead on Sunday at dawn. According to Luke 23:54, Jesus was buried on the same day, just before the Sabbath day. This would mean the body of Jesus only spent one full day in the tomb before the resurrection.

There are three views for the day of the week of Christ’s death: Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. Matthew 12:40 is central to a complete understanding of this difficulty.

a. The Wednesday Crucifixion View

Some scholars believe Jesus died on Wednesday around sunset and arose from the dead exactly seventy-two hours later. Their main reasons for believing this are as follows:

- 1) A literal interpretation of Matthew 12:40. This view considers Matthew 12:40 as necessitating that the body of Jesus be in the grave for three whole days. Some believe when “day and night” are combined it ceases to be an idiom but a clear statement. A Wednesday Crucifixion provides this seventy-two hour period of three whole days.
- 2) There needs to be three whole days between the death and resurrection because of the number of events which take place during the interim.
- 3) The Passover was not a fixed day on Friday but floated. Therefore, Thursday was the Passover, not Friday. This would leave Friday open for the embalming, before the Saturday Sabbath.
- 4) This view gives an explanation for what Jesus did on Wednesday. In the traditional view, there is no accounting for Jesus on Wednesday.

Problems with the Wednesday Crucifixion View:

- 1) If it were not for one verse, Matthew 12:40, the Wednesday view would not be proposed.
- 2) If a seventy-two hour period is demanded, Christ must have risen no later than 6:00 p.m. on Saturday. Otherwise He would have risen on the fourth day. But Christians celebrate the resurrection of the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2) and not on the Sabbath.
- 3) Several of the many events which occurred between Christ’s death and resurrection could have been done at the same time by various people.

b. The Thursday Crucifixion View

Those who hold this view also focus on Matthew 12:40. This view believes the traditional Friday crucifixion has only three days and two nights. The reasoning for this view is as follows:

- 1) The Last Supper is on Wednesday evening, which eliminates the problem of the silent Wednesday.
- 2) Thursday was the day of Crucifixion. Jesus is crucified on the “day of preparation for the Passover” (John 19:14). This is seen as proof that the day before the Passover, or Thursday, is the day of the crucifixion.
- 3) Friday was the Passover, which under this view is considered a Sabbath. Therefore, the references to the Sabbath (cf. John 19:31) are referring to this day.

- 4) Support for this is seen in Matthew 28:1 which uses Sabbath in the plural in Greek. Thus Matthew 28:1 is read to say two Sabbaths had passed (Friday and Saturday).

Problems with the Thursday Crucifixion View:

- 1) If it were not for one verse, Matthew 12:40, the Thursday view would not be proposed.
- 2) The phrase “day of preparation” in John 19:14 is a term meaning the day before the weekly Sabbath in other passages (Matthew 27:62; Mark 15:42; Luke 23:54; John 19:31, 42) and in the writings of Josephus. In fact, Mark 15:42 speaks directly to the day of preparation as being the day before the Sabbath. It is better to understand John 19:14 as speaking of the day of preparation for the Sabbath in the Passover week.
- 3) There is no evidence to consider the word “Sabbath” to refer to the Passover just because no work was to be done.
- 4) One-third of all New Testament occurrences of the word “Sabbath” are in the plural. Sometimes it is used interchangeably in the same verse (cf. Matthew 12:5). This does not mean there were more than one Sabbath while the body was in the tomb.
- 5) This view does not solve the problem it intends to solve. Under a Thursday Crucifixion, Christ’s body would have been in the tomb three full nights and two full days and only a portion of the third day.

c. The Friday Crucifixion View

Jesus predicted He would die and be raised on the third day (Matthew 16:21; Mark 8:31; Luke 9:22). This fits with the chronology of events for a Friday Crucifixion:

- 1) The body of Jesus was laid in the tomb on Friday evening, Passover, which was also called the day of preparation since it was the day before the Sabbath. (Matthew 27:62; 28:1; Mark 15:42; Luke 23:54, 56; John 19:31, 42).
- 2) The women who went to the tomb returned home and rested on the Sabbath (Saturday, Luke 23:56).
- 3) Early on the first day of the week the women went to the tomb (Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:1-2; Luke 24:1; John 20:1), which was empty.
- 4) When Jesus appeared on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13), he was told by the two disciples that it was the third day since their Master was crucified (Luke 24:21).

The Friday Crucifixion does not however yield three full twenty-four hour days. However, no other view does either. The only way you can have three full days and nights is for Christ to have died at the same hour he rose. But He was crucified at 3:00 p.m. and rose at or before 6:00 a.m.

In fact, 1 Corinthians 15:4 (cf. Acts 10:40; Luke 18:33; Matthew 16:21) says Jesus rose “on the third day.” Clearly, if Jesus had rose on the third day, He could not have been buried for three entire days and three entire nights. This would require His resurrection to be on the fourth day.

The only way to understand Matthew 12:40 is to see “three days and three nights” as referring to either a whole day or part of a day. This phrase is a Hebrew figure of speech referring to any part of a whole. This Hebrewism is found in several Old Testament examples:

- 1) In Genesis 42:17-18 Joseph put his brothers in prison for three days and released them on the third day.
- 2) In 1 Kings 20:29, Israel and Syria camped opposite each other for seven days, and on the seventh day they began to battle each other.
- 3) In Esther 4:16, Esther asks the Jews to fast for three days and three nights and she would then go to the king. In 5:1 she goes to the king on the third day.
- 4) The Feast of Pentecost was originally called the “Feast of Weeks” because it fell on the forty-ninth day after the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Yet it was actually known as the fiftieth day — Pentecost.
- 5) Rabbi Eleazar ben Azariah (c. 100 A.D.), who was the tenth in the descent from Ezra, gives the Hebrew mind set: “A day and night are as a portion of time and the portion of time is as the whole of it.”

Why then were one full day and two portions of two days referred to in Matthew 12:40 as three days and three nights? Gleason Archer gives this explanation:

“The simple answer is that the only way “day” in the sense of dawn-to-dusk sunlight could be distinguished from the full twenty-four-hour cycle sense of “day” was to speak of the latter as “a night and a day.”

Finally, the death of Jesus on the day of Passover (Friday) fulfills the conditions of Jesus being our Passover lamb (1 Corinthians 5:7; cf. Leviticus 23:5-15).

Not only does Friday Crucifixion fit with the natural reading of the New Testament, it is also the common consensus of the Church Fathers and scholars through history and the most accepted view today.

41. Was Jesus in error when He said the mustard seed was the smallest of all seeds (Matthew 13:31-32)?

This is one of the times when the word “all” does not mean “all.” We can discern whether “all” means all in the world or all of a group by the context. The context of Matthew 13 suggests Jesus is speaking of all of a group.

The subset of all the seeds in the world are those seeds which a first century Jewish farmer would sow in his field. This is clear from the phrase “which a man took and sowed in his field.” In fact, the mustard seed was the smallest of all the seeds that would be sown in Palestine. The context clarifies the group about which Christ was speaking.

Also, some claim that mustard trees cannot grow big enough to house birds. However, some do grow as tall as ten feet, providing enough branch space for birds build a nest.

42. Why does Christ say Peter is the rock on which the church is built (Matthew 16:18) when Paul says the church is built on Christ, not Peter (1 Corinthians 3:11)?

While there are different ways to understand Matthew 16:18, the Roman Catholic view that the church is built upon Peter, who became the first pope, is defective for several reasons:

- a. Peter was married (Matthew 8:14) and popes do not marry. If the first pope could marry, then why later pronounce that popes and priests could not marry?
- b. Peter was not infallible in what he spoke regarding the Christian life. In fact, Galatians 2:14 would then show the foundation of the church being rebuked by Paul for his hypocrisy.
- c. 1 Corinthians 3:11 clearly declares that Christ is the foundation of the church and no other foundation can be laid.
- d. In the sense that the apostles were foundational to Christ’s church (Ephesians 2:20), Peter was not unique. All the apostles shared in this ministry. Even the “keys of the kingdom” given to Peter (Matthew 16:19) were also given to all the apostles (Matthew 18:18). Peter was called a “pillar” of the church, but along with James and John (Galatians 2:9). He held no more significant position than other apostles.
- e. In the church dispute at Jerusalem in Acts 15, James played the leading role, not Peter.

Other views of this passage include the rock being Christ Himself or being Peter’s testimony about Christ. Even if the rock does refer to Peter, he was only a rock in the apostolic role in the church, not the rock.

43. Who came to speak with Jesus, the mother of James and John (Matthew 20:20-23) or James and John (Mark 10:35-38)?

It is clear from Matthew 20:20 that both the mother and her sons came to Jesus. Mark's account only focuses on the sons but does not prohibit the mother's presence. Most likely, this request was made by the mother on behalf of her sons and reiterated by James and John. This resolution is supported by Matthew 20:22, where "they" respond, "we are able." It is clear from this that it was not only the Mother of Zebedee who was speaking with Jesus.

44. Did Jesus heal two blind men (Matthew 20:29-34) or just one (Mark 10:46-52; Luke 18:35-43)?

While Mark and Luke only record one blind man getting healed, they do not limit the number to one by saying that only one blind man was healed. Once again, the mathematical formula applies: whenever there are two, there is always one.

Mark speaks of only one man possibly because he was personally familiar with the blind beggar, since he mentions him by name (Bartimaeus). It is understandable then why he may only focus on one of the two men. This account is similar to the story of the two demoniacs in Matthew 8:28. In this event as well, Matthew is the only gospel that records both men.

45. Did Jesus heal the blind man as He came into Jericho (Luke 18:35) or as He was leaving Jericho (Matthew 20:29-34; Mark 10:46-52)?

Several solutions have been offered for this difficulty:

- a. Some have claimed the healing in Luke took place as Jesus left Jericho and that it was only His initial contact with the blind man when He was entering Jericho. They notice the blind man was continually begging to be healed (Luke 18:38-39) and may have followed Christ through the city. However, it was after the healing when Jesus entered and passed through Jericho (Luke 19:1).
- b. Others have suggested Luke is speaking of a different event than Matthew and Mark. Under this view, Luke records the healing of one blind man as Jesus enters Jericho and heals the other men as he leaves the city. This is further supported by noticing the crowd grows between His entering and leaving the city. When He enters, Jesus encounters a "multitude" (Luke 18:36) and when He leaves there is a "great multitude" (Matthew 20:29; Mark 10:46). The first healing resulted in the word spreading as Jesus passed through the city. This may be why there were more blind men meeting Him as He left the city.
- c. The most common solution is that Jesus was between the Old Testament city of Jericho and the new Jericho, with its large Herodian palace to the south of the old city. This would explain how Jesus could be leaving Jericho (The Old Testament city) in Matthew and Mark and at the same time entering Jericho (the new city) in Luke.

46. Were there two donkeys involved in the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem (Matthew 21:2) or only one (Mark 11:2; Luke 19:30)?

There were two donkeys. This does not mean that Mark and Luke are wrong by omitting the mother of the donkey, they simply do not give us that detail.

Matthew includes the mother of the donkey because he is noting the literal fulfillment of Zechariah 9:9, "Behold, your king is coming to you; He is just and endowed with salvation, humble, and mounted on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

Matthew does not say Jesus rode both donkeys, but that He sat on the garments which had been placed on the donkeys. Matthew does not say on which donkey Jesus sat. It is probable that Jesus sat on the colt that Luke and Mark focus upon.

The presence of the mother may have been a calming influence for the colt, particularly since the colt had never been ridden before (Mark 11:2) and would be passing through a noisy crowd.

47. Did Jesus curse the fig tree after he cleansed the temple (Matthew 21:12-22) or before he cleansed the temple (Mark 11:11-26)?

As we have found with the gospels, Matthew tends to arrange his material in a topical order more than Mark or Luke. In these passages we can see that Matthew summarizes the events without giving the detailed chronological order that Mark provides. The following sequence will help to understand the approach that each author uses.

- a. Both Mark and Matthew write that Christ made His way to the temple when He entered Jerusalem on Sunday (Matthew 21:12; Mark 11:11).
- b. Both agree that Jesus actually entered the temple on Sunday. Mark adds it was in the late afternoon.
- c. Mark does not mention Jesus making any proclamations against the evil in the temple on that Sunday afternoon.
- d. Mark 11:12 says Jesus went to the temple again the next day. It is on this second trip to Jerusalem that He cursed the fig tree on the way into the city and then cleansed the temple.

Mark gives the detail of the two visits to the temple and gives us the more clear time markers. Matthew, however, combines the two visits by Jesus to the temple into one event, including the cleansing.

Matthew may have combined the two visits into one visit in order to show the reason for Jesus' indignation with the people of Israel. He had cleansed the temple three years earlier (John 2:13-17) now it remained as corrupt as it was then. Israel did not listen to His first rebuke and continued to stand condemned before the Lord. This provides His motivation for the cursing of the fig tree.

48. Why did Jesus curse the fig tree for not having figs when it was not the season for figs (Mark 11:11-14)?

Dr. W. M. Christie noted many years ago, "Towards the end of March the leaves begin to appear, and in about a week the foliage coating is complete. Coincident with this, and sometimes even before, there appears quite a crop of small knobs, not the real figs, but a kind of early forerunner....When they grow to their own indefinite maturity they drop off." Because this evidence of a fruitful tree was not present, Jesus would be expected to know the tree would not produce figs.

The cursing of the fig tree makes the same point of condemnation upon the nation of Israel and its leaders as the cleansing of the temple. This is why they occur together. The nation looked like it was alive, but upon closer inspection, was found to be fruitless. Hosea 9:10 had earlier compared the fathers of Israel to a fig tree and Jesus used this same symbolism to point out their lack of faith.

49. Does Jesus want us to love ourselves before other people, or to love other people before ourselves (Matthew 22:39)?

This verse has been understood in a number of ways:

- a. In order to love other people we must first love ourselves. However, nowhere does the Bible command us or even suggest that we love ourselves. In fact, 2 Timothy 3:2 lists loving yourself as a negative character quality. In numerous other places in Scripture we are told to deny ourselves (Luke 9:23), to regard others as more important as ourselves (Philippians 2:3), etc. If God was concerned that we love ourselves in order that we can then love others, He did not communicate this need in any other place in the Bible. Indeed, He communicated otherwise.
- b. We ought to love others as ourselves, that is in an unselfish way. While it is true that selfishness is not a positive characteristic and our love for ourselves should not be selfish, this is an awkward reading of this verse. What is the difference between loving yourself selfishly and loving yourself unselfishly? The difference is at least muddled.
- c. We ought to love others as ourselves, that is in a proper way. This is a little more legitimate perspective since there are supporting verses for a proper care for ourselves. Ephesians 5:29 expands on the commandment to love others as we love ourselves in applying the command to the husband in regard to his wife. Romans 12:3 urges us to think of ourselves in a proper way, soberly, not in an improper way, with arrogance. Nevertheless, Jesus command in Matthew 22:39 is to love others, not specifically to think of ourselves properly.
- d. We should love others as much as we love ourselves. We ought to measure our love for others by how we actually do love ourselves, without addressing whether we love ourselves correctly or not. Our love for ourselves is a given, not a concern. There is therefore a built in restraint on selfishness, since we are to love others to the same extent. The problem of man is not that he cares for himself too little, but that he cares for himself too much.

50. Why does Jesus call the scribes and Pharisees “You fools and blind men!” (Matthew 23:17) when He had earlier said “Whoever shall say, ‘You fool’ shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell” (Matthew 5:22)?

There is a difference of meaning between these two designations of “fool.” The very same word can mean different things according to the context.

In Matthew 5 the context is a person who is angry with his brother. This hatred did not apply to Jesus. The use of the word “fool” in Matthew 5:22 comes from the heart of hate, the use of the word “fool” in Matthew 23:17 comes from the heart of love.

Also, to be exact, Jesus only commanded that a “brother” not be called a fool, not an unbeliever. In fact, Psalm 14:1 says, “A fool has said in his heart, ‘there is no God.’” To call someone a fool is to essentially call them an unbeliever. The scribes and Pharisees who were arguing with Jesus were unbelievers. The people whom Paul addressed as fools in Galatians 3:1 were likewise unbelievers.

To call an unbeliever a “fool” is an accurate description. However, the title may not meet the need of the moment or provide grace for the hearer (Ephesians 4:29). Jesus did not call every unbeliever a fool, only those who were the most antagonistic toward His ministry and who were corrupting others in the process. And most important, His words reflected a loving heart, not hateful anger.

51. In Matthew 23:35, Zechariah the son of Berechiah is described as having been murdered between the temple and the altar. However, the person who was murdered in this way was Zechariah the son of Jehoiada in 2 Chronicles 24:20-22. Was Jesus mistaken?

The name “Zechariah” was a common name used to refer to many people, twenty-seven in the Old Testament alone. The suggestions that have been proposed as to who Zechariah the son of Berechiah include:

- a. Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist. However, there is no evidence John’s father was martyred.
- b. Zechariah the son of Baris or Baruch or Bariscaeus (manuscripts vary). This person according to Josephus was killed in the temple. Yet not only does the ancestry differ but there is no evidence that this person was a prophet or a martyr.
- c. A Zechariah of whom we have no knowledge. This is possible but also unlikely.
- d. A better suggestion is that this does refer to Zechariah the son of Jehoiada who died around 800 B.C. The words “the son of” can mean descendant, not only the actual father. In fact, Zechariah the minor prophet is called the son of Berechiah the son of Iddo in Zechariah 1:1 and is called the son of Iddo in Ezra 6:14.

Under this solution, Jehoiada would be Zechariah's grandfather in 2 Chronicles 24:20-22 and Jesus would be accurate. Adding to the strength of this view is to remember that 2 Chronicles was often placed at the end of the Hebrew Old Testament. Thus Jesus would be saying the guilt of everyone's blood would be upon the scribes and Pharisees, from the beginning of the Old Testament, to the end of the Old Testament.

- e. Another equally possible solution is to understand Zechariah the son of Berechiah as exactly the person so named, the minor prophet of the book of Zechariah. This view makes sense in that Abel would be chronologically the first martyr and Zechariah the son of Berechiah would be the last prophet to be martyred, after 480 B.C.

The one problem with this view is that there is no evidence that Zechariah the son of Berechiah was martyred. However, it should not be surprising if this Zechariah were to perish in the temple like Zechariah the son of Jehoiada.

52. Was Jesus wrong to say that the events of the second coming would occur during the lifetime of his hearers (Matthew 24:34)?

Since the events of Matthew 24 did not occur during the lifetime of Christ's hearers, it is reasonable to understand His teaching as referring to a more distant time-frame.

These events can be projected to a future day by reconsidering the meaning of "this generation." There are two possibilities:

- a. The word "generation" in Greek could mean "race." This could refer to the Jewish race which would not pass away until all is fulfilled. This harmonizes with Romans 11 which teaches the future restoration of Israel to God's promised blessings. Indeed, many promises to Israel are yet to be fulfilled, including the eternal inheritance of the land of Palestine (Genesis 12, 14, 15, 17) and the Davidic kingdom (2 Samuel 7).
- b. The word "generation" could also refer to the people born during a certain time span. This is a common reading and in this case, "generation" would refer to the people who will be alive at the time these things begin — the abomination of desolation (24:15), the great tribulation (24:21), the sign of the Son of Man in heaven (24:30), etc.

Since the tribulation period will be seven years long (Daniel 9:27; cf. Revelation 11:2), then Jesus would be saying that the generation alive at the beginning of the period will be alive at the end of it also.

With either possibility, there is no reason to assert that Jesus was mistaken in saying the world would end within the lifetime of His contemporaries and no error can be attributed to Him.

53. Was heaven prepared for us from the foundation of the world (Matthew 25:34) or did Jesus go to prepare it when He died (John 14:2-3)?

In Matthew, Jesus speaks of the general preparation of heaven, in that it was created from the foundation of the world. Jesus' words in John 14 refer to the specific adaptation of heaven to prepare it for each particular soul.

Heaven is the reward of each believer, but each believer will have individual rewards based upon his particular service of Christ (1 Corinthians 3:11-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10). Heaven therefore will be prepared by Christ for our particular arrival.

54. How can the Father be greater than Jesus if Jesus is fully God (John 14:28)?

The Bible is very clear that Jesus is God (Isaiah 9:6; Matthew 28:19; John 1:1; 8:58; 10:30; 14:9; 17:5; 20:28; Romans 9:5; Colossians 2:9; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 1:8; 1 John 5:20; Revelation 1:8, cf. Isaiah 41:4). While Jesus was divine, the Father is nevertheless greater than the Son. This distinction is not one of nature, but one of office.

Just as an earthly father possesses the same nature as his earthly son but holds a higher position, so our Heavenly Father holds a higher position than God the Son. While the character and essence of the Trinity is one, the function and position of each Person of the Trinity differs. Therefore, in one sense they are equal and in the other the Father is greater.

55. Why did Jesus say "all things I have heard from My Father I have made known to you" (John 15:15) when He had "many more things to say to you but you cannot bear them now" (John 16:12)?

The most natural way to reconcile these statements is to consider the Father as only revealing to the Son some of the things which the Son tells the disciples. Then Jesus would be accurate in saying He told the disciples all the the Father made know to Him but still has many more things to say.

The problem with this distinction is the words of Jesus in John 14:10, "The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works."

Some believe John 15:15 is proleptic, or a figure of speech which anticipates what will occur in the future and considers it as present. What is anticipated is the "many things" of 16:12 which then speaks of what the Holy Spirit would later reveal to them (16:13).

Others understand 16:12 as clarifying 15:15. Thus 15:15 would be in effect saying "all things I have heard at present, I have made know to you," qualifying the time of the Father's revelation. Jesus then would be faithfully communicating what the Father wanted the disciples to know and when He wanted them to know it.

56. Did Jesus institute the Lord's Supper on the day of Passover (Matthew 26:17; Mark 14:12; Luke 22:1) or on the day before the Passover (John 13:1, 18:28, 19:14)?

There are two positions on the issue of which day was the Lord's Supper. Some believe Jesus ate the Passover lamb on the day before the Jews because:

- a. He would offer up himself the next day (Good Friday) as the Passover Lamb, fulfilling the OT type on the very day the Passover was being eaten (cf. 1 Corinthians 5:7).
- b. John 19:14, after the Lord's Supper, says it was the day before the day of preparation for the Passover.
- c. John 18:28, after the Lord's Supper, affirms that the Jews did not want to be defiled on the day Jesus was crucified, so that they might eat the Passover.

A stronger view is that Jesus ate the Passover lamb and instituted the Lord's Supper on the same day it was observed by the Jews. This view is supported by the following:

- a. It was the day required by the Old Testament Law, which Jesus came to fulfill (Matthew 5:17-18).
- b. It is consistent with the meaning of Mark 14:12.
- c. John 19:14 is the day of preparation for the Passover week. The term "day of preparation" is used to refer to the day before the Sabbath, or Friday.

The chronology of the last week of Jesus' life is complicated because two systems of time were in use, Roman time which begins a new day at midnight, and Jewish time which begins a new day at sunset. The Lord's Supper was instituted by Jesus on Thursday evening, the day of Passover under Jewish time, and the crucifixion was on Friday, still the day of Passover under Jewish time.

57. When Peter denied Christ, did the rooster crow once (Matthew 26:34; John 13:38) or twice (Mark 14:30; cf. Mark 14:72).

This problem is similar to other alleged discrepancies involving one or two things in the Gospels. The mathematical formula remains, whenever you have two, you always have one. Matthew and John do not say the rooster only crowed one time. Mark was simply more specific in explaining exactly how many times the rooster crowed.

Another more remote possibility is that Mark's account of two crows by the rooster is due to an early copyist error. This would explain why a few important manuscripts mention only one crowing in Mark. However, this is unlikely because the weight of the textual evidence is on the side of including the word "two" in Mark 14:30 and 14:72.

The rule of thumb is that copyists typically erred in making their copy more like parallel passages, not different from parallel passages. Therefore, it is doubtful that a copyist would have been motivated to include the word “two” if it weren’t there in the first place. Rather, it is more likely that a copyist dropped the word “two” in order to make Mark correspond to Matthew and John.

58. Did Judas die by hanging (Matthew 27:5) or by falling onto rocks (Acts 1:18)?

These two accounts can be harmonized. Judas hung himself as Matthew describes. The Book of Acts adds more information about this hanging. Judas must have hung himself from a tree on the edge of a cliff.

This would be reasonable since it would allow him to tie the rope to the tree and jump off the cliff to secure the noose. If the branch that he hung himself from was dead or dry, it may well have split and sent the corpse onto the rocks below. There are many trees which fit this description along the canyon which tradition assigns the death of Judas.

It is certainly possible that each author only included a part of the details of the death of Judas. Taken together, Matthew and Acts give us a fuller picture of how Judas committed suicide.

59. Why are all the accounts of the inscription on the cross different?

Matthew: “This is Jesus the king of the Jews” (27:37)

Mark: “The king of the Jews” (15:26)

Luke: “This is the king of the Jews” (23:38)

John: “Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews” (19:19)

While the inscriptions are recorded differently, all agree on the essential phrase “the king of the Jews.” The differences are due to two reasons:

- a. The inscription was written in at least three different languages, Hebrew, Latin and Greek (John 19:20). Some of the differences may be due to the different languages.
- b. It is possible that each Gospel only gives part of the complete statement.

The complete statement could be summarized as follows:

Matthew: “This is Jesus [of Nazareth] the king of the Jews”

Mark: “[This is Jesus of Nazareth] the king of the Jews”

Luke: “This is [Jesus of Nazareth] the king of the Jews”

John: “[This is] Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews”

Therefore, each Gospel only gives part of the entire statement, “This is Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews.” It is possible that this statement even varied between the three languages. The accounts then are not contradictory but complementary.

60. Did both robbers revile Christ (Matthew 27:44) or did only one of the robbers do so (Luke 23:39)?

This difficulty is resolved in understanding that both reviled Christ initially and one of the two repented (Luke 23:40-42). Perhaps the one was so impressed with the Jesus' plea for forgiveness (Luke 23:34) that he believed in Christ.

61. What did the centurion really say about Christ on the cross and why are the accounts different (Matthew 27:54; Mark 15:39; Luke 23:47)?

Matthew: "Truly this was the Son of God" (27:54)

Mark: "Truly this man was the Son of God" (15:39)

Luke: "Certainly this man was innocent" (23:47)

The centurion may have said both statements and Luke may have noted one statement while Matthew and Mark noted another. Also, Luke may have been paraphrasing or drawing an implication from what Jesus actually said.

The following guidelines should help us understand differences in quotations:

- a. We do not claim to have the exact words of the speakers in every case, only an accurate rendering of what was actually said.
- b. The speakers spoke in Aramaic and the New Testament was written in Greek. Therefore, the words we have in the Greek text are already a translation of what was spoken.
- c. The New Testament writers, like writers of today, may quote, paraphrase or even summarize what a person said. While the essence of what was said is faithfully reproduced in the original text, the exact words may or may not be. While we may not have the exact words, we do have the same meaning.
- d. When sentences are totally different, we may assume that both statements were said and each author selected which statement to place in the text. This also is common literary practice today.
- e. Only when there are two contradictory, mutually exclusive statements can we conclude there is an error. Such is not found in the Scripture.

62. Was Jesus crucified on the third hour (Mark 15:25) or after the sixth hour since John says it was about the sixth hour at the end of Jesus' trial (John 19:14)?

Both writers are correct. Mark is using Jewish time while John follows Roman time (e.g. John 1:39 means 10 a.m., not 4 a.m.). According to Romans time the day ran from midnight to midnight. In contrast, Jewish time ran from sunset to sunset. Under Jewish time, a day began at 6 a.m., not at 12:00 a.m.

With this in mind, when Mark asserts that the crucifixion began at the third hour, we would understand this to be at 9 a.m. This would appropriately place John's description of the end of the trial around three hours before the crucifixion.

63. Why does Matthew refer to one angel at the tomb (Matthew 28:5) when John says there were two (John 20:12)?

As we have come to understand in other cases like this one, Matthew can accurately speak of one angel even while two were present. Matthew does not indicate there was only one angel, and whenever you have two angels, you always have one also.

Matthew probably focuses on the one angel who spoke to the women at the tomb, while John speak of how many were seen.

64. Was Mary at the tomb before sunrise, while it was still dark (John 20:1) or after the sunrise, as Mark 16:2 indicates?

There are two possible solutions to this difficulty:

- a. The phrase “when the sun had risen” means the early dawn (Mark 16:2; cf. Psalm 104:22), and yet it was basically still dark (John 20:1).
- b. Mary came to the tomb the first time while it was still dark (John 20:1) and later returned with other women (Mark 16:1).

The reasons which support the second view are as follows:

- a. Only Mary is mentioned in John, while the other women are mentioned in Mark.
- b. Luke 24:1 confirms Mark’s account that the “women” (not just Mary) came very early in the morning.
- c. Matthew 28:1 confirms Mark by saying it was after the Sabbath that “Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to the tomb.”
- d. Only John 20:1 mentions Mary being there alone “while it was still dark.”

65. Mark 16:8 says the women returned from the empty tomb and “said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.” Matthew 28:8 however tells that they ran to tell the disciples. Which is correct?

Three possible explanations exist for this problem:

- a. As Mark reports, the women were afraid and did not say anything. However, later they may have decided to tell the disciples.
- b. The women left the tomb in two groups at slightly different times, with Mark referring to one group and Matthew referring to the other.
- c. Probably the best explanation is to observe that Matthew does not actually say the women told the disciples, but that they ran to tell the disciples with the intention of telling them. It is probable that as they arrived they were afraid to say anything to the disciples.

66. If the resurrection was physical, how could Jesus walk through a closed door (John 20:19)?

The resurrection body of Jesus was physical and material, having “flesh and bones” (Luke 24:39), able to eat physical food (Luke 24:43) and had scars from the crucifixion (John 20:27). That Jesus was able to pass through a closed door does not mean He dematerialized to do it. The following should make this difficulty more understandable:

- a. The Bible does not say how Jesus got into the room. He may not have actually passed through a closed door.
- b. Even before Christ’s resurrection He performed miracles that transcended natural laws. Walking on water did not mean Christ was not material before the resurrection. Nor does walking on water mean that Peter dematerialized for a moment.
- c. It may be possible for our supernatural resurrection body to do supernatural things. What our resurrection body will be like has not be fully revealed.

The understanding of the physical resurrection of Christ is fundamental to our faith.

67. Why did Jesus tell the disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-8) when He imparted the Holy Spirit to them in John 20:22?

Many Greek scholars believe the word “receive” in the imperative should be translated as future or “you will receive.” This would be the initial announcement of the reception of the Holy Spirit, and Pentecost would be the historic fulfillment. This appears to be a likely meeting.

Even if the disciples actually received the Holy Spirit, this should not be understood as the equivalent of the baptism of the Holy Spirit which came on Pentecost in Acts 2. It is possible that John 20:22 is the temporal reception of the Spirit, like other times in the Old Testament when the Holy Spirit came upon individuals.

68. Does John 20:23 give men the power to forgive sins, such as a Roman Catholic priest?

Only the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins (Luke 5:20-24). We may forgive someone who has sinned against us, but we cannot forgive someone who has sinned against another. Since all sin is ultimately against God, we do not have the authority to forgive sin — only God does.

John 20:23 contains an unusual Greek sentence structure. In each of the two clauses the first verb is in the aorist tense and the second verb is in the perfect tense. The perfect tense denotes an action in the past which has results that continue to the present. Therefore, the forgiveness by God occurred in the past — before we expressed any forgiveness.

John 20:23 could be translated more literally, “Those whose sins you forgive have already been forgiven; those whose sins you do not forgive have not been forgiven.”

God does not forgive men’s sins because we decide to do so and God does not withhold forgiveness because we will not grant it. We announce forgiveness, but do not cause it. We discern a person’s state of forgiveness, but we do not determine it.

When we proclaim the gospel we communicate the means to forgiveness and if they believe in Christ we can legitimately tell them that by believing in Christ their sins are forgiven. The authority and responsibility for this has been given to all disciples.

69. Does Mark 16:9-20 belong in the Bible? Does the question concerning this text undermine our confidence in the Biblical text?

While this text does appear in most of the handwritten manuscripts that have been discovered, it does not appear in the best, most reliable manuscripts. While some believe Mark 16:9-20 is authentic because of the majority of manuscripts, we should weigh (not simply add) the evidence together. Truth is not determined by a majority vote, but on the most qualified witnesses.

The following are good reasons for questioning the authenticity of Mark 16:9-20:

- a. This passage is not found in many of the oldest and most reliable manuscripts.
- b. This passage is not found in many early translations, such as Old Latin, Syriac, Armenian and Ethiopic.
- c. Many early church fathers indicate no knowledge of these verses, including Clement, Origen and Eusebius.
- d. Jerome, who translated the Bible into Latin (the Vulgate), included these verses but admitted that almost all Greek copies known to him did not contain these verses.
- e. Many manuscripts that do contain this section place a mark by it indicating it is a spurious addition to the text.
- f. There is another, shorter ending to Mark that is found in some manuscripts.
- g. The style and vocabulary have been seen as different from the rest of Mark by some, although this is very weak evidence.

While there is debate about whether this text belongs in Mark, the issue does not affect any biblical truth. All of what it includes is referenced in other places in the Bible. This is even true about supernatural protection from poisonous snakes (Acts 28:3-5).

70. Does Mark 16:16 teach you must be baptized in order to be saved?

No, for the following reasons:

- a. Salvation is imparted to us by the grace of God, through our faith. No act on our part secures salvation, which is why Paul can say salvation is “not as a result of works that no man should boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9).
- b. No specific act is necessary to accompany the gift of salvation. If a specific act such as baptism were required, then the plethora of verses that promise salvation upon belief would be misleading and incomplete at the least (John 3:16; John 6:47, Titus 3:5, etc.).
- c. Since Mark 16 is a questionable passage textually, it should not form the foundation for any doctrine.
- d. Mark 16:16 in fact does not teach that baptism is necessary for salvation. The distinctive criterion in Mark 16:16 for salvation is belief, not baptism. To help understand this point, listed below are the four options regarding belief and baptism, with only three of these options being addressed by Mark:
 - 1) You can disbelieve in Christ and not be baptized. This person is not saved and Mark 16:16 describes this person as condemned.
 - 2) You can disbelieve in Christ and be baptized. This person is also not saved and Mark 16:16 also describes this person as condemned.
 - 3) You can believe in Christ and be baptized. This person is saved and Mark 16:16 agrees with this.
 - 4) You can believe in Christ and not be baptized. This person is also saved. Mark 16:16 does not speak to this person’s condition.

Therefore, not only does the Scripture speak clearly that salvation does not come through works, such as baptism, but Mark is in harmony with this doctrine.

F. Difficulties in the New Testament Book of Acts

1. **Were the apostles wrong to cast lots to select Matthias as the twelfth apostle, replacing Judas, when the Paul was clearly God's choice (Acts 1:20-26)?**

There is no reason to conclude that the apostles acted incorrectly in choosing Matthias. The Scripture in fact implies otherwise:

- a. The method of selection of Matthias was not haphazard:
 - 1) They first carefully selected two men.
 - 2) The two men possessed equal qualifications in which casting lots would be a reasonable way of indicating God's choice.
 - 3) There was no moral issue here but simply a choice between equal men.
 - 4) The apostles had no hesitation about the validity of the selection.
 - 5) The lot was cast following much prayer.
- b. Luke, Paul's friend and companion, spent much of Acts on Paul's ministry and yet seemed to believe that Matthias was God's replacement for Judas:
 - 1) He stated clearly Matthias was "numbered with the eleven" (Acts 1:26).
 - 2) He recognized "the twelve" including Matthias as an official group apart from Paul (Acts 2:14, 6:2, 15:2).
 - 3) He never expressed any question in Acts of Matthias' selection.
- c. Paul, although most certainly in no way inferior to any of the apostles apparently did not believe that he was God's replacement for Judas:
 - 1) He recognized "the twelve" as a group separate from himself (1 Corinthians 15:5).
 - 2) He never stated or implied that he was one of "the twelve."
 - 3) He did not meet the requirements for replacement from Acts 1:22, since he was not with Jesus from the beginning of His ministry.
- d. In Matthew 19:28, Jesus speaks of the twelve thrones for the twelve apostles to judge over the twelve tribes of Israel. This is definitely Jewish in orientation while Paul was sent to the Gentiles as he himself affirms (Galatians 2:9, Romans 11:13).
- e. To consider Matthias as not one of the twelve because we do not hear of him again would also apply to most of the other apostles as well. The New Testament's silence concerning Matthais after Acts one should not be surprising in light of its silence regarding most of the other apostles.

2. Was Peter mistaken to quote Joel 2:28-32 since no miraculous events occurred in Acts 2:16-21?

In quoting Joel 2:28-32, Peter was not saying the passage was entirely fulfilled at Pentecost. Certainly Peter was able to see that wonders in the sky were yet to be fulfilled!

Peter only referenced Joel as a partial, initial fulfillment of the prophecy. The coming of the Holy Spirit (Joel 2:28-29) was fulfilled at Pentecost but the Day of the Lord (Joel 2:30-32) is still awaiting the second coming of Christ for fulfillment.

It is not uncommon for a prophecy to contain both a near-term and long-term fulfillment. For example, Isaiah 9:6-7 contains a prophecy concerning the first coming of Christ (9:6) and the second coming of Christ (9:7).

It is important to note that Peter considered Pentecost to be the literal fulfillment. We can look to the remainder of the prophecy to be literally fulfilled as well.

3. Why isn't David in heaven (Acts 2:34)?

Peter is addressing the topic of the resurrection of Christ in Acts 2:25-35. In order to support the resurrection of Christ, Peter quotes David in Psalm 110:1.

David is contrasted by Peter to his prophecy. David was not bodily resurrected but Christ was bodily resurrected. The soul of David went to heaven, just like every other believer but his body was still in the grave (Acts 2:29). Thus Peter is not speaking of David's soul, but his body.

4. Does Acts 2:38 teach that you must be baptized in order to be saved?

No, for the following reasons:

- a. Salvation is imparted to us by the grace of God, through our faith. No act on our part secures salvation, which is why Paul can say salvation is "not as a result of works that no man should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).
- b. No specific act is necessary to accompany the gift of salvation. If a specific act such as baptism were required, then the plethora of verses that promise salvation upon belief would be misleading and incomplete at the least (John 3:16; John 6:47, Titus 3:5, etc, etc).
- c. Luke earlier quotes Jesus as promising forgiveness on the basis of faith alone (Luke 24:47).
- d. Luke later quotes Paul as promising forgiveness on the basis of faith alone (Acts 13:38 and 26:18).
- e. Peter, the same speaker, is later quoted by Luke as promising forgiveness on the basis of faith alone (Acts 10:43).

- f. Acts 10:44-48 clearly describes Gentiles who have received the Holy Spirit, and thus were saved, before they were baptized. Therefore, baptism is not necessarily conditional for salvation.
- g. Paul separates baptism from the Gospel in 1 Corinthians 1:17. If baptism is necessary for salvation, then we should expect Paul to be much more involved in baptism than he was. Paul considered baptism as part of the growth process which others serve, not the planting process that he served (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:6).
- h. Acts 2:38 can be understood in either of two ways which blends it with the rest of Scripture:
 - 1) The preposition “for” (eis in Greek) can be mean “with a view to” or “on account of” or “on the basis of” or even “because of.” The word is used this way in Matthew 3:11; 12:14; and Mark 1:4. With this understanding of the word “for,” Acts 2:38 could be understood to teach that baptism was being called for by Peter because they had been forgiven of sin, not in order to achieve the forgiveness of sin. However, this is not the common usage of this preposition and its normal meaning is “for.”
 - 2) A better interpretation is to observe that the Greek words “repent” and “your” are plural while the imperative “be baptized” is singular, setting it off from the rest of the verse. Therefore the verb repent is connected to the forgiveness of your sins. The verse would then read something like, “Y’all repent for the forgiveness of all y’all’s sins and y’all will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, and let each individual person be baptized.”

5. Why did the early church practice communism by holding everything in common (Acts 2:44-45)?

First, the early church did not practice communism and second, even if Acts 2:44-45 referred communism, it is not prescriptive but descriptive. In other words, it does not mandate as normative the practice but only describes what the early believers were doing.

The differences between the practices of the early church and communism are important:

- a. The communal arrangement was voluntary, not mandatory (cf. Acts 4:32-35; 5:4). There is no indication of compulsion and the arrangement was most likely a matter of convenience in light of the dynamic situation they were encountering.
- b. This early system of holding all things in common was a temporary one. Once the church grew and dispersed according to the plan of God, this practice diminished.

- c. The goods were shared with all as anyone had need. Sharing with those in need implies ownership. Communism as an economic model involves ownership by all. But if all are owners, then sharing with those in need is impossible, since they too would be owners. Communism, therefore, would be an inappropriate term to use for the early church.
- d. The goods were not distributed on an even basis, unlike pure communism. The goods were distributed to those in need and as the need arose.
- e. The implication of the text is that not everything was sold all at once, but some things were sold over a period of time. This is how later under the same system Ananias and Sapphira are seen selling property (Acts 5:1). Note that their sin was not failing to sell all their property but lying in how they represented the sale of their property.

The reason the early church adopted this practice was probably due to their expectation of the imminent return of Christ. This may explain why the practice did not continue.

6. Was Peter promising the return of Christ and the kingdom to Israel if they repented in Acts 3:19-21?

The focal issue here is whether Peter was offering God's plan of salvation to his listeners on an individual basis or whether he is also offering the coming Messiah to the nation of Israel with the millennium as well.

At first glance, we would tend to presuppose this verse is only regarding individual salvation. After all, it was spoken during the Church age and after the time when the nation of Israel had already rejected the Messiah and the kingdom. If there was a offer of the kingdom made by Peter it was obviously going to be rejected since Jesus had said the kingdom would not coming until the Gospel had been preach to all the nations (Matthew 24:14). How could this offer then be genuine?

However, there are a number of reasons to believe this to be an actual offer of restoration and the return of Christ:

- a. God knew and indeed predicted that the offer of the kingdom by Christ would be rejected. This did not diminish the offer to Israel still made a willful choice to reject Christ. Peter's offer in Acts 3:19-21 is no less legitimate, even though it too will be willfully rejected.
- b. Acts is a transitional book. In Acts we see the shift from God's work through Israel to God's work among the Gentiles. It should not take us by surprise the God would graciously give Israel another opportunity and that their rejection would again confirm their unbelief.
- c. The word used for "restoration" (apokatastasis) is related to word "restore" (apokatastasis) in Acts 1:6 which refers to the kingdom restoration.

- d. Acts 3:20 speaks of sending Jesus the Messiah. This surely must refer to the second coming and the millennium.
- e. According to Acts 3:24, the Old Testament foretold of these days. The prophets did not know of the church (Ephesians 3:1-6), only of the millennium.
- f. The concept of restoration parallels regeneration when it is used of the kingdom in other verses (Isaiah 65:17; 66:22; Matthew 19:28; Romans 8:20-22). The restoration is of “all things” which is best understood to be the fulfillment of all God’s promises to Israel.

Acts 3:19 speaks of an initial result of repentance and an ultimate result of repentance. The initial result of repentance was the forgiveness of sins, “your sins may be wiped away.” The ultimate result would be the coming of the kingdom, “times of refreshing...” which would occur if the nation as a whole would repent.

7. Did Luke make a mistake concerning Theudas and Judas (Acts 5:36-37) since Josephus records the revolt of Theudas and Judas occurring in 44 A.D. or several years after Gamaliel spoke the words in Acts 5?

Luke is speaking of a different Theudas and Judas than Josephus, which is evident from the following reasons:

- a. There was a futile revolt led by a rebel of the name of Theudas in 6 A.D.
- b. There was a time of unrest in 7 A.D. during which a man named Judas founded a terrorist organization from which the Zealots were recruited.
- c. The Theudas and Judas that Josephus mentions led their revolt much later than Luke records.
- d. In the revolt of 44 A.D., Judas preceded Theudas, in contrast to Luke’s account.
- e. The uprising in 44 A.D. was a much more significant revolt than what Gamaliel describes.

8. Why does Stephen in Acts 7:14-15 say 75 people went into Egypt with Jacob? Exodus 1:5 and Genesis 46:27 contradicts this number by saying there were only 70 people.

There have been several explanations for this difficulty:

- a. Some have claimed Acts 7:14 gives the correct number since the Greek translation of the Old Testament (Septuagint) along with a Hebrew manuscript from the Dead Sea Scrolls give the number also as 75 in both Exodus 1:5 and Genesis 46:27.

- b. Some say that Luke accurately recorded the words of Stephen but that Stephen was mistaken. Thus Acts remains an inerrant record. The problem with the view is that Luke give the impression that the words of Stephen are correct and Luke says Stephen was “full of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 7:55).
- c. Perhaps the best explanation is to understand the words of Stephen as citing the Septuagint translation rather than the Hebrew text. It was very common for the New Testament writers to quote from the Septuagint and this would explain the discrepancy.

The reason the Septuagint gives the number as 75 instead of 70 is because there was a difference in the way the totals were calculated.

This difference of five people is the result of the Hebrew text counting Jacob and his wife (whichever wife she was) and not counting the seven additional descendants of Jacob’s son Joseph. This difference can be seen in the following chart:

	HEBREW TEXT	SEPTUAGINT
Jacob and his wife	2	Not counted
Jacob’s sons	12	12
Jacob’s grandsons and great grandsons	54	54
Jacob’s grandsons and Joseph’s sons Ephraim and Manasseh	2	2
Joseph’s additional descendants in Egypt	Not counted	7
TOTAL	70	75

Genesis 46:26-27 in the Septuagint translation tells us that Joseph had nine descendants instead of only two.

This is probably because Ephraim and Manasseh had seven sons between them after Jacob migrated to Egypt in 1876 A.D. and before he died after spending 17 years in Egypt. The Greek translators must have taken the liberty to add this information to their translation based on the historical data.

It should not concern us the Stephen would quote from a questionable translation anymore than it should concern us that Paul would quote from a pagan source (Titus 1:12). The Bible is inerrant in all that it affirms, even if the source from which the information is found is not completely reliable. We can compare this to God using flawed men to reveal flawless truth.

In summary, either total (70 or 75) is correct, depending upon who is being counted.

9. Does Acts 15:20 and 15:29 teach that it is a sin to receive a blood transfusion?

No. Blood transfusions were not addressed in Acts 15 because they did not exist at the time. Acts 15 is referring the eating of blood and is rooted in the prohibitions of Genesis 9:3-4 and Leviticus 17:10-12.

The focus of this prohibition of eating blood in Leviticus 17:10-12 because “the life of the flesh is in the blood.” In other words, eating flesh that still had blood in it was prohibited. This has nothing to do with transfusions.

10. Is it morally wrong to participate in things sacrificed to idols, to eat blood, to eat strangled animals, and to practice fornication (Acts 15:29)?

Maybe, maybe, maybe and yes. This prohibition in Acts was not given as law for the Christians to live by since the New Testament clearly teaches we are not under the Law (Romans 6:14, 7:1-6, Galatians 4:8-31). Only fornication is found in the New Testament to be morally wrong across the board.

Eating things sacrificed to idols, blood and strangled animals were prohibited for the sake of offending the Jewish Christians in Acts 15. The Gentile Christians were to limit their freedoms in respect for their Jewish brothers. Thus it was, in that setting, wrong for them give offense in these things (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:32).

11. Why was Paul hypocritical by forcing Timothy to be circumcised (Acts 16:1-3) when he himself spoke so strongly against circumcision (Galatians 5:2)?

Even if Paul’s action in Acts 16:1-3 was wrong, the Bible would still be without error in all it teaches. Paul, like the rest of us, was certainly capable of error and it should not surprise us when we find Biblical characters in failure.

However, Paul was not necessarily hypocritical because the context of his statement in Galatians 5:2 is the content of the Gospel, not the means to communicate the Gospel. Paul opposed those who made circumcision necessary for salvation. He did not oppose it as helpful for evangelism. This is not hypocritical but is practical.

12. Why did the Holy Spirit forbid Paul to preach in Asia (Acts 16:6) when Jesus said to go into all the world?

Paul was only forbidden temporarily. God was redirecting Paul to a more strategic route for taking the Gospel through Europe first (Acts 16:9). Paul’s converts eventually took the Gospel into Asia (1 Thessalonians 1:7) and he himself preached there as well (Acts 19-20; 1 Corinthians 16:19).

13. Why did Paul lie in saying he did not know who the high priest was (Acts 23:5) when he himself was formerly a member of the Jewish Council (Acts 26:10) and worked closely with the high priest before his conversion (Acts 9:1-3)?

There are several views on this statement by Paul:

- a. Some believe Paul lied to get himself out of a bad situation. While the Bible does record sin committed by apostles (Galatians 2:11-13), there may be better explanations for Paul's words.
- b. Some believe Paul had poor eyesight and was unable to distinguish the identity of the high priest. This is unlikely since Acts 23:1 says he looked intently at the council.
- c. A better explanation is that Paul truly did not know the high priest personally, for well over twenty years had passed since he was involved with this group. In addition, the high priesthood changed hands fairly often. Plus, the high priest would not in this setting have been wearing priestly garments.
- d. Possibly the best explanation is that Paul was making an ironic, sarcastic statement in protest for his treatment. His words would then mean something like, "This is the high priest of God? I would never have known this by his unlawful command to strike me!"

G. Difficulties in the New Testament Epistles

1. Does Romans 1:19-20 teach that those who have never heard of Christ can be saved?

Romans 1:19-20 does not teach that God reveals Himself to mankind in creation for the purpose of saving them, but rather for the purpose of condemnation. They are without excuse and no one can say they did not know about God. We can clearly see by creation that there is a God and if we know there is a God, we are obligated to seek Him.

In addition, Romans 2:14-15 teaches that all men know they are sinful because God has created them with a conscience which tells them they need a Savior (Romans 3:19). No one can honestly say they are without sin (1 John 1:8).

The Bible clearly teaches that Jesus is the only way to the Father (John 14:6), that there is no other name by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12) and that hearing the word of Christ as spoken by His messengers is essential to salvation (Romans 10:13-17).

2. Is it fair to judge all people because Adam sinned, even if they themselves have committed no sin (Romans 5:14)?

Infants and the severely mentally retarded are two groups of people who do not appear to deliberately disobey God's dictates.

In addition to the personal sins which men commit, we are also guilty on the basis of original or inherited sin (Ephesians 2:3) and on the basis of imputed sin or the sin of Adam (Romans 5:12-21). We commit personal sins because we are born sinful, with original sin. We are also considered guilty because Adam's sin has been credited to our account.

Therefore, all are rendered guilty regardless of whether they commit personal sins or not. The question regarding infants and the mentally retarded is not are they guilty but are they redeemed?

Many argue that all those who are not to the point of moral accountability will go to heaven and give the following reasons:

- a. David expects to see his infant in heaven (2 Samuel 12:23).
- b. David speaks of an unborn baby written in God's book in heaven (Psalm 139:16).
- c. Isaiah makes a distinction between those who know enough to refuse evil and choose good and those who cannot (Isaiah 7:15), implying that those who cannot are not yet moral accountable.
- d. It is consistent with the nature of God and the words of Jesus that "not one of these little one perish" (Matthew 18:14).

Others argue that God would be able to foresee what the person's response to God would have been if it were possible. The Westminster Confession states, "Elect infants dying in infancy, are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit, who works when, where and how He pleases."

Gleason Archer poses this dilemma for those who believe in an age of accountability: "If dying in infancy insures the safe passage of one's child to heaven — whereas he might reject the Lord in later life and thus end up in hell — then it becomes almost obligatory for each parent to strangle his child as soon as it is born — and thus all abortionists are performing a good work!"

The bottom line is that God simply does not reveal Himself in this issue. Since there is no explicit Biblical teaching it is impossible to be dogmatic.

3. Why does 1 Timothy 2:5 state there is one God and one mediator between man and God, the man Christ Jesus, when Romans 8:26 says the Holy Spirit intercedes for us as well?

Christ is the only mediator, the Holy Spirit is an intercessor. Only Christ died for our sins (Hebrews 1:1-2) to reconcile us to God (2 Corinthians 5:19). The Holy Spirit prays to the Father on our behalf, on the basis of Christ's redemptive work. These are two very different roles.

4. Why does Paul say that all who are called are eventually justified and glorified in Romans 8:30 when Jesus said "many are called but few are chosen" (Matthew 20:16)?

The Bible uses the word "call" in a general sense and in a specific sense. When Jesus used the word he was speaking of a general invitation for all to believe. When Paul used the word he referred to the specific call by which God elects people to salvation. The first is a call for salvation to all and the second is a call to salvation for some. This is an example of words being defined by their context.

5. How can Pharaoh have free will when God raised him up to oppose God's people (Romans 9:17) and hardened his heart (Romans 9:18 cf. Exodus 4:21, 7:3) and prepared him for destruction (Romans 9:22)? How could God then hold Pharaoh responsible?

Romans 9 is devoted to the discussion of God's grace as it relates to the elect (those chosen by God for salvation) and non-elect. That God chooses before the beginning of the world who will be saved according to His grace alone is clear not only in Romans 9 but in many other passages (John 6:44; 17:6; Romans 8:29-30; Ephesians 1:4, 2:8-9; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; Titus 1:2, 3:7)

Because man is inherently sinful and cannot seek God (Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 3:10-11) it is not surprising that man must be chosen by God's grace alone in order to be redeemed. Man does not have the ability to believe in Christ apart from God's specific grace.

The even more challenging question is whether God also decides before the foundation of the world who will be destroyed. The logical conclusion would appear to be that God does select those who will be destroyed since He is choosing not to redeem them. This understanding is known as “double predestination.”

The problem with double predestination is that while the Scripture teaches that God chose certain people for salvation before the foundation of the world, it does not say any more than this. Romans 9 is the only passage that appears to possibly teach the God elects people for destruction. However, a closer reading puts this interpretation in doubt:

- a. There is no question that God knew about Pharaoh’s rebellion against God beforehand (Exodus 3:19). God also knew He would harden Pharaoh’s heart (Exodus 4:21).
- b. It is important to note the timing of when God hardened Pharaoh’s heart. God actually hardened the heart of Pharaoh (9:12; 10:20, 27; 11:10) after Pharaoh had initially hardened his own heart by refusing Moses (Exodus 5:2). Therefore, God confirmed the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart, He did not ordain it. This sequence follows that of Romans 1 where God is said to have given men over to sin (Romans 1:24, 26, 28) in response to their chosen rebellion.
- c. That God raised up Pharaoh (Romans 9:17) is speaking of his position of prominence, not his rebellion. God placed Pharaoh over Egypt while He knew that Pharaoh would be disobedient. God used the process of Pharaoh’s hardening for His purposes and glory. God often uses evil actions for good (cf. Genesis 50:20).
- d. There is a difference between how the preparation of the objects of God’s wrath is described and how the preparation of the objects of God’s mercy is described. Those receiving God’s mercy are clearly described as having been prepared by God (Romans 9:23). Those receiving God’s wrath are described as being prepared, but not necessarily prepared by God (Romans 9:22).

“Prepared” in Romans 9:22 is in the perfect tense, meaning a past action with a continuing result. The Greek construction may be understood as either reflexive or as passive. That is, either “prepared themselves for destruction” or “were prepared by another for destruction” would be possible. Even if they were prepared by God for destruction, the text does not state when this preparation would occur. It may be in response to their chosen rebellion.

God never chooses those who will not believe. They make that choice out of their own will. While their own sinfulness necessarily moves them to this choice, it remains their choice and not God’s. God is not the author of evil and He in His holiness cannot cause people to act evil, and indeed He cannot even tempt them toward rebellion (James 1:13).

6. Is the foundation of the church Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 3:11) or the apostles (Ephesians 2:20)?

Jesus Christ is the foundation of the church in the primary sense and the apostles were the foundation in the secondary sense. The next phrase in Ephesians 2:20 tells us that Christ is the “chief cornerstone.” While both Christ and the apostles are foundational to the church, Christ’s words and works provide the essence of what the apostles would teach.

7. Does 1 Corinthians 3:13-15 teach the Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory?

According to Roman Catholicism, purgatory is a place of temporal punishment where all who die in fellowship with the Roman church but short of perfection go upon death to undergo suffering for purification, after which they are translated into heaven. Those who have achieved perfection bypass purgatory and enter heaven immediately upon death.

It is doctrinal error, for the following reasons:

- a. 1 Corinthians 3:13-15 teaches about the final judgment for believers. This is not a judgment of punishment but of reward. There is a loss of reward but not a purification from sin in any sense.
- b. Purgatory is not taught in the Scriptures. It comes from the tradition of the Roman Catholic Church and they use for support the apocryphal book of II Maccabees 12:39-45, which speaks of praying for the dead that they may be loosed from their sins. II Maccabees was not accepted by Judaism, not by Christ and the apostles, nor by the Church. The Roman Catholic Church added this book along with the rest of the Apocrypha in 1546 A.D. to support their doctrine of purgatory, which was being criticized by the reformers.
- c. Most importantly, the doctrine of purgatory destroys the sufficiency of the death of Christ for sin, once for all (1 Peter 3:18; Hebrews 1:3, 10:12-14). There is no need to continue to cleanse our sin since His death accomplished this perfectly.

Because the doctrine of purgatory understands man as cleansing his own sin through his own punishment, rather than through Christ’s death, we should conclude this to be a major doctrinal error. Belief in the doctrine of purgatory says a lot about a person’s misunderstanding of the atonement of Christ.

8. Why does Paul in 1 Corinthians 3:19 quote Job’s friend Eliphaz saying “For it is written, ‘He catches the wise in their own craftiness’ ” (Job 5:13) when God rebukes Eliphaz for saying these words to Job (Job 42:7)?

God did not say that all of Eliphaz’ words were false, only that he was wrong in telling Job that God was punishing him because of his sin. Eliphaz made some correct statements (cf. Job 5:10) in spite of his error. Similarly, Job made wrong statements (cf. Job 10:3; 16:12-13), even though he was righteous.

Paul used the phrase “It is written” because this was the standard practice of quoting authoritative Scripture. Not only does Paul state these words as authoritative and true, but God Himself does later in Job (Job 37:24).

Eliphaz was as much able to utter a truthful statement as a sinner like Caiaphas in John 11:50-51. Paul simply used his truth statement to make his point, in spite of who originally uttered the words.

9. 1 Corinthians 5:9 indicates that Paul wrote a previous epistle to the Corinthians which is now lost. How could God allow an inspired, authoritative epistle be lost?

There are three proposed solutions to this problem:

- a. Not all apostolic letters were intended by God to be in the canon of Scripture. It is very likely that Paul and other apostles wrote documents which included spiritual instruction not included in the Bible.

Also, Luke says that many accounts were compiled on the life of Christ (Luke 1:1) and John tells us that much of what Jesus did was not recorded (John 20:30; 21:25).

It is the Scripture that is inspired (2 Timothy 3:16), not the author and Paul’s writings are not inspired simply because Paul was the author. We can conclude that any earlier writings by Paul that are not in the Bible are not inspired by God and thus non-canonical.

- b. Others believe that the letter referred to in 1 Corinthians 5:9 is not lost at all but is part of an existing book of the Bible, most likely 2 Corinthians 10-13, which is seen by some to be written at a different time than the rest of the book.
- c. Others believe that 1 Corinthians 5:9 is speaking of the book of 1 Corinthians itself. “I wrote” is in the aorist tense in Greek. This may refer to a past event, but does not necessarily refer to a past event but an event at hand.

The aorist tense does not reference the time of the action (past, present or future) but rather the kind of action (a completed action). It often implies an sense of decisiveness, which fit the context of ministry to the backsliding Christian in 1 Corinthians 5.

Paul thus would be saying something like, “I am now decisively writing to you.” This use of the aorist tense is found even in the same letter (1 Corinthians 9:15).

There is no evidence at all to indicate there was an existing letter by Paul to the Corinthians which is in addition to I and 2 Corinthians. We can, at a minimum, conclude from this that if such a letter did exist, it was not considered authoritative by the recipients. It is most likely that Paul was referring to the very letter he was writing.

10. Is Paul opposed to homosexuality in general or only offensive homosexual behavior (1 Corinthians 6:9)?

The phrase “homosexual offenders” (NIV) is better translated “homosexuals” (NASB). But even with the NIV translation, Paul is speaking about the offense of homosexuality, not an offensive homosexual act with the implication of there being non-offensive homosexual acts.

Several reasons lead to this conclusion:

- a. “Homosexual” qualifies “offenders,” therefore the reference is to a homosexual kind of offense, not an offensive kind of homosexual.
- b. If only offensive kinds of homosexual behavior was condemned, then are only offensive kinds of adultery or idolatry also condemned?
- c. Other passages in the Scripture condemn homosexuality (Leviticus 18:22-24; Romans 1:26; 1 Timothy 1:10; Jude 7) without any qualification or restricting judgment only to offensive acts.

11. How can Paul’s words be considered inspired by God in 1 Corinthians 7:12 and 7:40 when he says he is merely giving his own opinion?

In 1 Corinthians 7:12, Paul is saying that the Lord Jesus did not directly address the issue of the believing wife of an unbelieving husband when He spoke about marriage and divorce. Paul’s words regarding this situation are authoritative in that they further explain acceptable conduct in marriage.

In 1 Corinthians 7:40 gives Paul’s opinion but he explains that “I think I have the Spirit of God.” This passage shows Paul’s claim that his opinion is beyond only his view but is also God’s view. The word “think” (δοκῶ) means to deem, consider or have a perspective. It does not mean that Paul is uncertain about whether he indeed has the Spirit of God but that he truly considers himself as having the Spirit of God. He believes he is speaking authoritatively.

The context of the book also supports 1 Corinthians 7:12 and 7:40 as being authoritative. 1 Corinthians 2:13 says Paul is speaking according to the Spirit and 1 Corinthians 14:37 says Paul is speaking the Lord’s commandment.

12. Was Paul mistaken when he said in 1 Corinthians 10:8 that 23,000 people died when Exodus 32:28 put the number of deaths at only 3,000?

Exodus 32:27-28 says the number of people who died by the sword was 3,000. Exodus 32:35 indicates there was a plague that God used to judge Israel in response to their worship of the golden calf. Therefore, Paul is most likely giving the total number of deaths from the sword and the plague. The best solution would be that 3,000 died from the sword and 20,000 died from the plague.

Some have understood Paul as referring to a plague at Shittim where 24,000 people were killed (Numbers 25:9). This is unlikely since in the prior verse (1 Corinthians 10:7) Paul quotes from Exodus 32:6 and thus would have the golden calf incident in mind in 10:8.

However, even if Paul was speaking about Numbers 25:9, Paul gives the total of deaths in one day while Numbers 25:9 does not set a specific time period. Therefore, 23,000 would have died in one day and the total deaths would have been 24,000.

13. 1 Corinthians 11:5 says a woman must pray or prophesy with her head covered. If this is purely cultural, then how do we know what is cultural and what is not?

It is important to distinguish between the meaning and the significance of the text. The meaning is clear, when the women of Corinth took off their head covering when they were praying or prophesying, they were dishonoring their head or husband (1 Corinthians 11:3-11). The question is not what they should do but why they should do it. The meaning is clear but the significance is less clear.

It is also important to distinguish between the command and the culture. The command is based upon a principle which is absolute, while the culture is continually changing. The principle behind the commands does not change but the practice of the culture does change.

What Christians must do is absolute but how they do it is culturally relative. In 1 Corinthians 11:5 the principle is that women should be submissive and honoring to their husbands. In Corinth in the middle of the first century, women praying without a head covering would be understood as necessarily bringing disgrace to her husband. There would be no debate about whether or not this was rebellious.

In California in the end of the twentieth century this practice of covering the head no longer communicates submission and honor. Ironically, in some cases in our present culture to wear a head covering to church would be considered a rebellious exalting of our own interpretation of Scripture!

We must learn to study the culture in which we live in order to understand how to communicate the love and respect that God desires. What we must communicate does not change but how we communicate it does change.

How do we know whether a command is cultural or not? The Bible was written in the midst of a culture. We must learn to understand the principles behind the commands in order to apply them with wisdom in our culture.

One example is greeting the brethren with a holy kiss (1 Thessalonians 5:26). We must greet each other, but how we do this will change with the culture. Another example is lifting up holy hands in prayer (1 Timothy 2:8). If we do not make a cultural adaptation of the principle we will be communicating something far different than the Bible intends.

14. How can nature teach us that it is a disgrace for a man to have long hair when the length of hair varies from culture to culture (1 Corinthians 11:14)?

There is no doubt that the length of a man's hair has varied from culture to culture and from time to time. For example, the men of Sparta wore their hair at shoulder length and the founders of our nation wore wigs.

While there is no absolute standard for what is "long," there is a clear sense of what each culture naturally expects a woman to look like. It is instinctive for a society to believe that men and women ought to look different and be distinguishable. One clear way of doing this is with the hair.

While there may be exceptions to the general rule that men have shorter hair than women (the vow of the Nazarite, health reasons, occupational safety, etc.), our intuitive sense is in line with the general rule because of our conscience which tells that men should not look like women. The Old Testament even forbids a man to dress like a woman (Deuteronomy 22:5). It is in this sense that men having short hair is natural.

15. Was the gift of tongues in 1 Corinthians 14 an actual language or an ecstatic utterance?

A common view of tongues in 1 Corinthians 14 puts emphasis on the background of first-century pagan religions. These religions included unintelligible speech which is compared to tongues in 1 Corinthians. Thus some say that Paul is speaking of this type of heavenly speech in 1 Corinthians.

It is much preferred to understand Paul as referring to a miraculously given ability to speak in a human language that was foreign to the speaker. This conclusion is based upon several factors:

- a. It is much more likely that Paul's theology and terms were based in the Scripture and the early church rather than from pagan religions.
 - 1) The New Testament uses the term "tongue" (GLOSSA) in other passages to mean the physical tongue of the mouth (e.g. Mark 7:33; James 3:5; Revelation 16:10).
 - 2) Paul in other verses uses the term "tongue" as a figure of speech for a statement made in a human language (Romans 3:13; 14:11; Philippians 2:11).
 - 3) Other New Testament writers use the term "tongue" as a figure of speech for a statement made in a human language (Acts 2:11; Revelation 5:9; 7:9; 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; 17:15).
 - 4) The Greek translation of the Old Testament has thirty references to tongue which refer to normal speech and none that refer to unintelligible speech.
 - 5) In no place in the Scripture does "tongue" mean ecstatic speech.

- b. Acts 2 gives a description of the gift of tongues in practice at the founding of the church. In this incident it is very clear that tongues was an actual human language. This weighs in favor of the gift of tongues in 1 Corinthians as also being an actual human language.
- c. While 1 Corinthians 14 describes the problem of the speech being unintelligible (vv. 9, 14) it is unintelligible because there is no one with the gift of interpretation, not because it is in essence ecstatic and unknowable.
- d. The New Testament presents tongues speaking as primarily a sign or convincing miracle, and only secondarily as the communication of a message. In Acts and in 1 Corinthians communication alone could have been conducted without the use of tongues. Mere ecstatic utterances will not be convincing since anyone can babble and pagan religions practice the same activity.
- e. Like the gift of healing corrected the judgment of God from Genesis 3, the gift of tongues corrected the judgment of God from Genesis 11 at the Tower of Babel. Just as the judgment created actual languages, the gift of tongues enabled communication through actual languages.

Understanding tongues as an actual human language rather than a babbling utterance is helpful in evaluating the modern Charismatic Movement. Speaking an actual human language that you have never learned is much more verifiable than an ecstatic utterance which is nothing more than a learned behavior.

16. Are women suppose to remain completely silent in the worship service, unable to pray, speak or even sing (1 Corinthians 14:33-36)?

1 Corinthians addresses several church problems such as sin within the church, marriage, the Lord's supper and spiritual gifts. In 1 Corinthians 14:33-36, Paul gives his attention to one more problem in the church, the behavior of women during the worship service.

1 Corinthians 11 raised the problem of women dishonoring their husbands by praying or prophesying without a head covering. In 1 Corinthians 14:33-36 we see another problem with the women of Corinth and like 1 Corinthians 11 we must look at what principles the women were violating that would cause Paul to advocate their silence.

The principle of humility had been addressed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 11 when he exhorted the women to honor their husbands by wearing head coverings. Even that we see women praying gives evidence that Paul did not intend for total silence forever but that he was addressing a specific problem.

The principle of honor for God was addressed when he commanded orderliness in the prophecies and speaking in tongues in 1 Corinthians 14. In 1 Corinthians 14:33-36, these two concerns come together as the women are disrupting the worship (14:33, 35) and not subjecting themselves in humility (14:34).

The principles of humility and honor for God are absolute. The expression of these principles in Corinth required Paul to command the women to stop talking in the church service, even for good reasons such as seeking for understanding (14:34, 40). The women were more than just disruptive but even worse, they were prideful in their speech (14:36). Humility and honor would be exhibited as they ceased their prideful and disruptive speech.

The principles are abiding. Women (as well as men) ought to honor God in humility in the way they conduct themselves and ought not to exalt themselves but remain submissive. Prideful speech is particularly disruptive in the context of a worship service. Paul's solution to this specific problem was for the women to remain silent.

17. What proof is there of the resurrection of Jesus when the witnesses were all believers and therefore had a vested interest in advancing the theory of the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:5-8)?

Jesus did not only appear to believers. He appeared to Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9) who was the most hostile unbeliever of all. He also appeared to His brother James who had been an unbeliever before the resurrection (John 7:5). Finally, the disciples were hardly in the mood to advance a lie since they themselves doubted the resurrection (Luke 24:11, 25; John 20:25).

Also, it is not surprising that only those who ultimately believed would be the ones proclaiming the resurrection. The reason is because of the powerful evidence the resurrection gives to the validity of Christianity. If unbelievers witnessed the resurrection they would have become believers, like Saul of Tarsus.

Furthermore, that Christ only appeared to those who would be responsive to him is consistent with His teachings. To those who have, more will be given and whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away (Matthew 13:12). As we respond to Christ we receive more understanding. If we fail to respond we will not be granted more understanding (cf. Hebrews 5:11-14; Matthew 21:23-27).

18. Why does Paul say that Jesus appeared to “the twelve” (1 Corinthians 15:5) when there were only eleven disciples at the time of his appearing? Judas had already departed and hanged himself (Matthew 27:5) before Christ was even crucified?

Although the phrase “the twelve” was originally a numerical designation, it came to be used to describe the apostles as a group (cf. Matthew 26:14, 47; Mark 6:7; 10:32; Luke 8:1; 18:31; John 6:67; 20:24). In 1 Corinthians 15:5 the phrase means the whole group of apostles even though there were only eleven at the time.

This is identical to John 20:24, where Thomas is called one of the twelve even though Judas had already departed by that time as well. Likewise, today we refer to the Big-Ten Conference, even though it now has eleven teams with the addition of Penn State.

19. How could Jesus be the first to rise from the dead when other resurrections occurred before (1 Corinthians 15:20 cf. 1 Kings 17:22; 2 Kings 13:21; John 11:43-44; Acts 20:9)?

There is a big difference between the resurrection of Christ and the resuscitation of others: A resurrection is to immortality (1 Corinthians 15:53) while a resuscitation is only back to a mortal body. Everyone brought back from the dead prior to Christ eventually died again. Christ conquered death (Hebrews 2:14; 1 Corinthians 15:54-55); resuscitated bodies will be conquered by death.

Also, resurrection bodies seem to possibly have some additional qualities not found in mortal bodies, such as the ability to appear and disappear from sight (Luke 24:31) and to enter a closed room (John 20:19).

20. Should we baptize people on behalf of those who have died (1 Corinthians 15:29)?

This is an obscure and challenging verse that has been assigned up to 200 interpretations! One thing is clear — there is no salvation by proxy. The Scripture clearly teaches that after death comes judgment (Hebrews 9:27) and there is no way out of hell (Luke 16:19-31). Each person is called to belief while living and if they reject Christ no action on the part of any human can save them.

With this in mind some of the views of this verse are:

- a. The false Mormon view that living people should be baptized to ensure salvation for those who have died.
- b. “Baptism for the dead” means baptizing new converts to replace those believers who have died. Thus the church is replenished after it has been depleted upon the death of a believer. Paul would then be saying in this verse, “why do you continue to replenish the church with baptized converts if you don’t believe there will be a resurrection.”
- c. “Baptism for the dead” refers to the symbolism of our death with Christ in baptism (cf. Romans 6:3-5). We are then baptized with a view toward our death in Christ. Paul would then be saying, “Why are you baptized with a view toward your death and resurrection with Christ, if you do not believe in the resurrection?”
- d. “Baptism for the dead” means “for the sake of those who have died.” When a believer had died and in his final days had communicated the gospel to unbelievers who repented and became Christians, those new converts would be baptized for the sake of the one who had passed away. Paul would then be saying, “Why are you baptized for the sake of those who have died, if you do not believe in the resurrection?”
- e. “Baptism for the dead” refers to living believers who superstitiously were baptized in place of those who had died with the false hope of ensuring their resurrection. Paul would then be saying, “Why are you wrongly baptized in place of those who have died, if you do not believe in the resurrection?”

- f. Perhaps the best view is that “baptism for the dead” refers to the practice of pagan religions of the day, who were being baptized in place of those who had died. There is evidence that some pagan religions of the day were practicing rituals which would accrue to the account of those who had died. That Paul does not rebuke the practice but only refers to it and that Paul uses the pronoun “they” rather than “we” or “you,” indicates that this false practice was not active among the Corinthians. Thus Paul would be saying, “Why are the pagans baptizing in place of those who have died, if they do not believe in the resurrection?” In other words, even their obviously wrong practice is evidence from general revelation that there is a resurrection.

21. What does the building from God refer to in 2 Corinthians 5:1?

The building from God has been interpreted in several ways:

- a. Some say it is heaven. But how is heaven “put on” (5:2-3)?
- b. Some say it is our mansion or celestial dwelling place or heavenly temple (cf. John 14:2). But how do we “put on” a mansion? Also, it is quite a stretch to understand John 14:1-2 to say God is going to give us our own dwelling place. This verse is better understood as figurative.
- c. Some say it is an intermediate body that we will receive before our final resurrection body (cf. Luke 16:19-31). However, Paul only sees a temporal and an eternal dwelling — a supposed intermediate body would still not be eternal.
- d. The best view is the building from God is the resurrection body, for several reasons:
 - 1) The context of 2 Corinthians 4:18 is temporal versus eternal.
 - 2) The context of 2 Corinthians 5:3-4 is receiving a new body.
 - 3) There is a parallel in 5:1 to the “earthly tent” which is certainly our current physical body (2 Corinthians 4:10, 11, 16).
 - 4) The fourfold description of the building in 5:1 (from God, permanent, heavenly, spiritual) matches Paul’s description of the spiritual body in 1 Corinthians 15:38-54.
 - 5) The present tense “have” is often a future present tense (cf. Matthew 5:3).

22. How could Jesus be sinless if He was made to be sin (2 Corinthians 5:21)?

Jesus never committed a sin personally but He was made sin for us substitutionally. He was always without actual sin but He was made sin for us judicially. This distinction is often distorted by some teachers today.

In other words, Jesus did not stop being perfect and holy, for to do so would change what God is like, which would deny who God is. God made Him to be sin in the sense that the sins of the world were placed upon Christ (cf. Isaiah 53:6). Jesus did not turn into sin but rather our sin was credited to His account for judgment. It is in the same way that Christ's righteousness is credited to our account.

23. Was Paul “not in the least inferior to the most eminent apostles” (2 Corinthians 11:5) or was Paul “the least of the apostles” (1 Corinthians 15:9)?

Paul is speaking in different contexts about himself. In regard to ability, his training and his zealousness, he was not a back-seat apostle. In his position as an apostle of Jesus Christ he was not second place.

However, he considered himself unworthy to be an apostle (cf. Galatians 1:13; Acts 9:1) because of his actions as a persecutor of the church of Christ before his conversion.

Paul is a great example of a proper balance between humility and faithful service. He did not think of himself more highly than he should have (Romans 12:3) but did not shy away from serving the Lord boldly and with zeal.

24. Was Paul mistaken in Galatians 3:17 when he wrote there was 430 years between God's covenant to Abraham (c. 2000 B.C.) and the giving of the Law to Moses (c. 1450 B.C.)? Was Paul off by over 100 years?

In Galatians 3:17-18 Paul is contrasting the age of the Law with the age of the promise to Abraham. The promises to Abraham were repeated several times, even to Isaac and Jacob. God periodically renewed His covenant and the final appearance of God reaffirmed the covenant just before Jacob left Canaan for Egypt in 1876 B.C. (Genesis 46:2-4).

We can see that Paul is counting 430 years from confirmation of the covenant to Jacob rather than from the initial giving of the covenant to Abraham because he uses the term “ratify” or in some translations “confirm.” Therefore, the period from the final confirmation of the covenant (1876 B.C.) to the giving of the Law to Moses at Sinai (1446 B.C.) would be exactly 430 years.

25. Why does Paul tell us to bear other's burdens in Galatians 6:2 when only three verses later he says we should all bear our own burdens?

The Greek word for “burden” is different in 6:2 and 6:5. In Galatians 6:2 the word (βᾶρος) means a heavy or burdensome weight. In Galatians 6:5 the word (φορτιον) means simply a weight without reference to how heavy it is.

Therefore, in Galatians 6:2 Paul is urging sympathy and assistance for others who are undergoing difficulties and in 6:5 he is urging each of us to take responsibility for ourselves. There is no conflict between being accountable for our own lives and being helpful to others.

As we live the Christian life we should not be demanding or expecting others to necessarily give us assistance as we encounter trials. Then if we receive help we can be truly grateful. Yet on the other hand, when we see our brothers and sisters in need we should see the opportunity to fulfill Galatians 6:2 and move toward them in service. This is a godly double standard!

26. How could the mystery of Christ (the church) be hidden in the previous generations when it was made known to the prophets (Ephesians 3:5)?

The prophets in Ephesians 3:5 are not the Old Testament prophets but are New Testament prophets, for the following reasons:

- a. The order is not “prophets and apostles” but “apostles and prophets.”
- b. The phrase “apostles and prophets” appears again in Ephesians 2:20, where it means New Testament prophets for two reasons:
 - 1) The Greek grammatical structure of the definite article (“the”) precedes only the first of the two nouns, grouping them together as one.
 - 2) The church is said to be built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, yet the church did not exist in the Old Testament but only after Christ announced it in Matthew 16:18.
- c. The mystery of Christ is only now revealed. The prophets must be those of the New Testament age. Colossians 1:26 is a parallel passage which confirms this.

27. Why did Paul distort Psalm 68:18, which reads “Thou hast ascended on high, Thou hast led captive Thy captives; Thou has *received* gifts among men” to say “When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, and He *gave* gifts to men” in Ephesians 4:8?

Paul may have been following the translation of the Targum, the traditional interpretations of orthodox Jews, which considers God to be giving gifts in Psalm 68:18. Regardless, both the receiving of gifts and the giving of gifts are present in the broad context of this Psalm. David robbed the enemies of their gifts and he gave the gifts to his men. Thus both the giving and receiving are present, as the Targum illustrates.

Paul’s point in Ephesians 4:8 is consistent with both a receiving and a giving. Christ’s resurrection won the victory over Satan, taking captive His enemies and setting Satan’s captives free by receiving them to Himself. He gave those who He had brought out of darkness as gifts themselves to men (Ephesians 4:11).

Paul then is not strictly quoting Psalm 68:18 but rather integrating a summary of the entire psalm into his citation of 68:18. The idea of giving gifts does not come from the one verse but it does come from the essence of the Psalm.

28. How could Jesus descend into hell as the Apostles' Creed states (cf. Ephesians 4:9) if He told the thief on the cross "today you shall be with Me in paradise" (Luke 23:43)?

There are two views as to where Jesus went for the three days that His body was in the tomb before the resurrection:

- a. Some believe Christ went to Hades (or Sheol in the Old Testament) where He spoke to those spirits who were in prison (1 Peter 3:19). These were in a temporary holding place or compartment in Hades called "Abraham's bosom" which was reserved to the saved (Luke 16:19-31). When Christ rose from the dead He was the firstfruits (1 Corinthians 15:20), leading these Old Testament saints into heaven with Him for the first time.
- b. Others believe the souls of Old Testament believers went directly to heaven at the moment of their passing.

How you view Ephesians 4:9 is related to how you understand what happened to Old Testament saints when they died. There are three interpretations of what "the lower parts of the earth" means in 4:9:

- a. Those who believe that Christ descended into Hades between His death and resurrection would understand Ephesians 4:9 as "into the parts lower than the earth."
- b. Some who believe the souls of Old Testament believers went directly to heaven when they died believe this verse refers to Christ's incarnation or His "descent" to the earth. Ephesians 4:9 would then read, "into the lower parts, namely the earth."
- c. The rest of those who believe the souls of Old Testament believers went directly to heaven believe this verse refers to Christ's death and burial in the grave. Ephesians 4:9 would then read, "into the lower parts which belong to the earth."

The last interpretation is most likely accurate because it fits with the context of Ephesians 4. Christ's victory over sin and death and His redemption of those who would be given as gifts to the church is based not upon His incarnation, nor upon His descent to hell but only upon His death for man's sin on the cross.

The souls of Old Testament believers went directly to heaven upon death for the following reasons:

- a. Jesus affirmed to the thief on the cross that he would go directly to heaven that very day, not having to wait until Christ's resurrection.
- b. Enoch was taken up by God, which implies he went to be with God (Genesis 5:24; Hebrews 11:5).
- c. Elijah was taken up into heaven (2 Kings 2:1).

- d. Luke 16:23 is a description of heaven, not hell. Abraham is said to be in the kingdom of heaven in Matthew 8:11, not in Hades.
- e. When Moses and Elijah appeared at the transfiguration they appeared in glory (Luke 9:31).
- f. Christ was the first fruits of those who would likewise be bodily resurrected (1 Corinthians 15:20). The souls of the Old Testament saints went to heaven, but their bodies wait until after Christ's resurrection.
- g. The lower parts of the earth is not specifically hell but any enclosure on the earth, even a women's womb (Psalm 139:15).
- h. The Apostles' Creed is of course not inspired, but even this creed did not add the phrase "descended into hell" until the fourth century.
- i. The spirits in prison are not saved but unsaved in 1 Peter 3:19.

29. How can Christ be God if He emptied Himself of His Deity (Philippians 2:5-7)?

Christ did not stop being God at any time. Christ did not lose His Deity, but He added His humanity. In addition to being God, He also became man.

Philippians 2:5-7 does not say Christ emptied Himself of Deity but that He set aside his rights as Deity and took the form of a servant. In fact, the text actually says He was in the form of God, that is He was God in His nature (NIV).

30. If Paul had the gift of healing, raised the dead (Acts 20:9-10), and even healed everyone in an entire city (Acts 28:9), why could he not even heal his co-worker, Epaphroditus (Philippians 2:25)?

While some people cite Matthew 17:16 as proof that those with the gift of healing may not always be able to heal, Christ rebuked His disciples for not exercising their power from God to heal. Just as no one who has the gift of prophecy ever utters a false prophecy, the gift of healing in the Scripture is always successful. Paul does not explain why Epaphroditus was not healed. The text does not say that Paul tried to heal him and failed.

The last evidence of the gift of healing was around 61 A.D. and is not found in the later New Testament books as it was in the earlier New Testament books. It is possible that by the time of the writing of Philippians the apostolic gift of healing had passed away.

31. If Christ is the first-born of all creation (Colossians 1:15, 18), how can He be divine? How can God be born or created?

Paul in this same epistle declares Jesus to be God in that He created all things (Colossians 1:16) and in that the fullness of Deity dwells in Him (Colossians 2:9). The Scripture is clear that Jesus is God the Son.

The reference to “first-born” does not mean that Jesus was created. After all, He predated all created things (Colossians 1:17). Instead of first-born *in* creation, Colossians 1:15 says He is the first-born *of* creation. Therefore, “first-born” does not mean that He was the first one to be born but that He is the heir of all as the Creator. As creator of all things He could not have been a created thing.

The term “first-born” in the Old Testament did not only mean priority of birth, but it primarily referred to a superior position (cf. Exodus 13:2-15; Deuteronomy 21:17). The term “first-born” was used in Psalm 89:27 as a designation of the Messiah, and is repeated in Revelation 1:5 in reference again to His position. The application of the term to Christ denotes His priority in time to all creation and His sovereignty in rank over all creation.

32. How could Christ’s death on the cross be sufficient for our salvation (John 19:30; Hebrews 1:3) when there is something lacking in His afflictions that we need to complete (Colossians 1:24)?

There can be no doubt from Scripture that Christ’s death was fully sufficient to atone for the sins of man, resulting in salvation:

- a. Jesus’ own words about His death indicate His death completed the work of the atonement for sins (John 17:4; 19:30).
- b. The epistles state that Christ died one time for our sin in order to bring us to salvation (2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:21-24; 3:18).
- c. Through the death of Jesus, believers are perfected forever (Hebrews 10:14).
- d. Christ atoned for sins “by Himself,” with no help from anyone else (Hebrews 1:3).

However, there is a sense in which Christ is still being afflicted when the church is persecuted:

- a. Jesus said to Paul, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” (Acts 9:4).
- b. We are told we will suffer for the sake of Christ (Philippians 1:29). We do not suffer for sin but we do suffer because of sin (both our sin and the sin of others).

Our suffering is in service for Christ, not for the purpose of salvation.

33. Why was Epistle of the Laodiceans lost and where did it go (Colossians 4:16)?

There have been several proposals that have surfaced concerning this letter from Laodicea:

- a. John Knox suggested this letter was actually Paul’s letter to Philemon, although with very little support.

- b. In the fourth century a letter appeared under the title of “the letter to the Laodiceans.” This was an obvious fraud since there are no Greek manuscripts of this letter and the Latin manuscripts date only as early as the fourth century. The contents as well testify that it is an attempt to solve the problem of Colossians 4:16. It is largely a collection of quotations from Ephesians and Colossians and called a “forged epistle” at the Council of Nicea (787 A.D.).
- c. Many believe Paul is referencing a letter that has indeed become lost. If this were the case, it would not have been preserved by God’s providence to be included in the canon of Scripture. It could then be classified along with other writings which were not divinely authoritative or inspired (cf. Luke 1:1). That Paul may have written other letters should not concern us anymore that knowing that Jesus performed other works which have not been preserved for us either (John 20:30; 21:25).
- d. It is best to conclude the letter from Laodicea was never really lost but is actually the Book of Ephesians, for the following reasons:
 - 1) Paul writes, “read my letter that is coming *from* Laodicea.” It is not described as being *of* Laodicea or *to* Laodicea. It may have only then passed through Laodicea.
 - 2) The Book of Ephesians apparently did not have not had an original title since the phrase “in Ephesus” (Ephesians 1:1) does not appear in some important early manuscripts. This gives the impression that the letter that was circled among various churches and not addressed to any one church.
 - 3) Adding to the argument that the Book of Ephesians was a circular letter is the fact that although Paul spent three years at Ephesus (Acts 20:31), he does not include any personal greetings like he does in other books. By contrast, in Romans 16 he greets many people in a city he had not yet visited.
 - 4) The Book of Ephesians dates from the same period of time and contains similar information as the Book of Colossians.

34. Was Paul wrong to believe that he would be alive when Christ returned (1 Thessalonians 4:15)?

There are two ways of understanding this verse without charging Paul with a mistake:

- a. Paul may have been using a common figure of speech which meant the believers who would be alive. This editorial “we” would then refer to the believers who would be alive when Christ returned. For example, it is not uncommon for us to describe our church as doing something even though “we” personally may not actually be participating.

- b. Paul may have been expressing his hope, without necessarily affirming that he would be alive at the return of Christ. The return of the Lord is a “blessed hope” (Titus 2:13), which we long for. Since none of us knows the length of our life span, much less the time of the return of Christ (Acts 1:7), Paul surely was not certain he would be alive when Christ returned.

35. How could God, who cannot lie (Titus 1:2; Numbers 23:19) and who will judge liars (Revelation 21:8), send a lie to delude people (2 Thessalonians 2:11)?

God cannot lie and therefore no lie can originate from God. Rather He sends the lawless one (1 Thessalonians 2:8) and turns those who have already refused to believe over to this delusion. God is not the source of the delusion, Satan is the source and God uses the lawless one. God also is not sending a delusion upon those who are already deluded in order to prevent them from believing, He is sending the lawless one to reveal their depravity in having chosen evil over good.

36. Is Paul chauvinistic in denying ministry to women in 1 Timothy 2:12?

Paul and the Bible in fact exalts the role of women:

- a. Women are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27) and are in essence and in value equal with men.
- b. According to Paul, men and women are equal in redemption as they share the same salvation (Galatians 3:28).
- c. Throughout the Bible, women are equal in the nature of their ministry:
 - 1) Deborah was a judge of Israel (Judges 4:4).
 - 2) Huldah and Anna were prophetesses (2 Chronicles 34:22; Luke 2:36).
 - 3) Priscilla was active in evangelism (Acts 18:26).
 - 4) Pheobe was a deaconess (Romans 16:1).
 - 5) Women played a prominent role in the ministry of Jesus and ministry to Jesus (Matthew 28:1-10; Luke 8:3; 23:49; John 11:1-46; 12:1-8).
- d. No spiritual gift is limited to men in the lists in the New Testament (1 Corinthians 12:27-31; Romans 12:3-8; 1 Peter 4:8-11).
- e. Women were commanded to edify the body of Christ, which included teaching (Titus 2:4) and prophecy (Acts 2:17-18; 21:9; 1 Corinthians 11:5).

The limitation which 1 Timothy 2:12 places upon the ministry of women is not a limitation of either the nature or the significance of their ministry. They are called to minister in the same basic way as men are called to minister and the significance placed upon their ministry is in no way diminished. It is only the *sphere* of ministry in which women are limited in their authority. They are not to teach men or exercise authority over men.

Paul's statement of limiting women in teaching or exercising authority over men has been challenged in the following ways:

- a. Some contend that Paul was just wrong in his thinking, which must be rejected on the grounds of the doctrine of inspiration of Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16). One example is Paul Jewett who believes Paul has an uneasy conscience.
- b. Some understand Paul's words "I do not allow" (1 Timothy 2:12) to mean his own personal preference which is not abiding for the church at large. However, this undermines Paul's apostolic authority. Indeed, Paul commonly spoke in the first person in directing the church (cf. 1 Timothy 2:1,8,9) and the context of the book itself is direction for the church.
- c. Walter Kaiser has argued that verse 11 gives a condition that women must meet before being allowed to teach men, that is they must be instructed. After being educated they are then qualified to teach men. Kaiser would understand Eve's deception (2:14) as being caused by her lack of education. The major problem with this interpretation is that the text itself gives no hint that instruction would reverse Paul's command.
- d. Many evangelicals see women as being commanded to teach and that the restriction is not solely upon teaching but is upon teaching in a way that usurps authority away from men. Hence women may then teach men as long as they themselves are under the authority of a man.

The problem with this view is:

- 1) Authority is inherently involved with the teaching of the Scripture. Teaching in the New Testament is not just a giving of facts but an attempt to convince with an expectation toward application and following. True teaching necessarily exercises authority.
- 2) Can men really delegate something to a women that God has limited to men?

Paul gives two reasons why women should not teach or exercise authority over men (2:13-14):

- a. Man was created first.
- b. While Adam walked straight into sin, Eve was deceived. What Paul means by noting that Eve was the one deceived has been said to be:
 - 1) Women are made so that they are less rational and more easily deceived.
 - 2) The curse put women into the place of being more easily deceived (although Eve was deceived before the fall and the curse).

- 3) God cursed women by limiting their authority because Eve was deceived.
- 4) Paul was only giving an example of what could happen if the creation order is reversed. This interpretation is easiest to receive.

The bottom line for the application of 1 Timothy 2:12 is “Is a woman functioning in authority in reference to the Word of God over men in the church?”

37. Is salvation achieved through the bearing of children by women (1 Timothy 2:15)?

This difficult verse has generated a number of diverse interpretations:

- a. Women will be saved (physically) through the dangerous process of childbirth.
- b. Women will be saved (emotionally) from a life of insignificance by means of her role in the family.
- c. Women will be kept safe from the corruption of society by staying home and raising their children.
- d. Women will be kept safe from seizing men’s roles in the church by fulfilling their God-given roles at home.
- e. Women will be saved (eternally) through the childbirth of the Savior, Jesus Christ (cf. Genesis 3:15).
- f. Women will be saved (eternally) even though they must bear physical children.
- g. Women will be saved (eternally) equally with men as they fulfill their God-given role at home.
- h. Women will be saved (eternally) as they fulfill their proper role, as exemplified in motherhood.

While it is impossible to be dogmatic, the last option has the strength of fitting the context of the passage in dealing with the role of the women and their children without invalidating the service of women who through no fault of their own are unable to righteously bear children.

This view understands child-bearing as a common figure of speech which uses a part of something to refer to its whole (i.e. synecdoche). Motherhood is obviously a role that cannot be replaced and is a critical ministry (cf. 1 Timothy 5:14), but women who cannot participate directly in child-bearing can still serve in the process of motherhood with the children born of other women (adoption, foster care, helping other parents, etc.).

38. Does 1 Timothy 3:2, “the husband of one wife,” prohibit divorced men from being elders?

There are several interpretations of what the husband of one wife prescribes:

- a. The Roman Catholic Church sees “wife” in a spiritual sense and thus they conclude the celibate priest must remain married to the Church.
- b. Some understand this as requiring marriage. However, you would also have to require having children (2:4-5) and this would also seem to rule out Paul from being an elder (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:7). Also, why would Paul specify “one” wife?
- c. Some understand this verse as prohibiting polygamy. But polygamy was already outlawed by the Roman government and was not practiced by the church. This is not a very high standard.
- d. Some view “husband of one wife” as prohibiting widows who are remarried from becoming elders. But the Scripture never prohibits remarriage after a spouse dies (1 Timothy 5:14; 1 Corinthians 7:39; Romans 7:1-3).
- e. Some view Paul as prohibiting divorced men from becoming elders. This is much closer to his intention but leaves some outstanding questions, such as, “what if the divorce preceded the man’s conversion to Christ?” and “what about circumstances that are completely out of the man’s control that he could not be faulted?” There may be some legitimate extenuating circumstances.
- f. The best understanding of the phrase “husband of one wife” is literally “one woman man,” which goes beyond the circumstances and looks at the lifestyle of a man. The man must be the kind of person who would be faithful to one woman. Therefore, Paul does not necessarily preclude a past divorce or singleness but rather is focused on the lifestyle.

39. Can women serve as deacons (1 Timothy 3:11)?

Many understand 1 Timothy 3:11 as being a qualifier for the wife of a deacon. The arguments against allowing women to serve as deacons are:

- a. The order of development of the passage speaks first of deacons, then of women and returns again to deacons, which appears to cover only one group.
- b. The word for “women” commonly refers to wives.
- c. There is no clear proof there were women deacons in the early church.
- d. Acts 6, which is thought by many to be an apparent model for deacons, includes only men.

The arguments for allowing women to serve as deacons are:

- a. The word “likewise” (3:11 cf. 3:8) appears to reference an similar office.
- b. This verse parallels the qualifications of a deacon.
- c. There are no qualifications for elders wives.
- d. Pheobe is described as a deacon in Romans 16:1.

Women can function as deacons without teaching or exercising authority over men by serving in varied children’s and women’s ministries. Because the ministry of women is essential to the health of the church, it follows that those who serve faithful should be recognized for their service.

40. Why does Paul advocate drinking (1 Timothy 5:23) when the Bible strongly warns against drinking (Proverbs 20:1; 31:4-5; Isaiah 24:9; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Ephesians 5:18)?

This verse is in harmony with the rest of Scripture because Paul certainly does not advocate drunkenness in 1 Timothy 5:23 and the Bible does not completely forbid all drinking of alcohol, but only becoming drunk.

Paul says for Timothy to use “a little wine,” which is consistent with his prior urging of church leaders to be temperate (1 Timothy 3:3, 8). The reason Paul encouraged Timothy to use wine was not for social reasons but for his stomach and frequent ailments. The wine was used for medicinal purposes.

41. How can God alone possess immortality (1 Timothy 6:16) when believers also possess immortality (1 Corinthians 15:53; 2 Timothy 1:10)?

We do not have immortality in and of ourselves. Our immortality is conditional upon God. God on the other hand is immortal in His nature. His immortality does not depend on anyone else. God is immortal but we only have been granted immortality.

Furthermore, God’s immortality has no beginning and no ending. Our immortality had a beginning. We exist continually into the future but we had a beginning. God simply exists and indeed defines existence. His existence is not derived from anyone at any time.

42. How can Paul’s statement that all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted (2 Timothy 3:12) be harmonized with Solomon’s proverb, “when a man’s ways are pleasing to the Lord, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him” (Proverbs 16:7)?

First of all, Solomon’s proverb is simply that — a proverb, or general truth. It does not cover every possible situation but is a rule of thumb.

Second, being at peace with our enemies does not mean they are not persecuting us. It only means we are not in a war with them, retaliating or fighting back (cf. Matthew 5:39-40).

Finally, while we will be persecuted we will probably not suffer constant persecution throughout our lifetime. While we may find peace coming to our relationships with some of our enemies, we may not find peace in every relationship all the time.

43. Doesn't the Revised Standard Version and the American Standard Version undermine the doctrine of inerrancy by translating 2 Timothy 3:16 as "Every Scripture inspired by God is also profitable for teaching..." instead of the more common "All Scripture is inspired by God"?

Yes. These versions do render this translation poorly and are misleading. It is not only the passages that God has inspired that are profitable but it is every passage of Scripture which is profitable because they are inspired. It is fortunate that these versions include a better rendering in their margins.

The reason all other translations follow the rendering "All Scripture is inspired by God" is because it is consistent with "is profitable." There is never a case in the New Testament where a predicate adjective (in this case, "is profitable") is connected by the word "and" to another adjective (in this case, "inspired"), where the second adjective is attributive ("inspired by God is").

Furthermore, the word "Scripture" (γραφή) always refers to inspired, authoritative writings. It is clear that Paul is using it to refer to the Old Testament Scriptures in that this is what Timothy's Jewish mother and grandmother taught him (3:15).

The authors of the Scripture were moved by God to write the Word of God (2 Peter 1:20-21) and therefore the Scripture, as the Word of God, is without error because God cannot err (Hebrews 6:18; Titus 1:2; John 17:17).

44. Doesn't the Scripture necessarily contain a lie in Titus 1:12 when Paul quotes a Cretan who said that "Cretans are always liars." If Cretans are always liars, then the quote would be a lie. If the Cretan was in fact lying when he said Cretans are always liars, then Cretans are not always liars and the Scripture contains a lie about the Cretans. On the other hand, if the Cretan that Paul quoted was telling the truth about Cretans, then what he said was wrong, at least in one instance, for he was a Cretan telling the truth!

This may be why Paul added the words, "This testimony is true" (1:13). The statement "Cretans are always liars" does not mean in every instance every Cretan must necessarily tell a lie.

It was a phrase that characterized the Cretans but was only meant generally, not universally. It is absurd to think that even pathological liars are incapable of uttering a truthful statement.

45. Does Paul make an inspired prophet out of a pagan poet by including him in Scripture (Titus 1:12)?

Paul does not quote the poet as inspired but only as truthful. Even pagans can utter truth and all truth comes from God. Caiaphas the high priest uttered a truth about Christ (John 11:49-52) and this did not make him a prophet, much less a believer. Paul even cited non-Christians elsewhere (Acts 17:28; 1 Corinthians 15:33).

By quoting this source, Paul did not consider him divinely authoritative. The common phrases such as “it is written” are never found when sources outside of the Scripture are referenced.

46. Why does Paul approve of the unethical practice of slavery by sending the runaway slave, Onesimus, back to his owner in the Book of Philemon.

Paul does not create, commend or approve of the system of slavery. He only gave instructions on how men should act in the situation which they found themselves.

The Bible does not condone slavery but only regulates how we should behave in the midst of a corrupt system. In fact, the Bible eradicates the social structure of slavery and declares all as equal before God (Galatians 3:28). Slavery existed in many cultures at the time of Moses and the Law demanded that slaves be eventually set free (Exodus 21:2; Leviticus 25:40).

Finally, the slavery system Paul was speaking to in the Book of Philemon was something different than what developed in America with Africans. One-third of the population of major cities (Rome, Ephesus, Corinth, Antioch) were slaves and another third were former slaves. A slave could normally count on being set free by age thirty. Apparently large numbers of slaves were released prior to their thirtieth birthday (close to fifty percent). Sometimes the entire household of slaves would be freed upon the death of their owner. Also, slaves had the opportunity to purchase their freedom from their owners.

In addition, a slave's position in life was not always subordinate. Slaves served in roles such as administrators, educators and physicians as well as cooks and personal attendants. In fact, slaves were indistinguishable from free men in the streets. Capable slaves had advantages over their free peers. For example, they were often provided with an excellent education at the expense of their owners. Indeed, Felix, the Roman procurator who was Paul's judge in Acts 23:24-24:27 was the product of this type of education.

Non-Romans even sold themselves as slaves in order to become Roman citizens when freed. People also sold themselves into slavery to pay off debt (i.e. bankruptcy, to enter an easier lifestyle and more secure existence and to obtain special jobs. In summary, because slavery was such an integral part of the economic life of the Roman empire, Paul addressed how to function within this system, much like Moses did in Deuteronomy 24:14 (cf. Matthew 19:7-9).

47. How could Jesus be forever perfect when Hebrews 2:10 states He became perfect through sufferings? If He became perfect through His sufferings, then He must have lacked perfection prior to His sufferings.

God is perfect (Matthew 5:48) and cannot change (Hebrews 6:18). In Christ's divine nature He was totally perfect, but in His human nature He was subject to change. This change was not with regard to sin but with regard to normal human growth.

For example, Jesus is described as growing up as a child "increasing in wisdom and stature" (Luke 2:52). His growth was not only physical but experiential as He "learned obedience through the things He suffered" (Hebrews 5:8).

This does not mean that He grew from being sinful to holy, but that He grew in the totality of His experience throughout His life. He was perfected, or made complete, in His experience of obedience, not in His performance of obedience.

48. Hebrews states that Christ was tempted in all things (Hebrews 2:18; 4:15). How can Christ be God if He could be tempted? James 1:13 even says that God cannot be tempted. On the other hand, if Christ really is God and therefore cannot sin, how could He be really tempted and sympathize with our weaknesses? What kind of temptation would this be?

All orthodox scholars agree that Christ did not actually sin and all agree that Christ's temptations were a real example for us. However, there is a disagreement over the question of whether Christ could have sinned.

Those who believe Christ could have sinned (a view known as "peccability") would solve this difficulty by arguing:

- a. Temptation implies the possibility of sin. Temptation by definition must involve susceptibility.
- b. Since Christ fully shared temptation, He is an actual example for us to following in overcoming temptation.
- c. If Christ was fully man He must have been capable of sin.
- d. James 1:13 applies to Jesus in His divinity, not in his humanity. If Christ is God He only must be actually sinless. James 1:13 means the temptation of Christ in His divine nature is of no affect, it does not speak to the affect of temptation to Christ's human nature.

Those who believe Christ could not have sinned (a view known as "impeccability") would solve this difficulty in a different way:

- a. Christ's temptation is an example for us in His dependence upon the Spirit (Luke 4:1) and submission to the Father (Philippians 2:8; Luke 22:42; Hebrews 5:7-8). The analogy between our temptation and Christ's is not identical since Christ did not possess a sin nature.

- b. Temptation does not necessitate susceptibility. Temptation is valid whether a person yields to it or resists it.
- c. Christ was fully man and was not able to sin because He was also fully God. The two natures of Christ cannot be dissected. Christ cannot have possibly sinned because God cannot sin. Christ could not cease being God in order to sin.
- d. James 1:13 supports the view that Christ was not able to sin. Temptation in this verse includes the response of sin (cf. James 1:14).

The better view is that Christ could not sin. He is able to sympathize with our weaknesses in that He fully experienced human suffering and other pressures. In faith, we too can receive protection and deliverance from God (1 Corinthians 10:13).

49. Why does the Book of Hebrews (6:4-6; cf. 10:26-31) teach that Christians can lose their salvation when other passages (Romans 8:29-30; 8:38-39; John 6:38; Ephesians 4:30) teach otherwise?

Hebrews 6:4-6 is a difficult passage which is central to the incorrect belief that Christians can lose their salvation. This interpretation is not only in conflict with other passages but would result in the conclusion that once a person has lost his salvation, he can never be renewed again to repentance (Hebrews 6:6). Those who believe a Christian can lose their salvation typically believe the person can be saved again and again.

There are four other views of Hebrews 6:4-6 which seek to be consistent with the Biblical doctrine of eternal security:

- a. Some view this passage as a prohibition against attempting to be saved over and over again. To wrongly attempt to be saved again denies the sufficiency of the faith that brought the person to salvation in the first place. It is in continually seeking to be saved that he crucifies Christ again. However, the problem with the readers was they were in danger of “falling away,” not continually coming.
- b. Some consider this to be a hypothetical case. But why introduce a hypothetical? If it is not possible, then why discuss it?
- c. Some view this passage as a reference to the believer’s works and rewards. This view understands Hebrews 6:4-6 as a warning to Christians who drift away from the faith and become disqualified for future service (cf. 1 Corinthians 9:27), thus losing their reward for that future service. However, the focus of this passage is not works, but on faith and repentance.
- d. It is best to interpret this passage as a warning to those who have professed faith in Christ but who are in danger of leaving the Christian community and returning to Judaism.

This interpretation has the following advantages:

- 1) It is consistent with the doctrine of eternal security.
- 2) Other passages teach that there may come a time when a person cannot be saved (Matthew 12:31-32; Hebrews 12:15-17; 2 Peter 2:19-21; 2 Chronicles 36:13).
- 3) Repentance is a term usually associated with conversion, indicating those being referenced were unbelievers. It is the renewal for repentance that has occurred prior, not the repentance itself.
- 4) This view best fits the illustration of Hebrews 6:7-8.
- 5) This view best fits the Jewish audience and context of the book.

This would be similar to the unpardonable sin of Matthew 12:31-32, as it is impossible a person to be renewed to repentance if they have at one time been convicted of sin by the Holy Spirit and have rejected.

50. Why does Hebrews 9:3-4 misplace the altar of incense behind the veil in the Holy of Holies when Exodus 30:6 (cf. Exodus 26:33; 40:3) tells us that it was in front of the veil in the Holy Place?

Several of the proposed solutions for this difficulty are:

- a. One belief holds that the text of Hebrews 9 has been corrupted by a copyist and that the golden altar should be listed in verse two in the Holy Place. However, this solution is improbably due to very weak manuscript evidence.
- b. Another perspective is that Hebrews 9:3-4 is correct to place the altar in the Holy of Holies since Exodus 40:5 and 1 Kings 6:20 imply it was there also. However, this contradicts the Old Testament (Exodus 30:6-11), the New Testament (Luke 1:5-12, which puts the altar where ordinary priests served) and Jewish authorities like Philo and Josephus.
- c. A third viewpoint is there were two altars of incense, one inside the veil and the other outside the veil. However, there is absolutely no evidence of this and the author of Hebrews would then be omitting one of these altars.
- d. Another alternative is to consider the altar of incense as only inside the Holy of Holies in a doctrinal sense, not in a physical sense, since it was used as a part of the atoning sacrifice. However, the text appears to clearly describe physical location.
- e. Another better view is the veil was moved back on the Day of Atonement. On that one day (which is the subject of Hebrews 9) the altar became part of the offering in the Holy of Holies and behind the pulled back veil. This fits with the typology of Christ's sacrificial death removing the veil once for all time (Hebrews 10:10-11; cf. Matthew 27:5).

- However, there is no evidence that the veil was ever pulled back since the priest is described as going inside the veil on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:12-27).
- f. A more probable interpretation is understanding the term “golden altar” to be translated “golden censer.” This is an acceptable, though not usual translation and while it is rendered “golden altar” in most translations, it is rendered “censer” in the King James Version and in the margin of the NASB. This view leaves the altar in the Holy Place where it was used regularly (Luke 1:5-12) while putting the golden censer in the Holy of Holies where it would be used once a year (Leviticus 16:2, 12-13). The problem with this position is the author of Hebrews would have omitted the altar of incense, which is a more significant item than the censer. Also, the censer was probably made of brass or bronze to carry the hot coals, not gold.
 - g. A final improvement is the view that the altar of incense was moved into the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement. This understands Exodus 30:6 (cf. Exodus 40:5) as giving instructions for moving the altar on the Day of Atonement. It also fits with the placing of the altar in the “inner sanctuary” in 1 Kings 6:22 and incense being offered before God (Revelation 8:3-4; 9:13). Also, the non-canonical Jewish Apocalypse of Baruch describes the altar of incense in the Holy of Holies. Yet there is no explicit statement that tells us the altar was moved. And how could the high priest have moved the altar into the Holy of Holies by himself?

As a Jewish teacher familiar with the law, the author of Hebrews would have been familiar with the temple furniture. Had he indeed made a gross mistake with regard to the positioning of the furniture he would have lost credibility with his Hebrew readers. It is much more reasonable to opt for one of these possible solutions.

51. Why does Psalm 40:6 (“Sacrifice and meal offering Thou hast not desired; My ears Thou hast opened”) distorted in Hebrews 10:5 (“Sacrifice and offering Thou hast not desired, but a body Thou has prepared for Me”)?

Hebrews 10:5 follows the Septuagint, or the Greek translation of the Old Testament. However, this does not solve the difficulty because the New Testament citation must be accurate. There are two ways that have been proposed which harmonize this apparent misquotation:

- a. One approach is to see Hebrews 10:5 as a loose paraphrase of the concept referred to in Psalm 40:6, that the Messiah has been prepared by God for obedient service. That is, generally His body has been prepared by specifically His ears being opened. This then is a figure of speech (known as a synecdoche) in which one part stands for the whole.
- b. Some consider “My ears Thou hast opened” to be a Hebrew expression meaning “digging out the ears.” This is a Hebrew figure of speech signifying willing submission, a concept which was also found in Christ’s submission to the cross in being the one sacrifice for sin.

Either approach solves the charge of a misquotation by the author of Hebrews. Remember that citations do not have to be exact quotations as long as they faithfully represent the Old Testament text.

52. Did Jacob die in worship leaning on the top of his staff (Hebrews 11:21) or bowed at the head of his bed (Genesis 47:31)?

The Hebrew words for “staff” and “bed” are spelled the same in their consonants. It is only in their vowels that they differ and the Hebrew vowel points were not added until around 700 A.D. The Septuagint translates the Hebrew as “staff” while later Jews opted for “bed.”

In light of Hebrews 11:21 which clearly tells us the Jacob died leaning on the top of his staff, we can assume the correct translation of Genesis 47:31 is “staff” and the rendering “bed” would be a textual mistake made by later Jews in their insertion of the vowel points.

53. If God does not tempt us (James 1:13), then why did Jesus tell the disciples to pray for God not to lead them into temptation (Matthew 6:13) and why does Genesis 22:1 in the KJV say Abraham was tempted by God?

God did not tempt Abraham or anyone else to sin. God rather tested (NASB) Abraham’s faithfulness. The difference between testing and temptation is that testing is constructive and temptation is destructive. God tests us so that we may come forth as gold (Job 23:10). Testing is designed to result in endurance and sanctification (James 1:2), temptation may lead to sin and death (James 1:14-15).

God allows Satan to tempt us (Job 1-2; Matthew 4:1-10; James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:8-9) and we are also tempted by our own lustful desires (James 1:14-15). God’s purpose in allowing temptation is also to purify us and accomplish His will. While the temptation was not originally designed to edify, God is still able to bring about good. Thus we can say the words of Joseph with regard to temptation, “you meant it for evil against me, but God meant it for good” (Genesis 50:20).

54. Why does James 2:21 and 2:24 contradict Paul’s teaching that we are justified by faith and not by works (Romans 1:17, 4:5; Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5).

James and Paul are not contradictory because they are not addressing the same issue. James is speaking of justification before man and Paul is speaking of justification before God. Abraham’s faith justified him in front of others as he did deeds that could be seen by them (James 2:21-22). James explains that we must “show” our faith (James 2:18). True faith is evident in visible behavior.

Paul agrees with James that true faith is visible. After Ephesians 2:8-9 he explains, “we are Christ’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works.” Likewise, Titus 3:8 follows Paul’s statement on justification by faith in saying we should be careful to engage in good works. Even in the book of Romans, Paul states that true faith necessarily results in visible obedience, stating “the doers of the Law will be justified” (Romans 2:13).

Conversely, James agrees with Paul that faith is what justifies us before God when he writes, “Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness” (James 2:23). The root of justification is faith, the fruit of our justification is good works.

55. Why does the Bible condemn oath taking (James 5:12; cf. Matthew 5:33-37) when oaths are blessed by God (Genesis 21:24; Deuteronomy 6:13), when angels take oaths (Revelation 10:5-6) and when even God Himself took an oath (Hebrews 6:13)?

An oath is defined as “a declaration based on an appeal to God, or to some revered person or object, that one will speak the truth, keep a promise, remain faithful, etc.” The Bible does not condemn speaking the truth, making a promise, intending to remain faithful, etc. Indeed, God Himself makes promises.

The problem is not with making promises but with drawing a distinction between promises which are based on something and those which not. We must be faithful to our promises simply because it is God’s will that we mean what we say. Our character must be sufficient to back up our words. To have to invoke anything else to bolster our promises implies that our character is not of such depth that our word can be counted upon.

Actually, as a Christian all our promises are based on God since we are identified with God in Christ. We can not swear an oath to anything higher than upon the One whom our lives necessarily are united with.

When we take a courtroom oath, we are only declaring that which we are already bound to do — that is, to tell the truth (cf. Matthew 26:63-64). While we should be careful when we make promises beyond what we are already committed to as believers, we are only told to let our yes be yes and our no be no. What is forbidden is swearing upon something that will supposedly add credibility to our oath.

56. Why does James 5:17 say the drought during the days of Elijah was three and one-half years long when 1 Kings 17:1 and 18:1 say the drought was only three years long?

There are three reasonable solutions to this difficulty:

- a. Three years is a round number and the exact length was three-and-a-half years.
- b. The last year in Kings could be counted from the time of Elijah’s stay with the widow of Zarephthah, not the beginning of the drought.
- c. The drought lasted six months longer than the famine lasted and 1 Kings is speaking about the famine. It takes some time before a drought results in a famine.

All three of these solutions are conceivable and explain the apparent confusion.

57. Why does Peter teach that people are given a second chance for salvation after they die (1 Peter 3:19) when Hebrews 9:27 says men are appointed to die once and then they enter into judgment?

As Hebrews 9:27 states, men do not receive a second chance for salvation. There is no indication of a second chance elsewhere in Scripture and Luke 16:26 indicates it is impossible to escape hell (cf. John 3:36; 5:24).

There are several other interpretations 1 Peter 3:19 which do not allow for a second chance. The differences between them surround the following issues:

- a. Whether the “spirits now in prison” should be understood as humans or whether they should be understood as angels.
- b. When the proclamation to the “spirits now in prison” took place.

Below are five solutions which have been offered to this difficult passage:

- a. Some believe between His death and resurrection, Christ visited Hades and proclaimed victory over the spiritually dead. But this view rests on a doubtful interpretation of Ephesians 4:8. Also, why did Christ need to proclaim victory? And why single out only those of Noah’s day (1 Peter 3:20)?
- b. Some believe between His death and resurrection, Christ visited Hades and ushered the Old Testament saints into heaven. This view also rests on a doubtful interpretation of Ephesians 4:8. Also, Enoch (Genesis 5:24; Hebrews 11:5), Elijah (2 Kings 2:1; Luke 9:31) and Moses (Luke 9:31) appear to be with God before Christ’s death and resurrection. And again, why single out those people in the day of Noah?
- c. Some believe the proclamation is that of the gospel by the Lord through the apostles to people of their time who were lost in the prison of their sins (cf. Ephesians 2:14, 17). However, this view also fails to explain the reference to Noah. Also, living people are never referred to in the New Testament as spirits.
- d. Some see the spirits in prison as being the people of Noah’s day and the proclamation as being done by Christ through Noah to those people who were rebellious. 1 Peter 1:11 informs us that Old Testament prophets had the Spirit of Christ ministering through them. One problem with this interpretation is the chronological order seems to put the proclamation after the death of Christ (1 Peter 3:18).
- e. Another perspective is that after Christ’s death He visited the realm of the fallen angels who sinned according to Genesis 6 and proclaimed victory to them. 2 Peter 2:4-5 (the same author writing to the same people) may also allude to the judgment of these angels. Since the term “spirits” is normally used of angels (Hebrews 12:7, 14; Luke 10:20), this interpretation may be stronger.

58. Do people who have died have the opportunity to hear the gospel again (1 Peter 4:6) or is Hebrews 9:27 correct when it says men are appointed to die once and afterward they enter into judgment?

As discussed above, men do not have the opportunity to hear the good news and become saved after they have died. Four solutions have been offered to understand 1 Peter 4:6 in harmony with Hebrews 9:27:

- a. Some believe between His death and resurrection, Christ visited Hades and preached the gospel to Old Testament believers, ushering them into heaven.
- b. Some believe Christ preached the gospel to the fallen angels of 1 Peter 3:19.
- c. Some understand “those who are dead” be being only spiritually dead, not physically dead. This is then the preaching of the gospel to those alive on earth. However, since 1 Peter 4:5 is clearly referring to physical death, it seems probable that verse six is also speaking of physical death.
- d. The best view is probably that those who have heard the gospel while they were alive had the opportunity to receive eternal life. This view is consistent with the preaching being in the past and the state of death being in the present. Also, it understands spirit and flesh the same as in 1 Peter 3:18. There is no chance to hear the gospel after death.

59. Why does Peter say fallen angels have been cast into hell (2 Peter 2:4; cf. Jude 6) when the New Testament describes them as freely roaming the earth (cf. Matthew 12:22; 17:14-17; Acts 16:16-18; Revelation 16:14)?

There are two basic options which solve this apparent contradiction:

- a. One explanation is that Peter is only referring to those specific angels in Genesis 6 who sinned with women just before the flood. Therefore, this may account for this group being in hell while other fallen angels are loose. This interpretation observes the context of Noah in 2 Peter 2:5.
- b. Perhaps a better explanation is to interpret Peter as speaking about the ultimate destiny of the demons and not their present status. While they are under the official sentence of eternal damnation in the lake of fire (Revelation 20:10; cf. Matthew 8:29; Revelation 12:12), God has not yet executed this sentence. Greek grammar allows for a future event to be described in the past tense in order to emphasize the certainty of the event.

60. Why does John contradict himself by saying in 1 John 1:8, “If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves,” when he says in 1 John 3:9, “No one who is born of God practices sin?”

1 John 3:9 is in the present tense and should be understood as “continually” practices sin. If a person habitually practices sin, consistently and routinely exercising rebellion against God without repentance, he is not born of God.

This is consistent with the teaching of James that true faith necessarily produces good works (James 2:14-26). Both a believer and an unbeliever will commit sin, as 1 John 1:8 affirms, but only the unbeliever is content and comfortable with this rebellion and will tolerate it on a continual basis. The true believer will at some point demonstrate the fruit of repentance.

61. How can God promise forgiveness to all who seek it (cf. Acts 13:38-39; Romans 5:20; 1 John 2:1) when there is a sin which results in death (1 John 5:16)? Is God only willing to forgive some sins but not others? It is possible for a Christian to commit this sin and lose his salvation?

Even if “a sin leading to death” is understood as spiritual death, it would be consistent with the unpardonable sins which Jesus speaks of in Matthew 12:31-32. This does not need to imply that God is only willing to forgive some sins and not others. Rather, sin such as assigning the work of Jesus Christ to Satan (the unpardonable sin of Matthew 12:31-32) is clear evidence of a total and complete rejection of the revelation of God.

It is not that this specific sin is not within God’s power to forgive, but rather it is the result of a person who has rejected God’s full revelation to them. In essence, they have turned their back on God and cannot be renewed again to repentance (cf. Hebrews 6:4-6). The term “brother” in 1 John 5:16 would then be forced to mean a professing but not a true believer in order to be consistent with the doctrine of the security of the believer.

However, it is better to understand death in a physical sense rather than a spiritual sense, particularly since all sins lead to spiritual death unless forgiven (Romans 6:23).

There are several examples in the Scripture of sins which result in physical death:

- a. The lie of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11).
- b. Those who participated in the Lord’s Supper in an unworthy manner (1 Corinthians 11:29-30).
- c. The disobedience of Nadab and Abihu (Numbers 3:4).

It is very possible that the sins about which John is speaking are the types of sin which have a rapid consequence (the word “a” before sin is an interpretive translation which may wrongly imply there is only one sin which leads to physical death).

John stated in 1 John 5:14-15 that our prayers will be heard by God if they are according to God’s will. He is not encouraging prayer for what is contrary to God’s will and so we should not pray for God to halt His discipline of believers who are in sin (cf. 1 Corinthians 5:5). Some sins bring the discipline of the Lord even to the point of physical death.

62. How can Jude 9 include the fictional account of a dispute between Michael the archangel and the devil if it is inspired by God?

While it is true that the argument between Michael the archangel and the devil over the disposition of the body of Moses after his death on Mount Pisgah is not found in the Old Testament, it does not follow that this must then be a fictional account. Just because an event is not recorded in the Old Testament does not mean the event did not actually occur.

This account is thought to come from the pseudepigraphal (meaning false or spurious) book entitled "The Assumption of Moses," which exists in a single sixth century Latin manuscript discovered in Milan in 1861. It is considered to have been composed shortly after Herod the Great's death in 4 B.C. and is an account of the Jewish tradition of Moses' prophecy to Joshua at the threshold of the Promised Land.

While the writing itself is questionable in nature, it is a fallacy to conclude it to be devoid of all valid information as to the past. The oral tradition of the Jews is not inerrant but in areas of accuracy the guidance of the Holy Spirit enabled the truth to be incorporated into Scripture.

All truth is from God and the truth in Jewish tradition is sometimes included in God's Word. Biblical authors are not limited to citing only Scripture for support.

63. Why does Jude 14 cite the uninspired Book of Enoch as being a divinely authorized prophecy?

First of all, Jude 14 does not directly cite the pseudepigraphal Book of Enoch but only records the words of Enoch. It is possible that the words of Enoch are included both in the Book of Enoch and in Jude. Jude may have been using truthful Jewish tradition and not specifically quoting Enoch 1:9.

However, the Book of Enoch was written around 110 B.C. and Jude may well have been familiar with its contents. Yet the principle still holds that truth may be found in places outside of Scripture. Even the pagan work "Phaenomena 5" by Aratus contained truth which Paul quoted in his sermon on Mars Hill to the Athenians. Beyond that is the donkey which speaks for God in Numbers 22:28!

Just because an extra-biblical source is quoted does not mean that the quote is not true. Nor does the quotation necessarily affirm the validity of the entire Book of Enoch. It only guarantees the truth of the portion it quotes.

Certainly Enoch's communication with God is an established fact (Genesis 5:24; Hebrews 11:5) and it should not surprise us when we learn he made prophecies which were not recorded in the Old Testament.

G. Difficulties in the New Testament Book of Revelation

1. Orthodox Christian doctrine teaches the Trinity is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. If there is only one Holy Spirit, how can there be seven Spirits in Revelation 1:4?

One possibility is that these seven spirits are angels and do not refer to the Holy Spirit. However the context appear to speak of the Trinity since the the Father and the Son are spoken of in the same sentence. This may be why the NASB interprets Revelation 1:4 as seven Spirits.

If Revelation does reference the Holy Spirit, it does so in a symbolic way, not in a numerical way. Satan, for example, is depicted as a dragon with seven heads and ten horns in Revelation 12:3. The Holy Spirit is also symbolized as a dove (Mark 1:10) and wind (John 3:8).

The reference to the number seven may derive from Isaiah 11:2 where the Holy Spirit is called seven different titles — the Spirit of the Lord, of wisdom, of understanding, of counsel, of might, of knowledge, and of fear of the Lord. This would be seven different characteristics of the same Person, not seven different Holy Spirits.

2. Why does God have a specific number of people who will be saved? Doesn't the 144,000 in Revelation 7:4-8 limit God's grace when others may want to receive Him? Who are these elite people anyway?

First of all, even those who believe in man's free will in choosing salvation would not consider a specific number being saved as being a problem because God obviously foreknows ahead of time the number of the saved.

Even if you believe in universalism, you still will be left with a specific number of people who are saved! The problem then isn't that there is a specific number, but that the specific number is 144,000. This number seems so low as to be impossible.

There are two basic ways to understand the 144,000:

- a. Many interpret the number in a strictly spiritual sense, referring to all Christians. The most significant problems with this interpretation are:
 - 1) The 144,000 are from every tribe, which is never spoken of in anyway other than literally in the Scripture.
 - 2) It is impossible to take this number seriously if it speaks of the total number of Christians because many, many millions of believers are alive today, let alone throughout history.
 - 3) This is obviously not a reference to all Christians because Revelation 7:9 says there is a great multitude from all nations in addition to the 144,000 in heaven. The 144,000 are part of the saved, not the entire group.

- b. It is much better to interpret this passage literally as 144,000 Jews who will be saved during the seven year period of tribulation, 12,000 from each of the twelve tribes. This is the plain meaning of the text.

The alleged problems with this interpretation are:

- 1) The twelve tribes have been changed. The tribes of Dan and Ephraim have been eliminated and the tribes of Levi and Joseph have been added. However, there are good reasons for these changes.

The omission of Dan may be due to their decision to take land not allotted to them by force in Judges 18. Levi is included because there is no longer a need for a priestly tribe since Christ serves as the high priest forever. Ephraim is represented in his father, Joseph.

- 2) The number of 144,000 seems symbolic since it is a multiple of twelve and since it is a round number. However, when Jesus spoke of the twelve apostles judging the twelve tribes in the last day (Matthew 19:28), He was speaking of twelve literal apostles and twelve literal tribes.

There is no reason to take the 144,000 as figurative unless you also take the number twelve as figurative as well. Furthermore, just because a number is a round number does not mean it is figurative.

- 3) The Jews of today are unaware of their lineage. Those that claim to come from a tribe only regard themselves as from the tribe of Judah (though some Levines and Cohens consider themselves Levites). However, God has not lost any of the tribal lineage and this may even be revealed by God if necessary.

The promise of the restoration of Israel (Romans 11:11-26), the promises of land to Abraham's descendents (Genesis 15:18) which are yet to be fulfilled, and the implication of Jesus that He would restore the kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:6-8), each demand we understand Revelation 7 as speaking literally of the Jews in the tribulation period.

I. Appendix: Additional Bible Difficulties

1. What was the "purification ritual" in Esther 2?

First of all, we know for certain only what the Bible tells us of Esther's purification. Some commentators wrongly think this was a Persian religious purification ritual. Esther proved herself to be a brave, righteous, God fearing Jew and would not subject herself to a pagan process. She would die rather than do that and she proved her nerve when she went into the king's presence at risk of death to plead for her people.

Esther 2:7-14 says (New American Standard Bible):

"And he was bringing up Hadassah, that is **Esther**, his uncle's daughter, for she had neither father nor mother. Now the young lady was beautiful of form and face, and when her father and her mother died, Mordecai took her as his own daughter. So it came about when the command and decree of the king were heard and many young ladies were gathered to Susa the capital into the custody of Hegai, that **Esther was taken to the king's palace into the custody of Hegai, who was in charge of the women. Now the young lady pleased him and found favor with him. So he quickly provided her with her cosmetics and food, gave her seven choice maids from the king's palace, and transferred her and her maids to the best place in the harem.** Esther did not make known her people or her kindred, for Mordecai had instructed her that she should not make {them} known. And every day Mordecai walked back and forth in front of the court of the harem to learn how Esther was and how she fared. Now when the turn of each young lady came to go in to King Ahasuerus, after the end of her **twelve months under the regulations for the women—for the days of their beautification (purification) were completed as follows: six months with oil of myrrh and six months with spices and the cosmetics for women**—the young lady would go in to the king in this way: anything that she desired was given her to take with her from the harem to the king's palace. In the evening she would go in and in the morning she would return to the second harem, to the custody of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch who was in charge of the concubines. She would not again go in to the king unless the king delighted in her and she was summoned by name."

Notice the word in verse 12 is translated *beautification* rather than *purification* as in other translations. This is significant and more accurate to the original Hebrew word.

Before a virgin could be selected to come before the king of Persia there was, by written regulation, a time of preparation. This time of preparation is disclosed in the book of Esther as well as in secular sources.

The book of Esther was written during the time of Israel's captivity in Babylon. Babylon's king at this time was Ahasuerus. His palace was in Shushan. In this time the king of Babylon was powerful and influential. He dismissed his previous queen and so:

Esther 2:2 "Then the king's attendants, who served him, said, "Let beautiful young virgins be sought for the king."

There were three qualifications a young woman must possess to be chosen as the bride or even a consort of the king of Persia:

- She was to be beautiful
- She was to be young
- She was to be a virgin

The word beautiful is the Hebrew word TOWB and means "to be good, pleasant, agreeable, becoming, and of a higher nature." Only the best was good enough for the king.

She must be young. She must be a damsel, a lady, someone who is clean, chaste, not loud, rude, or boring; one who has been separated from all the world and worldly desires.

Lastly, she must be a virgin. The word virgin means "untouched, separate, undefiled, and pure."

Even though all the virgins were fair and young, they were still given the things needed for their further beautification. They were the choicest, the most beautiful, the chosen, and select of the kingdom, but before they could enter into the king's presence there was a process that had to be completed in each of their lives. This purification was to take one year. (This time also included a time of teaching in court etiquette).

There were six months purification with the oil of myrrh, (MOWR, a perfume used for cleansing). The purification process also consisted of a six month of spices and cosmetics, "sweet odors" applied following the oil of myrrh along with [other] things to make the women smell sweet and look even more beautiful. That is, everything was done to cleanse them from all impurities, to perfume, and adorn, and in every way prepare them for the king.

The virgins had one last preparation before entering into the king's presence:

Esther 2:13 "the young lady would go in to the king in this way: anything that she desired was given her to take with her from the harem to the king's palace."

The virgins could clothe themselves in any of the exquisite finery found in the king's house. All the royal apparel was there for their choosing but Esther did not choose that approach:

Esther 2:15, "Now when the turn of Esther, the daughter of Abihail, the uncle of Mordecai, who had taken her for his daughter, was come to go in unto the king, she required nothing but what Hegai the king's chamberlain, the keeper of the women, appointed. **And Esther obtained favor in the sight of all them that looked upon her.**"

2. Why does Hebrews 13:17 use terms like "obey" and "submit" to our church leaders when the word for "obey" means "to persuade" according to Vine's Expository Dictionary? Aren't we only required to follow our church leaders when we are sufficiently persuaded that this is the right thing to do?

"Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you" - Hebrews 13:17 (NASB)

"OBEY"

The word translated "obey" is PEITHESTHE, which is the second person, plural, imperative, middle of PEITHO. The word PEITHO, occurring 55 times in the N.T., can be translated in many ways: agree, assure, believe, confident, friend, obey, persuade, trust, urge and yield. The most common meaning of PEITHO is persuade, win over or trust.

However, when PEITHO is followed by a noun referring to a person or a thing in the dative case it is translated "obey or follow" (Bauer, Arndt & Gingrich, "A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, p. 639; Abbott-Smith, "Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament"). In Hebrews 13:17, "obey your leaders" is exactly this instance - the verb PEITHO followed by a noun in the dative case.

Other instances of this usage of PEITHO with the dative are:

1. Romans 2:8 "But to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth..." The truth is an absolute and is to be obeyed regardless of how persuaded we are about it.
2. Galatians 5:7 "You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth." Again, the truth is absolute.
3. James 3:3 "Now if we put the bits into the horse's mouths so that they may obey us, we direct their entire body as well." A bit in a horse's mouth hardly conveys the idea of persuasion! Obedience is clearly in mind here.
4. Galatians 3:1 (KJV) "O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth." Once again, the truth is absolute.

Note: This example is found only in the King James Version. The words "that ye should not obey the truth" are not found in the best Greek manuscripts. However, this does not weaken the significance of the example because it is still valid for determining how words were used.

5. Other extrabiblical literature support this rendering

- 4 Maccabees 10:13; 15:10; 18:1
- 2 Clement 17:5
- Diognetus 5:10
- Ignatius letter to the Romans 7:2a, 7:2b
- Hermas Mandate 12, 3, 3

- Hermas Similtude 8, 9, 3

Also, the two most accepted theological dictionaries support this position:

- Kittel, "Theological Dictionary of the New Testament." It says "The meaning can be "to obey" e.g. Hebrews 13:17 "Obey your leaders and submit to them," James 3:3 "of horses which obey the bit, and especially Romans 2:8 "to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth"
- Colin Brown, "Dictionary of New Testament Theology." It says "...in other places it means to obey, to follow (Gal. 5:7; Heb. 13:17; James 3:3)."

Furthermore, all major translations have chosen "obey" to translate this word in Hebrews 13:17:

- "Obey your leaders and submit to them" (NASB)
- "Obey your leaders and submit to their authority" (NIV)
- "Obey them that have rule over you and submit yourselves" (KJV)
- "Obey your leaders and submit to them" (RSV)
- "Obey your leaders and defer to them" (NEB)

Also, minor translations also echo this consensus:

- "Obey your leaders and follow their orders" (Today's English Version)
- "Obey your spiritual leaders and submit to them--continually recognizing their authority over you (Amplified)
- "Obey your spiritual leaders and be willing to do what they say" (Living)
- "Obey your rulers and recognize their authority" (Phillips)
- "Obey your leaders and yield to them" (Berkeley)
- "Obey your leaders and do as they tell you" (Jerusalem Bible)
- "Obey your prelates and be subject to them" (Douay)
- "Obey them that have rule over you and submit to them" (ASV)

Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words brings into question "obey" as a correct translation of PEITHO in Hebrews 13:17:

PEITHO, to persuade, to win over, in the Passive and Middle Voices, to be persuaded, to listen to, to obey, is so used with this meaning, in the Middle Voice, e.g. in Acts 5:36,37 (in ver. 40, Passive Voice, "they agreed"); Rom. 2:8;

Gal. 5:7; Heb. 13:17; Jas. 3:3. The obedience suggested is not by submission to authority, but resulting from persuasion.

What did Vine have in mind when he wrote "the obedience suggested is not by submission to authority, but resulting from persuasion"? We cannot be certain exactly what he meant but we can look at his evidence. Vine's statement could be taken to imply that if someone is not persuaded they do not need to submit or follow. We intend to show his conclusion is unwarranted and is lacking in supporting evidence.

As we see, Vine gives the common definition for PEITHO - to persuade. Also, Vine references the same verses which were mentioned earlier, Romans 2:8, Galatians 5:7 and James 3:3. In Galatians 5:7, Romans 2:8 and James 3:3 "obey" or "follow" is the only reasonable translation:

1. Romans 2:8 "But to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth..." The truth is an absolute and is to be obeyed regardless of how persuaded we are about it.
2. Galatians 5:7 "You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth." Again, the truth is absolute.
3. James 3:3 "Now if we put the bits into the horse's mouths so that they may obey us, we direct their entire body as well." A bit in a horse's mouth hardly conveys the idea of persuasion! Obedience and submission is clearly in mind here.

The horse (James 3:3) is not persuaded by the bit in his mouth, he has not option but to follow. Likewise, men (Galatians 5:7, Romans 2:8) are under an obligation to follow the truth. It is wrong for them not to obey the truth and if they disobey the truth they will suffer. It is clear that in these verses the idea of "persuade" is inappropriate, for men are under a moral obligation to follow truth whether they believe it or not.

The same perspective holds true for Hebrews 13:17. The word "obey" is in the command form in and so there is an outright command to obey the leaders. Just as with "obey" when it is followed by a noun in the dative case in other verses (Romans 2:8, , James 3:3, Galatians 3:1 (KJV) and 5:7), our disagreement does not remove our obligation to submit.

In addition, Vine's mentions one more verse to support his statement that obedience is to result from persuasion - Acts 5:36,37:

"For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody; and a group of about four hundred men joined up with him. And he was slain; and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. After this man Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census, and drew away some people after him, he too perished, and all those who followed him were scattered" (NAS)

Here the word used both times is EPEITHONTO, which is the third person, plural, indicative, passive of PEITHO. The fact that the indicative mood is used here is significant. The indicative mood represents a statement of fact while the

imperative mood (found in Heb. 13:17) is used for commands. This is why the translation used is "followed." It is simply descriptive.

Certainly the example of Acts 5:36,37 shows men as persuaded and therefore following. However, this verse is only of limited value when it comes to discussing Hebrews 13:17 because it only describes an incident and is not giving a command. It would be valid to render the translation in Acts 5:36,37 "were persuaded by" or "followed" or "obeyed."

However, Acts 5:36,37 does not give any proof for Vine's statement that "the obedience suggested is not by submission to authority, but resulting from persuasion." First, the passage only describes an incident where people were persuaded and obeyed a leader. It does not show that persuasion is essential for obedience, only that in this case it accompanied obedience. It is always ideal when obedience comes with being persuaded. Secondly, this description of the following is just that - a description - and is not a command. Hebrews 13:17 on the other hand is a command, not showing a following but demanding that the reader follow.

In light of the overwhelming evidence, the only reasonable translation of PEITHO in Hebrew 13:17 is "obey."

"Your leaders"

"Your leaders" (TOIS HEGOUMEMOIS) - dative, plural, masculine, participle, present of HEGOMAI) occurs 28 times and is translated in the KJV in the following ways: account, chief, count, esteem, governor, judge, rule, suppose, think). The NAS translates it "leaders." The NIV translates it "leaders." And the KJV translates it "them that have rule over you." Clearly in light of the command to obey the best option for this word is "leaders." The Hebrew Christians are being commanded to obey, to comply with, to fulfill the instructions of their leaders. In our church setting the application would be for those that fellowship at VBC to obey their elders who are the recognized leaders of the church. It is interesting to consider for a moment why the writer of Hebrews selected the word "PEITHO" rather than other words for "obey that he might have used. Colin Brown examined the word in the section entitled "faith." He considered two words in this section "PEITHO" and "PISTIS" (faith). This is what he said about the grouping: "The words dealt with here are basically concerned with that personal relationship with a person or thing which is established by trust and trustworthiness." Why would the writer of Hebrews pick "PEITHO" to express the concept of obedience? It is very likely that he selected it because the leaders (elders) are individuals who have proven and are proving themselves to the fellowship (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; Hebrews 13:7 and Hebrews 13:17). They are not like governors who are placed over them by the whims of the political system. They are not like parents who are placed over them at birth. The leaders are men who have been chosen or appointed because they have proven themselves worthy of trust. The obedience therefore is not based upon fear of the sword or the rod. Our obligation to obey is not based upon whether or not we are in agreement with the leaders but solely upon their position as leaders.

"Submit"

"Submit" (HUPEIKETE) - 2nd person, plural, present, imperative of HUPEIKO) is only found one time in the New Testament. It literally means to "yield under." The Hebrew Christian perspectives of various issues might be quite different from their leaders but they are to bring their thoughts, preferences and desires under their leaders. They are to yield to the leaders. Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich says it means "to yield, submit to one's authority." Notice the reference to authority. You might say, "I thought our obedience was based on the trustworthiness of the leaders?" This is true but this does not mean that the leaders (elders) do not have authority. The scriptural commands for obedience and submission to such men constitutes the ground for their authority. Church leaders can command us on the basis of this authority to submit but the submission that the Lord wants from us in this passage is a submission that is willingly and freely given in response to their lives and ministry.

This is by far the most prevalent understanding of those commenting on this epistle. Philip Hughes, "Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews" says,

The recipients of this letter, who have already been exhorted to remember and to imitate the faith of their former leaders already dead (Heb. 13:7), are now enjoined to obey their present leaders. Such an admonition implies the author's confidence in the ability and genuineness of this leadership, and it suggests that the community to whom he is writing is not as a whole giving these leaders the respect that is due. It may perhaps be that the occasion of the epistle was the reception by its author of a report, either in writing or in person, from these leaders of the potentially serious situation which was developing among those over whom they had been placed. Christian leadership is intended for the advantage of all, not just for the advantage of those who hold positions of authority, and good and successful leadership, is to a considerable degree dependent on the willing response of obedience and submission on the part of those who are under authority. "Anarchy," says Chrysostom, "is an evil, the occasion of many calamities and the causes of disorder and confusion;" moreover, "a people that does not obey a ruler is like one that has none, and perhaps even worse." We can all understand, then, Paul's appeal to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work (1 Thess. 5:12 ff.)

The following commentaries repeat the same basic thought: Wuest, "Hebrews Verse by Verse;" Lange "Commentary on the Holy Scriptures;" Guthrie "Hebrews." Particularly interesting is Strauch's book "Biblical Eldership."

Why is this so important? The first reason is "for they keep watch over you souls, as those who will give an account..." (NAS). The NIV translates this, "They keep watch over you as men who must give an account." The leaders are described as "keeping watch" (AGRUPNOUSIN, 3rd person, plural, present, indicative of AGRUPNEO). It literally means "keep oneself awake, be awake; metaphorically it means "to keep watch over something, to guard, to care for it" (Bauer, Arndt & Gingrich).

What are the leaders keeping watch over? They are keeping watch over people. The word for "you" or "souls" is PSYUCHON (genitive plural of PSUCHE). This word is used 155 times in the N.T. and is a multi-sided word. In this context it appears to be used as a personal pronoun. This is why we see it in the NIV translated "they keep watch over you." The leaders of the church are watching over the lives of those in the fellowship. They are very much like loving parents within the Christian community in the sense of their care and concern. In a footnote in Philip Hughes' commentary on Hebrews he said the following, "The noun is better rendered by the personal pronoun "you" in the NEB. It is frequently used in the N.T. for individuals or persons (see, for example, Acts 2:41, 43; 3:23; 7:14; 27:37; 1 Peter 3:20) and to translate it "souls" in such cases can easily lead to misunderstanding. The Christian pastor's concern is not merely for the "souls" of those entrusted to his care but for their human experience in its entirety.

The second reason this issue is important is found in the next phrase "let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you." The NIV translates it, "obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you." The KJV translates it "That they may do it with joy, and not with grief, for that is unprofitable for you."

How were the Hebrew Christians to bring joy to their leaders? By obeying and submitting. How would the Hebrew leaders bring grief? By not obeying and submitting. If they in fact do cause their leaders grief the authors of Hebrews tells them that this will be "unprofitable." This is the only occurrence of this word in the N.T. It simply means that their lack of obedience and submission would be unprofitable for them. Strauch in commenting on this particular section made the following statement:

Unless all brothers and sisters submit themselves to the governing authority of the elders, the Christian community will not enjoy the unity, peace, love, and truth that are to characterize the life of the church. If the sheep wander and chafe under the shepherd's direction and protection, the shepherds will be unable to do their work effectively. All will suffer. Elders are dependent, then, on the people's submission for progress, vitality, and safety of the church.

Having completed this examination of Hebrews 13:17, hopefully it will be apparent to all the importance of a proper understanding of these truths.

3. How can James 5:14-15 promise that God will heal those who are anointed with oil and prayed for by the elders since this does not occur?

This passage is probably one of the most complex parts of Scripture in the entire Bible. This is not because James is confusing but because there are several elements within this passage that are easily misunderstood. Simply put, James is not teaching about *physical* healing here but *spiritual* healing. Continue reading for detailed explanation of why this is so.

The Translation of James 5:14-15

The biggest problem that must be overcome in order to understand James 5:14-15 as dealing with spiritual weakness rather than physical sickness comes from the English translations. These translations advance the physical sickness interpretation. Perhaps the main reason why this passage is considered to be difficult to interpret is that interpreters seek to fit physical healing into a context of spiritual weakness, resulting in many difficult issues.

In order to help understand that the English translations lead the reader directly to an understanding of James 5:14-15 as being a physical illness, below are the several places where a more interpretive translation was chosen over a more basic, less interpretive translation:

- * “Sick” (ASTHENEIO) in James 5:14 has a basic meaning of “weak.”
- * “over” (EPI) in James 5:14 has a basic meaning of “for.”
- * “anointing” (ALEIPSANTE) in James 5:14 has a basic meaning of “rubbing.”
- * “offered in” in James 5:15 has a basic meaning of “of.”
- * “restore” (SOZO) in James 5:15 has a basic meaning of “save.”
- * “Sick” (KAMNO) in James 5:15 has a basic meaning of “weary.”

This passage would be easier if the translators did not lead the reader to the physical sickness interpretation of this passage.

If we eliminate the bias in the translations toward a physical sickness or a spiritual weakness and simply translate the words according to their basic meaning, the James 5:14-15 would read:

“Is anyone among you weak? He ought to call the elders of the church to pray for him, applying oil in the name of the Lord;

and the prayer of faith will save the one who is weary, and the Lord will raise him and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him.”

An obvious question is “why do the English translations use words that depict a physical illness?” It is important to understand that translations have a historical context. Anointing the sick with oil is a Roman Catholic sacrament known as Extreme Unction. The main text used to support the doctrine of Extreme Unction is James 5:14-15. This sacrament influenced the translation of the King James Version, which was produced by the Church of England (which held to nearly all the Roman Catholic doctrines) in 1611. Until very recently, the KJV has been the standard for translations therefore for the NIV, NASB, etc to deviate from using the word “sick” in James 5:14-15 was no small thing.

It is likely that modern translations will continue the translational tradition and render this passage as dealing with “sick” because of the theological background of the translators. Most of those who hold the perspective of the weakness being spiritual are from a Bible-oriented theology (such as John MacArthur), not from a liturgical or charismatic theology. Since translations include a diverse group of beliefs, the status quo interpretive translation will probably remain.

Simply put, the translation affects the interpretation and the interpretation affects the translation. Before we examine each phrase on this passage and its

context, we must understand that the English translations have unfortunately provided an interpretation for us. This will help us to consider a better interpretation of James 5:14-15.

The Meaning of “Sick” (James 5:14)

The meaning of the word usually translated “sick” (astheneo) in James 5:14 is simply “weakness,” literally “not strong.” It is the context that determines the cause of the weakness, whether the weakness is of a spiritual nature or of a physical nature.

In the gospels we find the weakness to be of a physical nature, usually of a disease or affliction, and “sick” is an appropriate translation. In the epistles we find the weakness to rarely mean physically sick and normally refers to a spiritual weakness. The word therefore can be used in either sense. The question at hand is in what sense does James use the word?

The argument for this word being used in the physical sense in James 5:14 centers around its use in the gospels. The epistle of James reflects the gospels, particularly the themes of the Sermon on the Mount. This weighs in favor of a usage similar to the gospels. Of course James is an epistle, which favors a common word usage with the same type of literature. The early date of the writing of James is insignificant since it was written only a very few years (less than seven) before Paul’s began to write his epistles. Words don’t change that much in a very few years.

Word meaning is determined by **context**. In the immediate context, there is a second word for “sick” that James uses. “Sick” in James 5:15 (KAMNO) primarily means growing weary or becoming fatigued (BAG; Thayer). It means “to be weary, faint, as from labor, distressed with labor or anything else” (Bullinger).

Furthermore, and significantly, the only other New Testament occurrence of the word “sick” (KAMNO) found in James 5:15 is in Hebrews 12:3. Hebrews 12:3 uses the word to mean “grow weary” and it is used in the context of struggling against sin. Note that the spiritual problem in both Hebrews 12 and James 5 are related to Jewish Christians struggling to endure. The word “weary,” translated “sick” in James 5:15 is used in a spiritual sense, not a physical sense, in its other occurrence in the New Testament.

Unless we believe that “weary” in James 5:15 (KAMNO) is a different problem than “weak” in James 5:14 (which no one suggests) then this observation weighs strongly in favor of a similar usage that is consistent with Hebrews 12:3, especially in light of the common Jewish audience of both of these epistles.

Another strong argument for understanding “weak “ (astheneo) in James 5:14 comes from the context of the epistle of James as a whole.

The book context is sin. From the beginning of the book to the end of the book, James speaks solely about issues of spiritual weakness and nothing about physical illness. What is in his mind throughout and what should be in the

reader's mind throughout is their spiritual state of being, not the physical health.

This also explains why the gospels use “weakness” in the context of the physical and the epistles use “weakness” in the context of the spiritual. The gospels are narrative accounts of the life of Christ and the epistles are teaching on living the Christian life. Since much of Christ's ministry was directed toward miracles of healing who were diseased or afflicted, it stands to reason that those accounts will use the word “weakness” in a physical sense. Since the teaching of the epistles are to the church and address sin and spiritual growth, it is no surprise that we find the word used to speak of spiritual weakness.

The basic argument for “sick” (ASTHENEIO) meaning physically ill comes from its usage in the gospels. This has been necessary since its usage in the epistles support a meaning of spiritually weak. Since James has some similarity with the gospels in terms of theme, particularly the Sermon on the Mount, since James is an early epistle and since James was (very likely) the brother of Jesus, the idea is he would have used terms in a “gospel way” rather than an “epistle way.” The same argument is also used with the term “healed” (IAOMAI) in James 5:16. This very same argument would also be expected to be applied to the word “restore” in James 5:15. Both “healed” and “restore” are generally used in the gospels in a physical sense and in the epistles in a spiritual sense.

The word SOZO, translated “restore” in James 5:15 is used normally in terms of physical restoration in the gospels and in terms of spiritual restoration in the epistles. It is the normal word used for salvation in the epistles. This gospel vs. epistle division exists with this word as well. If, as with “sick” (ASTHENEIO) and with “healed” (IAOMAI), we have this word used in one place in James we would be left with considering which meaning fit better based upon the context. Those who put an emphasis on the word usage in the gospels would claim that James uses the same terminology of the very early church and would see this as supporting a physical restoration in James 5:15 back to physical health.

However, we do have other usages of the word SOZO in James. James 1:21 (“receive the Word implanted which is able to save your souls”), James 2:14 (“can that faith save him”), James 4:12 (“the one who is able to save and to destroy”) and in the near context of James 5:20 (“will save his soul from death”). In each of these cases, James clearly uses the word SOZO in an “epistle way” rather than a “gospel way.” This word usage of SOZO in other places in James not only leads us to view “restore” in James 5:15 as a spiritual restoration, consistent with how he uses term elsewhere, but has bearing on “sick” (ASTHENEIO) and “healed.”

We have the opportunity to see this argument of “gospel usage” vs. “epistle usage” played out and found that in this case James uses the terminology of the epistles. He uses the word SOZO similarly to Paul rather than the gospel writers. This observation should cause us to consider that James uses the terms for “sick” (ASTHENEIO) in 5:14 and “healed” (iaomai) in 5:16 also like the other epistles — in a spiritual sense, not a physical sense.

The calling of the elders in James 5:14

First a few observations:

- * The elders (plural) are called.
- * The person is commanded to call for the elders.
- * The prayer of faith is promised to bring restoration (literally, “salvation”).

Second, a few questions for those viewing the weakness as a sickness:

- * Why are the elders of the church involved? Are the elders uniquely able to pray for the sick? James 5:16-18 opens the task of praying for healing to any righteous man, not just the elders.
- * Why are they called? Why must they be with the sick person?
- * When the elders pray with faith, will that always restore the sick person to health?
- * Why not call for a physician or someone that possessed the gift of healing? James was an early epistle and the gift of healing was still functioning in the church at the time of the writing.
- * Why call for more than one elder if one person’s prayer can be effective to bring about the restoration (cf. James 5:16-18)?
- * How is this to be applied? Since everyone gets ill and since this is a command, when do I call for the elders? Which sicknesses do the elders pray for and what sicknesses do we simply pray for “one another” (James 5:16)?

The answer to why the elders are called is much easier to explain if the weakness is understood to be spiritual. The elders are not uniquely able to pray, but they are uniquely responsible for the spiritual oversight of the person.

It also solves the problem of why “elders” is plural. Since the elders are responsible for the spiritual oversight of the church, then we should expect those who together share that responsibility to be contacted when a person is spiritually weak and in need of care. The prayer is not more effective with more elders praying (cf. James 5:16-18).

It also will bring restoration, considering it is more than reasonable to assume the one who is weak is praying with the elders in faith. This can be assumed since the person called the elders in the first place. What is lacking is the person’s knowledge of how to draw near to God. This is the role of the elders, to guide him in prayer to be spiritually healed. When they together pray in faith, restoration will occur. This is reflected in the previous chapter of James, the person will then “draw near to God” (James 4:8) and God will draw near to him. There is no need for any qualifications for this direct promise.

God is holding the elders accountable to keep watch over the souls of the church (Hebrews 13:17) and He desires those with spiritual weakness to seek them out for help. While many Christians can provide this type of ministry, the elders have the specific responsibility.

Furthermore, if you were going to advise people who are dispersed (James 1:1) and in spiritual need to receive help, who would you tell them to contact? You should not advise them to contact any Christian they knew and like, for they are

not in a position to evaluate the kind of help they are being offered. You should advise them to contact their church leaders, who are more likely to be qualified to care for their souls. This is harder to appreciate now that elders may be unqualified in many churches. At the time of this writing, elders would be expected to be of significant spiritual aid.

Understanding James 5:14-15 as dealing with spiritual weakness fits well with James 5:16. We all need to confess our sins to one another and pray for one another for spiritual healing. Only those who are unable to function in this way with one another in the church (thus spiritually weak) should ask for assistance from the elders through prayer. Not everyone is able simply to confess and repent. They need help to turn from the error of their way (James 5:19-20).

Some have argued that the elders are called to go to the person and this implies that the person is physically unable to go to the elders. However, the text only says that the elders are to be called. It does not say the elders are to necessarily go. This is reading something into the text. The text does not say or even imply that the person is physically unable to go to the elders. (Certainly this passage is not directed to only the bed-ridden!) The word for call (PROSKALEOMAI) often means to summon but it also means to request help for a particular task (cf. Acts 13:2; 16:10). The focus is on the prayer, not on who goes where.

James is addressing the person who is in need. Therefore, he is giving the person in need the responsibility, not just waiting for elders to come but that he should ask the elders for help. After all, the elders may not even be aware of the sickness and therefore need to be called.

The fact that the elders are being called speaks strongly to a spiritual ministry, not a physical one. A spiritual ministry for the weak (including prayer) requires personal contact, prayer for physical illness does not. A spiritual ministry for the weak requires people who are spiritual (cf. Galatians 6:1).

As the book unfolds, the “tests of a living faith” build toward a conclusion. What should a person do if he is failing these tests? He should act. In fact, he is commanded in this passage to act to get his relationship with God right.

Should he do this alone, by himself? He needs other people to help him, like we all do (cf. James 5:16). He should request help from those who are qualified and capable to help him. Even more than that, he should seek help from those who are specifically responsible to God for overseeing his spiritual life.

Will this be too time-consuming for the elders? It will be more time-consuming to teach that those who are physically ill are required to obey God’s command and call the elders to pray with them for their physical healing. After all, most of us will become physically ill, but most of us are able to continue to follow God with the mutual accountability of fellow believers in Christ (cf. James 5:16).

The elders can pray for someone’s physical health without personal contact but they cannot fulfill their responsibility for spiritual oversight without personal contact by someone. After all, what better use of time than to meet with people to pray for their spiritual lives?

In contrast, to teach this passage as addressing physical illness will have the elders diverted from their responsibility as spiritual overseers. The elders will be meeting with people for prayer about what people think is most important, their physical health, and the church will not be instructed to involve themselves with the elders in what is truly critical, their spiritual state.

The meaning of “pray over him, anointing him with oil

in the name of the Lord” in James 5:14

The phrase “pray over him” has nothing to do with the physical positioning of the bodies of the elders in relation to the body of the weak one. A better translation is simply “pray for him.” This is a normal meaning of the Greek preposition “EPI” and avoids the problems that come with a believing that positioning of the body is important to effective prayer. Of course, “pray for him” does nothing to advance a spiritual or physical interpretation of this passage.

The phrase “anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord” is debated to be either the application of medicine, symbolic of the Holy Spirit, or a cultural means of refreshment. Oil is not only a very ineffective medicine according to today’s medical standards, it was equally so 2,000 years ago. Oil was not and is not going to assist the healing process. Medicines existed during the apostolic age for various ailments and oil was not used to bring a cure, but only a comfort.

The problem with viewing this as symbolic of the Holy Spirit is the word “anoint” (ALEIPHO) actually means rubbing or smearing. It is not the usual word for ceremonial, ritualistic or sacrament anointing (CHRIO). Although considering the application of oil to be symbolic of the Holy Spirit is not likely, this interpretation would not take away from the conviction that the issue in James 5:14-15 is spiritual, not physical.

The practice of anointing with oil in connection with physical healing has a weak biblical basis. Jesus never used oil in any of His healings. The book of Acts does not reference oil being used in healing. Only in one case, Mark 6:13, in anointing (ALEIPHO) used for the sick. Thus we can conclude that anointing with oil was certainly not a critical element in helping the sick.

Also, since only Mark 6:13 of all the occurrences of anoint (ALEIPHO — cf. Matthew 6:17; Mark 16:1; Luke 7:38, 46; John 11:2; 12:3) in the New Testament have anything to do with the physically sick, it is impossible to suggest that James 5:14 must refer to the sick. Mark 6:13 does not state why the sick were anointed, only that they were. We should not think that when people are anointed they must be sick (from Mark 6) anymore than we should think that when people are anointed they must be Jesus (from John 11, 12 and Mark 16).

In the New Testament we find a wide variety of people helped with oil, the sick (Mark 6:13), the injured (oil and wine poured in Luke 10:34, not bringing a cure but a comfort), the weary (Matthew 6:17), the healthy (Luke 7:38, 46) and the dead (Mark 16:1). Neither the medicinal view, nor the ceremonial view of the used of oil is consistent with every occurrence. Yet in each case you can

understand the anointing with oil as a demonstration of honor or refreshment. It is best to understand anointing with oil as simply a cultural refreshment to the weary (cf. Matthew 6:17; Mark 6:13; Luke 10:34) or a cultural demonstration of honor (cf. Luke 7:38, 46; John 11:2, 12:3; Mark 16:1).

The anointing with oil was simply a culturally-bound expression of care and/or honor for all types of people in all sorts of conditions. This can be applied today in other ways that express care and honor in order to assist our spiritual ministry and to help people who are spiritually weary.

The meaning of “the prayer offered in faith” (James 5:15)

This phrase literally says “the prayer of faith.” It is the common grammatical construction for use of the Greek noun form called the genitive. There are many options for interpretation and the grammatical construction does not lead us to see this is anything more than simply “the prayer of faith.”

This could be understood in many ways, such as the prayer offered in faith, the faithful prayer, the prayer which is prayed faithfully, the prayer which is to express faith, the prayer which is derived from faith, the prayer which contains faith, the prayer which is associated with faith, etc. Far from a special or technical phrase, it is common, both in vocabulary and grammar and there is no reason to impart to it any unique elements.

The best understanding of this phrase is as a genitive of purpose, “the prayer which is to express faith.” This prayer is participated in by the one who is spiritually weak and it is this prayer, with and led by the elders, that expresses faith, that brings healing and if necessary, brings forgiveness. The text does not expressly say that one who called the elders is praying, but the implication is clearly that their faith is present, even in the calling of the elders.

The meaning of “will restore the one who is sick” (James 5:15)

The word translated “restore” (SOZO) in James 5:15 literally means “save” and is used normally in terms of physical restoration in the gospels and in terms of spiritual restoration in the epistles. It is the normal word used for salvation in the epistles.

There are other occurrences of the word SOZO in James. James 1:21 (“receive the Word implanted which is able to save your souls”), James 2:14 (“can that faith save him”), James 4:12 (“the one who is able to save and to destroy”) and in the near context of James 5:20 (“will save his soul from death”). In each of these cases, James clearly uses the word SOZO to speak of the soul, not the body. This word usage of SOZO in other places in James is another strong argument that leads us to view “restore” in James 5:15 as a spiritual restoration, or salvation.

Furthermore, the prayer offered in faith will result in salvation, or restoration. This is a direct statement of fact and if the weakness is understood as spiritual then the prayer of faith (with the implied participation of the weak one) will certainly bring salvation or restoration.

Those who view the weakness as a physical illness are challenged to explain this promise of restoration. The usual explanation is that this promise is qualified by passages such as 1 John 5:14-15 restricting God's answer to only that which is according to His will. While certainly God only acts in accordance with His will, understanding this passage as speaking to a spiritual weakness requires no such qualifications. Also, do those who advocate this truly believe that God is more responsive to the prayers of the elders as they gather for prayer? In practice, with regard to physical illness, it appears that this qualification to the prayer of the elders is not the exception to this direct statement, but rather the rule.

A few have attempted deal with the prayer resulting in physical healing in unique fashion, believing that it was only the elders of the apostolic church who knew God's will and thus could pray the prayer of faith. While this view takes the promise of restoration at face value it nevertheless results in a number of difficulties.

First, it means James 5:14-15 would be the only passage in this epistle not to have an application for today. Second, while it is the elders that supposedly know it is the will of God for the healing to occur, it is the weak person who takes the initiative to make the request. It is not the elders who select those who God has revealed His will about. If the elders have God's revealed will concerning physical illness, why are they not selecting out those who would be healed? Third, we have to make the unlikely assumption that every church has at least one elder that is receiving special revelation from God. Fourth, if the ill who are commanded to call the elders actually obey this command, then no one who obeyed would ever die from illness until after the passing of the apostolic age. Fifth, this view is not supported elsewhere in the Bible. Nowhere else is this type of elder function even hinted at, nor is it a qualification for an elder.

The fact that "will restore" is a definite promise according to the Greek grammar, that "restore" is always used by James in a spiritual sense and that "sick" is only used in the New Testament in a spiritual sense makes this phrase very difficult to view as addressing a physical illness.

The meaning of "the Lord will raise him up" (James 5:15)

The image often presented for this passage is an incapacitated ill person who upon the prayer of the elders is "raised up" to health. A study of the word "raise" offers little support for this imagery.

The word "raised" (EGEIRO) occurs over 100 times in the New Testament. Over half of those times involve people rising from the dead, usually the resurrection of Christ. Another 30 times the word references people who are asleep, sitting, etc. and are getting up. Another 11 occurrences refer to people who have arisen to prominence or in war. In 8 places the New Testament uses "raised" (EGEIRO) to mean getting up from a sickness and in two places it means arising from being spiritually dead (Romans 13:11; Ephesians 5:14).

While this is hardly conclusive to whether the weakness of James 5:14-15 is spiritual or physical, it does show that the main usage deals with Christ's

resurrection. Remembering that our salvation is based upon Christ's resurrection and that we have been raised up with Christ (Colossians 3:1; cf. Romans 6:4; 1 Corinthians 15:20) through faith, this then fits with the salvation mentioned in the prior phrase.

When we are saved ("restored" in 5:15), we are also raised up with Christ. This will one day be bodily but its present expression is spiritually.

The meaning of "and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him" in James 5:15

This phrase is further evidence that James 5:14-15 is speaking of a spiritual problem.

The word "if" is a third class Greek conditional clause that refers to the possibility of, but not the necessity of, something. The person may have committed sins or he may not have committed sins. Since we know that everyone has committed sins (Romans 3:10) we must conclude that these sins in James 5:15 are not all sins but a subset of all sins. What defines this subset is that these sins are still without God's forgiveness.

What sins are not forgiven by God? Believers in Christ have all their sins forgiven by God and unbelievers have none of their sins forgiven by God. Therefore, these forgiven sins are sins that have been committed by those who are without forgiveness, namely unbelievers. James 5:20 confirms this view by describing those who are in need of the salvation of their soul as "sinners." All are sinners, but those who are identified as having sin are the unsaved in need of forgiveness. The "anyone among you" of the "twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad" (James 1:1) includes some unbelievers (similar to the Book of Hebrews). This is supported by observing that the judgment that is referenced as a possibility in James 5:12 is the eternal judgment of the unsaved (the word for judgment (KRISIS) is never used in the New Testament to refer to believers). Furthermore, whenever the forgiveness of God is used in the New Testament, it refers to that which brings people to salvation and into the kingdom of God.

Most view the forgiveness in James 5:15 as breaking a believer's fellowship with God. While I disagree with this understanding of forgiveness in the New Testament, it is important to note that one's view of the forgiveness has no affect on the issue of whether the weakness spoken of is spiritual or physical. John MacArthur, for example, believes that the problem addressed in James 5:14-15 is spiritual rather than physical, yet disagrees on the nature of the forgiveness.

The bottom line is that with this phrase we have an undeniable spiritual weakness, giving more evidence that this is what this passage is speaking about.

The Context of James 5:14-15

The context of James 5 gives us even more strong evidence that James 5:14-15 is speaking about a spiritual weakness rather than a physical sickness. It is important to note that James writes in a context. What he writes builds on what

he has written and his statements are not disconnected. This book is not a loose collection of teaching but is a unified whole.

The preceding context, the following context and the context of the entire book give not so much as a hint of sickness. Rather, spiritual difficulty is the topic of the book — beginning, middle and end.

The context: James 5:7-11

The context preceding James 5:14-15 is suffering. Understanding “sick” in James 5:14-15 as spiritual weakness fits with the context of James 5:7-11.

Suffering in James 5:10 and 13 refers to persecution. This suffering is not related to physical illness or disease at all. This is seen by both the context of James 5:7-11 and the usage of the word “suffering” (KAKOPATHEO) elsewhere in the New Testament (2 Timothy 2:9; 4:5).

While a physical issue related to persecution is likely present in James 5:7-11, this is not the concern of James. James does not address the physical state of the readers but instead he addresses the spiritual state of the readers. He does not give them any help on how to feel better physically. His purpose is to minister to their spiritual lives. Will they endure with patience? This is then consistent with the rest of the book of James, which deals exclusively with spiritual concerns and guiding the readers toward spiritual maturity.

The context of James 5:7-11 fits much better with understanding “sick” in 5:14-15 as spiritual weakness because the goal in both passages would be, as with the book as a whole, spiritual growth. Those who are unable to endure in 5:7-11 are “weak” (5:14) and need help in their spiritual life. Thus the entire book addresses the same audience. Those who are failing the “tests of a living faith” require the personal ministry of prayer and care by those who are responsible for overseeing their spiritual lives.

The purpose of James 5:14-20 is “healing.” Phrases describing the purpose of this passage include, “so that you may be healed” (5:16), and “will restore the one who is sick” (5:15). If this healing is with regard to physical illness then James’ purpose for his instruction would be different than that in James 5:7-11. If this healing is in regard to spiritual weakness, then James’ purpose would be identical to his purpose in James 5:7-11.

When James instructs them to pray if they are suffering (5:13), this is not a prayer for physical healing. (To think it is such would mean calling the elders for prayer for this also). This must be understood in light of his words to them about the suffering. He calls them to pray for endurance. James does not seek to bring physical healing to those suffering. Rather James’ goal in 5:7-11 is spiritual strength and endurance not physical healing. So too is his goal in James 5:14-20.

Therefore, the preceding context of James 5:7-11 favors understanding the weakness in James 5:14-15 in a spiritual sense.

The context: James 5:12

How does James 5:12 fit with the flow of thought of James 5? Why does James restate the words of Jesus (cf. Matthew 5:34-37)? What does this have to do with suffering (5:10, 13) and endurance (5:11)? Why is this verse “above all”?

James 5:12 serves as the hinge verse for the last chapter of James. Prior to verse 12 we see the difficulties and suffering, along with the need to patiently endure. Some are not patiently enduring. They are in danger of falling away (similar to some of the readers of the Book of Hebrews). To not let their yes be yes and their no, no; that is, to not follow through on their commitments was bringing them into judgment.

James refers to the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:34-37 not to simply restate Christ’s teaching but to apply Christ’s teaching to their life. They must be patient until the coming of the Lord (James 5:7-8) even in the midst of suffering (James 5:1-6, 10-11) and to continue their professed commitment to Christ.

This judgment (KRISIS) referred to in James 5:9 is never used in the New Testament to refer to believers. It refers to the eternal judgment of the unsaved. Those who do not let their yes be yes, who do not fulfill their professed commitment to Christ, who do not patiently endure suffering but turn away, will fall into judgment in that they were never truly born again. This idea is also seen in the warning passages in the Book of Hebrews (a similar group of readers, cf. Hebrews 6:4-12; 10:26-31).

Those who are in danger of falling into judgment, whose commitment is in doubt, who may not patiently endure suffering but may turn away, will be addressed in James 5:13-15. They should call their church leaders to come and pray with them so they can be restored, or saved. This verse then fits best with a spiritual understanding of James 5:14-15.

The context: James 5:13

James 5:13 tells those who are suffering to pray. The suffering that James has just referenced is suffering for the faith (James 5:10, as illustrated by James 5:1-6). Those who are enduring in the midst of suffering with rejoicing should pray to God with praise. Those who are failing to endure (the “weak”) should pray also, seeking out spiritual help in their time of weakness (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:14).

The context: James 5:16

The context following James 5:14-15 is even more clearly related to spiritual weakness.

The word “healed” (iaomai) in James 5:16 is never used in the New Testament epistles to mean physical healing. Rather it is used to mean healing from sin (Hebrews 12:13; 1 Peter 2:24). Once again, as a New Testament epistle, James’ topics and purposes are the same as the other New Testament letters, to bring spiritual maturity to the church.

Supporting the view that James 5:16 is speaking of a spiritual healing is the confession of sins. Confession of sins, along with praying for one another, is the specific cause for the effect of healing. Do we have any evidence in the Bible that confession of sins is a cause of physical healing? No. Do we have any evidence that confession of sins is a cause of spiritual healing? Certainly (1 John 1:9, for example).

The context: James 5:17-18

James 5:17-18 should be understood as nothing more than an illustration of the point that James made in 5:16, “the effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.” That the prayer resulted in miraculous events does not need to lead us to conclude the healing is physical in nature in James 5:16. It only leads us to conclude that the effective prayer of a righteous man can indeed accomplish much. While man considers physical healing to be a great accomplishment, Jesus considered spiritual healing an even greater accomplishment (cf. Luke 5:20-24).

Furthermore, the illustration that James uses is Elijah’s prayer for the drought and the rain, which was God’s response in judgment upon the nation of Israel for its sin (1 Kings 17:1; cf. 16:33). He did not use Elijah’s prayer for the physical healing of the widow’s son, which is in the same chapter (1 Kings 17:17-24). Also, Elijah was a “man with a nature like ours”, as he grew weary (1 Kings 19:1-5). Thus the illustration from James 5:17-18 supports spiritual sickness, not physical sickness.

The context: James 5:19-20

Also, the context of James 5:19-20 is indisputably speaking about spiritual problem. James 5:19-20 is not disconnected from the context but is a conclusion to the teaching of a book addressing spiritual issues. Those who serve to help those with sin in need of forgiveness will bring salvation (SOZO). This is a great encouragement toward serving others by bringing spiritual healing (James 5:14-18).

This passage confirms that people who are in spiritual need must receive help in order to confess their sins and turn from the error of their way. The spiritually strong must restore the spiritually weak (Galatians 6:1). This is why the Lord did not only reveal himself to Paul on the road to Damascus (Acts 9), he sent Ananias. This is why when Cornelius was seeking for God he sent for Peter (Acts 10). James encourages those who are spiritually weak to seek help (James 5:14) and those who are spiritually strong to seek to help (James 5:20).

The context: The Book of James

The book context is sin. From the beginning of the book to the end of the book, James speaks solely about issues of spiritual weakness and nothing about physical illness. What is in his mind throughout and what should be in the reader’s mind throughout is their spiritual state of being, not their physical state. The context of the book of James should move us to view James 5:14-15 as

consistent with the rest of the book and to see the problem that is addressed as a spiritual one.

The context: The Bible

One of the most important principles of Bible interpretation is to interpret Scripture with Scripture. As we look to the rest of the Bible in considering James 5:14-15, we can ask the question, “if James 5 were not in the Bible, which interpretation would continue to be practiced, based on other biblical passages?”

There is nothing in the Bible that describes the elders functioning in prayer for ill people. Even the miraculous ministry to the sick by Christ and the Apostles was very different that what many make James 5:14-15 to be. Prayer was normally not involved and they did not even have to be with the person.

But more importantly, the healing ministry of Christ and the Apostles was not simply for the purpose of healing, but for the purpose of validating them as God’s prophetic messengers of His divine revelation. This is why the elders of the church do not follow in the healing ministry of those who founded the Church. While prayer for physical illness is a good thing, there is nothing in the Bible that assigns ministry for the physical health of people to the elders.

Rather, the elders are described as functioning to care for the spiritual needs of the church. This is why if James 5 were not in the Bible we would still be praying with people in their spiritual weakness. This is the reason our church is developing a counseling ministry, so that people in spiritual need are able to receive personal help. We are not developing a prayer ministry for elders to meet with the ill. The simple reason is because this concept is not found elsewhere in the Bible.

Viewing James 5:14-15 as dealing with physical illness will move us to begin to practice things that we have never initiated. Viewing James 5:14-15 as dealing with people in spiritual need requires no change in our current ministry, because it is consistent with the rest of the New Testament ministry of the church. The only change will be an improvement of our current ministry because people in spiritual need are commanded to call for the elders. Therefore the elders will be more aware of the spiritual state of the church and able to pray and help more effectively.

Conclusion

As the book of James unfolds, the “tests of a living faith” build toward a conclusion. What should a person do if he is failing these tests? He should act. In fact, he is commanded in this passage to act to get his relationship with God right or even to start a relationship with God.

Should he do this alone, by himself? He needs other people to help him, like we all do (cf. James 5:16). He should request help from those who are qualified and capable to help him. Even more than that, he should seek help from those who are specifically responsible to God for overseeing his spiritual life, the elders of

the church. They would be the ones that could be expected to be able to help the weak in time of need.

Praying for those who are physically ill is a very good thing. It is an expression of care and we desire the ill to recover. Visiting the ill for prayer is also a good work. It is possible to apply oil to an ill person without violating God's will. Yet because these things are may be good does not mean this passage is addressing the physically sick.

To misinterpret James 5:14-15 to say that those who are ill should call for the elders is more than just a small thing. While praying for those who are ill is fine, we can miss the critical application of the book of James in the lives of those in spiritual need.

The climax of this book is that people who are failing the tests of faith need personal ministry (fundamentally prayer expressing faith) to turn from the error of their ways. If we do not instruct people to do this, we will not only be deficient in handling the Word, we will lose the opportunity that is necessary to help people in desperate need. Our church will thus fail to be all of what God intended.

People who are weak and weary, who are in danger of wandering away from God and not fulfilling their profession of faith (cf. James 5:12), need the care of spiritual shepherds, the elders of the church. Those people need to call for the elders when they being tempted to turn away from the faith because they need to be guided by those responsible for the oversight of their souls as they to draw near to God.

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Note: **Bold** references are discussed as specific Bible difficulties.

Bible Difficulties

Class Notes

Valley Bible Church

Adult Sunday School

Gerry Andersen
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