

# ***THE BIBLE***

## **DOES THE BIBLE CONTAIN MISTAKES?**



**SUMMARY:** Certainly, the Bible contains mistakes. The Bible is a spectacular presentation of a message from God to us in an earthly vessel. After 3500 years of writing by at least 35 authors and many generations of copies translations for the past 2000 years, it would be unreasonable to expect anything else. Whatever mistakes the Bible might have would be in grammar not Gospel.

Church members sometimes teach the Bible is inspired and perfect in every way, and if not today at least it was in the original autographs. Non-believers take statement like Matthew 26:12 “poured this perfume on My body” and John 12:3 “anointed the feet of Jesus” and suggest the Bible is full of mistakes, not recognizing that they could simply be two people’s descriptions of the same situation.

To say the Bible contained no mistakes would require that for 3500 years God prevented anyone from making a mistake and also prevented them from an intentional misinterpretation. Imagine for a minute that He did. It would mean that if an author decided to not put an error in, God would have to stop his hand or the equivalent. At that time, people would begin trying to make a mistake just to watch God stop them. You would lose “faith” because you knew for sure what God meant because it was unstoppable. For better or worse, we are free moral agents and can make mistakes, and can make mistakes in reproducing the Bible.

### **WHAT THE NEW TESTAMENT SAYS FOR ITSELF**

A verse frequently used on this subject is 2 Timothy 3:16 NASB “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness”. It is estimated that the New Testament was written between 50 and 95 A.D. It is estimated that 2 Timothy was written in 66-67 A.D. when a large part of the New Testament, and potentially none of the Gospels, had been written. (See lesson 5.8.1) By Scriptures was Paul referring to the Old Testament, the part of the New Testament which had been written, or all the New Testament by prophecy? What ever you believe on this is an interpretation.

Luke sheds some light of the subject in Luke 1:1-4 NASB 1 “Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, 2 just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, 3 it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; 4 so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught.” Luke specifically states that he got his information from doing research with actual witnesses. Is Luke inspired in that he was diligently writing down inspired events? Do we interpret Luke in light of 2 Timothy, or 2 Timothy in light of Luke?

### **HISTORY OF WRITING**

The original writings of the Bible are called autographs and no longer exist. Early copies of the Bible are called manuscripts or manual copies. The simple process of copying a significant portion of the Bible inherently put mistakes into the manuscripts. It is reasonable to say that there was no manuscript which did not have errors.

The process of repetitively translating and copying the manuscripts until the printing press in 1440 A.D. continued to add minor mistakes into the manuscripts. The Jewish nation had strict procedures for copying which should have minimized mistakes. We have heard of no such procedures for early copying of the New Testament. Since the invention of the printing press, the nature of the process and the historical greater access to earlier manuscripts has tended to remove the errors from the Bible. As a result, today the materials available for translations allow **translations to be very close to the original quality of the autographs.**

### **PROBLEMS WITH TRANSLATIONS**

God provided us information in the Bible and did not implement any plans to prevent mistakes or intentional errors to creep into the texts.

INTENTIONAL: One problem today is that in some cases the Bible is intentionally mistranslated. The iconic name for an intentional mistranslation is the Queen James Bible. It obviously has an agenda. The classic case of intentionally mistranslating the Bible is Acts 2:38 where the Greek word baptiso for immersed is “transliterated” into baptism to please King James who was sprinkled. A paraphrased version of the Bible can include many well-meaning mistranslations as they are telling you what they think the Bible means which can include their denominational background information they take as a fact.

PARAPHRASING: However, more pertinent to us, is the paraphrasing of the Bible which tends to tell us someone’s interpretation of what it means rather than what it says. Consider the NASV Genesis 2:4 “This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in **the day** that the Lord God made earth and heaven.” And NIV Genesis 2:4 “This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created. When the Lord God made the earth and the heavens.” The original called the period “**the day**” as presented in the NASV and the NIV simply left it out. Is this significant or not? Do you want someone else deciding that for you, or do you want to know what the author said?

The opposite of paraphrasing is a literal word for word translation which is basically what an interlinear is. These two styles have been called dynamic equivalence (or functional equivalence) for sense-for-sense translation (translating the meanings of phrases or whole sentences) with readability in mind and formal equivalence as word-for-word translation (translating the meanings of words and phrases in a more literal way) keeping literal fidelity. The extremes of these two styles are a Greek-English Interlinear for word-for-word and a children’s Bible for paraphrasing. Interlinears are functionally unreadable and children’s Bibles are basically milk for children.

# ***THE BIBLE***

## **DOES THE BIBLE CONTAIN MISTAKES?**

---



If you want to know what the Bible actually teaches rather than someone's interpretation, you should go for a more literal translation. Go to lesson 5.1 THE BIBLE for a chart showing the spectrum of Bibles from word for word to thought for thought. The New American Standard Bible and the English Standard Bible are near the word for word end of the spectrum, and the NASV is characteristically used in this publication. The New American Standard Bible and the English Standard Bible still use the word baptized in Acts 2:38. You have to go to McCord's translation of the New Testament to actually see immersed as it was in the Greek.

**IDIOMS:** The subject is not as simple as looking for pure word-for-word to know exactly what the authors said. An idiom is a group of words established by usage as having a meaning not deducible from those of the individual words. Some idioms we would take for granted are chicken fried steak, rain cats and dogs, see the light, cross your fingers, fell on deaf ears, getting cold feet, a cold shoulder, having a change of heart, and I'm all ears. Most of these expressions would make no sense if translated word for word into another language. Imaging a chicken frying a steak. In that case word-for-word translation is not adequate, but it must be translated thought for thought.

### **WHAT ARE MISTAKES?**

**Mistakes are when the Bible says something which is actually wrong or when it contradicts itself.** Wrong can be geography, history, a scientific statement, a prophecy which did not come true at a given time or a variety of other things. A contradiction is when one verse states something which another verse denies in the same context or same time, place, and situation.

### **WRONG**

**Something is wrong which it is an incorrect statement.** Discussions of scientific statements and errors in the Bible are in lessons 5.3 and 5.4. As you might suspect we have no listing of errors in the Bible. We do have lessons 2.21 Scientific Errors in the Quran, 2.22 Scientific Errors in Mormonism, 2.23 Scientific Errors by Scientists, 5.6 The Accuracy of Human Prophecies, and 1.10 Evolutionary Frauds and Errors which give a ground work for what you might have expected from a non-inspired set of writings. In recent years a number of archeological discoveries have been found to verify what the Bible says, which would have been suggested to be a mistake before. An example of this is when Luke referred to Lysanias as being the tetrarch of Abilene in about A.D. 37 in Luke 3:1 when it was understood that he lived a half century later. It was recently learned from archeology that there are inscriptions which proved it to be true and that there were two Lysaniases.<sup>1</sup>

### **CONTRADICTIONS**

**A contradiction is when one verse states something which another verse denies in the same context.** An example is the sky is blue and the sky is not blue. However, the verses must be describing the same time, place, and situation. If one is discussing noon and the other midnight, it would not be a contradiction. This is characteristic of many alleged contradictions.

The book [Keeping Faith in an age of Reason<sup>2</sup>](#) lists 1171 allegations of contradictions in the Bible and refutes them all.

### **COMMON FALICIES IN CONTRADICTION CLAIMS:**

1. Point of view: Different writers will be impressed by and choose to record different aspects of an event.
2. Aggregate: Different writers will record different steps of an event. To leave out steps is not an error.
3. The argument from silence. That is say I have 5 fingers is not contradictory to the fact that I have 10 fingers.
4. Bifurcation or either/or fallacy: To presume there are only 2 choices when there are other options. It is black or white when it might be green.
5. Equivocation: James 1:13 teaches that God cannot be tempted whereas Hebrews 4:15 says Jesus was tempted in all things. Tempted vs. tested meanings, Jesus vs Jehovah.
6. Semantic range fallacy: Choosing a specific meaning for a word as a contradiction rather considering the range of meaning, i.e. the many meanings of dope or scoop.
7. Semantic anachronism fallacy: Importing a present day meaning for a word which meant something else in the first century.
8. Sweeping generalization fallacy: Statements which say what is true in most cases but is not true in some specific instances. If you drop something it will fall, is not true in the specific case of a helium filled balloon. It is still a good general statement.
9. Failure to do textual transmission analysis: Recognizing the potential for copying mistakes in manuscripts.
10. The genre fallacy: generally considering whether the particular writing is history, poetry, prophecy, or parables.
11. Specious reasoning: Agag is executed. Agag has many descendants. Not necessarily a conflict. He could have fathered children before he was executed.

Much of the above listing comes from page 10 of the book [Keeping Faith in an age of Reason<sup>2</sup>](#). This is an excellent book to read. He discusses 54 Quantitative Differences, 109 Names, Places, and Genealogies, 138 Timing of events, 154 cause and effect, 296 differences in details 296 and 420 yes or no questions for a total of 1171 alleged contradictions. That is an amazing amount of collected work on his part. As you can imagine a critic of the Bible with a list of 1171 alleged contradictions to tell your children can be an intimidating opponent. We must equip our children (and the rest of us) with resources to answer the questions.

The object of this lesson is not to answer the 1171 allegations, but rather to help you know it has been addressed, where it is addressed, and to offer to assist in any particular question which you may have.

# ***THE BIBLE***

## **DOES THE BIBLE CONTAIN MISTAKES?**

---



As has been stated in this lesson, there are inherently some minor errors in the Bible. To the best of our understanding, any potential minor translation errors do not impact the quality of the message. The alleged errors or contradictions we have seen have been when someone made an interpretation which provided a conflict when there were other interpretations which would eliminate the conflict. We are comfortable that some exist, just haven't seen them.

We don't understand the Bible to be just a book, we understand it to be the vessel carrying God's word, instructions, and expectations of us. Our problem is not having God's word accurately delivered to us, it is actually following it.

1 [The Case for Christ](#), Lee Strobel, Willow Creek Resources, Zondervan, p. 97.

2 [Keeping Faith in an age of Reason](#), Jason Lisle, Master Books, [www.masterbooks.com](http://www.masterbooks.com).