

Biblical Difficulties

We've all run across Bible passages where we've walked away scratching our heads and saying to ourselves, "what does that mean?"

We might have even been discussing the Bible with friends and had them say something to the effect of, "I don't read the Bible because there are a lot of contradictions in it."

Most of the time we tuck these comments or passages away until a later time when we can ask someone or come back to it and look at it from a different angle.

Sometimes, if these passages in question really bug us, we'll seek someone out who can explain the passage or do what I do, pray for wisdom, seek guidance from the Holy Spirit who leads us into all truth (John 16:13) and head to the nearest Christian bookstore and start reading commentaries... lots of commentaries by faithful Christian men and brothers in the Lord.

We shouldn't let Bible difficulties get us down because the truth is, Peter acknowledged that some of the Apostle Paul's teachings were "hard to understand" (2 Peter 3:16), that's why God gives teachers to His church (Ephesians 4:11) and the reason why He gave the illuminating ministry of the Holy Spirit (John 16:12-15; 1 Corinthians 2:9-12).

We need to point out to critics and those who have honest questions about the Bible, that the difficult verses that might trip us up can be easily addressed.

St. Augustine (AD 354-430), Bishop of Hippo, stated that "If we are perplexed by any apparent contradiction in Scripture, it is not allowable to say, the author of this book is mistaken; but either the manuscript is faulty, or the translation is wrong, or you have not understood."¹

God does not want us to be confused and frustrated over verses that we don't understand because He is not the "author of confusion" (1 Corinthians 14:33) but wants us to seek His wisdom (James 1:5) so that we can grow in the Word (1 Peter 2:2).

When it comes to difficult Bible verses, the *two premises* and *one conclusion* that we can follow are: ²

1. God cannot err.
2. The Bible is the Word of God.
3. Therefore, the Bible cannot err.

The first premise can be seen in the fact that God cannot commit an error:

- Hebrews 6:18 says that, "it is impossible for God to lie"
- In Titus 1:2, Paul speaks of God, "who cannot lie"
- Jesus, being God, said in John 14:6, "I am the way, *the truth*, and the life..." (emphasis added)
- And to the Father, Jesus said in John 17:17, "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth."
- See also (2 Timothy 2:13 and Psalm 119:160)

The second premise is that the Bible is the word of God:

- In John 10:35, Jesus, when speaking of the Old Testament as the "word of God", says that "Scripture cannot be broken."
- Jesus says in Matthew 5:18, "till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled."
- Paul says in 2 Timothy 3:16 that, "All Scripture is God breathed..."
- Jesus authoritatively used Scripture to rebuke Satan three times in Matthew 4:4, 7, and 10 by saying, "It is written..."

- See also (2 Peter 1:20-21; Mark 7:13; Romans 9:6; Hebrews 4:12)

The final and logical conclusion is that: **The Bible cannot err.**

And thus when we encounter something in the Scriptures that we just can't understand or wrap our minds around or what *appears* to be a Biblical contradiction; we can rest assured that the Bible, in its original autographs is *inerrant*, meaning the Bible is without error in whatever it teaches.

Inerrancy applies to the original autographs, but don't let that confuse you since the Bibles we use today are very accurate and we can say with a greater confidence than ever - that based on the manuscript evidence we have - we can get back to the original meanings of the authors with *great accuracy* even though we do not possess those original autographs.

So, the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments are not only *inerrant*, but also *inspired*.

In 2 Timothy 3:16-17 we read, "All scripture is given *by inspiration of God*, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." (emphasis added)

- *by inspiration of God* [Greek: *theopneustos*] literally means *breathed out by God* or simply *God-breathed*.
 - This means that even though men wrote the words down, God's truth flowed through their hearts, minds and souls as they recorded God's dictation. God superintended His Holy Scripture and over saw its correct transmission from pen to paper.
- God said in Jeremiah 1:9 that "Behold, I have put My words in your mouth."
- 2 Peter 1:20-21 says that "knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by

the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."

- The meaning of *prophecy* here is intended to convey a broad sense, not so much "predictive", although that is included as well, but as an over arching "speaking forth or proclaiming a message."
- The word *moved* [Greek: enegko] literally means "to be driven; carried along" and is used in Acts 27:15 and 17 in relation to the winds driving a ship along.
- J. Vernon McGee says, "The Greek actually portrays the idea of a sailing vessel. The wind gets into those great sails, bellies them out, and moves the ship along. That is the way the Holy Spirit moved these men."³

So when we run across verses that confuse us, remember that God has given us His Word and His Word is truth (John 17:17).

When we apply proper Biblical hermeneutics like context of the passages we're reading and the basic interpretive principle that *Scripture interprets Scripture*, we realize that we can learn and grow and "always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in us." (1 Peter 3:15)

So tonight, what I'd like to go over tonight are Biblical passages that are either difficult to understand or at first glance *appear* to be contradictions until you dig deeper and apply proper Biblical hermeneutics to Scripture.

1. Genesis 1:26, 27 - What does it mean when the Bible says that we are created "in the image of God"?

Genesis 1:26 says, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness..."

The Bible says that of all the creatures that God had created; only human beings were made *in the image of God* [Latin: *imago Dei*].

The Bible also tells us that God is Spirit and does not have a physical body:

- John 4:24 says that "God is Spirit"
- Colossians 1:15 says that "[Jesus] is the image of the *invisible* God"
- 1 Timothy 1:17 says, "Now to the King eternal, immortal, *invisible*, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen"
- Hebrews 11:27 says, "for [Moses] endured as seeing Him who is *invisible*."

Since humans are physical as well as spiritual creatures and as we have seen, God is Spirit, we understand that Genesis 1:27 is speaking of the immaterial part of man and that is what sets us apart from the animal world to which we were given "dominion" over (Genesis 1:28).

The words *image* [Hebrew: *tselem*] and *likeness* [Hebrew: *demut*] basically "refers to something that is *similar* but not identical to the thing it represents or is an "image" of. The word *image* can also be used of something that *represents* something else."⁴

In other words, the original readers would have recognized that they were created *like* God or a *shadow* of God and in many ways would *represent* God in the respect of having "dominion" over the earth as well as being like God Mentally, Morally and Socially.

We also see the "dominion" and "created in Gods image" terminology in the psalmist's paraphrase in Psalm 8:5, 6:

- "For you have created [man] a little lower than the angels, and You have crowned him with glory and honor. You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet."

We can see another example in Genesis 5:3 "When Adam had lived a hundred and thirty years; he became the father of a son in his own *likeness* [demut], after his *image* [tselem], and named him Seth."

Obviously, Seth was not identical to Adam but was similar to him in many ways and represented his father.

2. Genesis 4:17 - Where did Cain get his wife?

If the only people mentioned in the early accounts of Genesis were Adam and Eve (Genesis 4:1), Cain and his brother Abel (Genesis 4:8) then how could Cain have had a wife?

The Bible mentions in Genesis 5:4 that Adam and Eve "had sons and *daughters*."

Remember in Genesis 1:28 God told Adam and Eve to "be fruitful and multiply" and since Adam lived to be 930 years old (Genesis 5:5), he would have had plenty of "sons and daughters" and this would of course, back up that Cain's wife would have been either his sister or his niece.

Now we may shiver at such a prospect, but remember that at this time there were no genetic imperfections, Adam was a genetically perfect human being (Genesis 1:27) and it took a while for genetic imperfections to arise.

Critics will point out that Cain's wife could not have been either his sister or niece since God had commanded in Leviticus, that incest was forbidden.

Charlie Campbell, Director of the *Always Be Ready Apologetics Ministry* points out that incest had not been forbidden at this time:

- "It was only later, during the days of Moses (c. 1446 B.C.), after the gene pool had undergone years of contamination by sin, that the Lord forbade incest (see Leviticus 18-20)."⁵

Besides that, God had commanded Adam and Eve in Genesis 1:28 to "be fruitful and multiply" and since the world began with one couple, Adam and Eve; Cain obviously had no one else to marry except his sister or his niece.

3. Genesis 6:2 - Were the "sons of God" mentioned here fallen angels that married women?

Genesis 6:2 says, "...the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves of all whom they chose."

Jewish teachers of the Old Testament as well as the early church taught that the "sons of God" mentioned in Genesis 6:2, 4 were fallen angels that had sexual intercourse with women. Giving weight to this theory is the fact that in the Old Testament the phrase "sons of God" always refers to angels (Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7).

Many contemporary theologians and evangelical scholars believe that the "sons of God" were more likely the Godly line of Seth who intermingled and had sexual relations with the godless women from the line of Cain or that "sons of God" could also mean "powerful human rulers."

This marrying of the Godly line of Seth with the godless line of Cain resulted in the corruption of faith and the "Nephilim, fallen or mighty ones" (Genesis 6:4). This union was the cause of wickedness (Genesis 6:5) and the flood that God sent to destroy the world.

The fallen angel with a human body theory has its problems since angels are nonphysical beings while humans are physical beings:

- Angels and demons live in the spirit realm (Ephesians 6:12) and are bodiless spirits (Hebrews 1:14) and the only instance of angels taking on human form in the Bible is when they were sent as a messenger from God. We have no instances in the Bible where demons take on human form.
- The Bible also points out that angels "neither marry nor are given in marriage" (Matthew 22:30) and thus would not have sexual reproduction organs in which to procreate with.

And of course, Jesus pointed out to His disciples in Luke 24:39 that "a spirit does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have."

Dr. Wayne Grudem, professor of Bible and Theology at Phoenix Seminary points out that the "larger purpose of the narrative seems to be to trace the parallel development of the godly (ultimate Messianic) line of Seth and the ungodly descendents of the rest of mankind."⁶

4. Exodus 9:12 – Does this verse imply that God hardened Pharaoh's heart causing him to sin or that he didn't have a choice?

Exodus 9:12 says, "But the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh; and he did not heed them, just as the LORD had spoken to Moses."

There's a saying that the sun shines on freshly poured concrete causing it to *harden* and the same sun shines on wax *softening and melting it*.

Remember that Pharaoh was not an innocent or godly man. Egypt had been enslaving the Hebrews for 400 years and Pharaoh had even ordered that the male babies of the Hebrews be killed at birth (Exodus 1:16).

Pharaoh initiated the process of hardening his own heart before and during the first five plagues as seen in (Exodus 7:13, 14, 22; 8:15, 19, 32) but "when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he hardened his heart" (Exodus 8:15) and again "But this time also Pharaoh hardened his heart" (Exodus 8:32).

Pharaoh could have repented at any time and stopped this whole process.

We all have a choice or freewill to repent and follow God or to turn our back on God and do things our way.

But God, being omniscient (Psalm 147:5; Hebrews 4:13), knew that Pharaoh would not relent so as a result of Pharaoh's hardening his own heart, God hardened Pharaoh's heart even further and thus allowed the last few plagues (Exodus 9:12; 10:20; 10:27).

Romans 9:17-18 says, "For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: 'I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.' Therefore God has mercy on whom He wants to have mercy, and He hardens whom He wants to harden."

The Bible says that God does not tempt people (James 1:13) and He predicted how this whole thing would play out before it even began (Exodus 4:21; 7:3).

And finally, Gotquestions.org elaborates:

- "Since the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23), and Pharaoh and Egypt had horribly sinned against God, it would have been just if God had completely annihilated all of Egypt. Therefore, God hardening Pharaoh's heart was not unjust. God bringing additional plagues against Egypt was not unjust. The plagues, as terrible as they were, actually demonstrate God's mercy in not completely destroying all of Egypt, which would have been a perfectly just penalty."⁷

5. Exodus 20:5 - Can the sins of one generation be passed down to another?

Exodus 20:5 says, "For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me."

There is a belief today in many churches to try to blame every sin, addiction, issue or problem one has on a "generational curse" that was passed down from a previous generation.

The bottom line is this is not Biblical.

There are several verses that make it clear that each individual pays for their own sins. (See Deuteronomy 24:16; Job 19:4; Jeremiah 31:30; and Ezekiel 18:20)

So how do we understand Exodus 20:5 that seems to say that *innocent* children pay for the sins of their fathers?

Notice how we *assume* that the Exodus 20:5 verse means *innocent children* but it doesn't say that.

There are two ways of reading this verse:

1. It could be that the children were just as guilty of rebellion and iniquity as the father was. This is represented in the saying "Apple trees produce apples, peach trees produce peaches and rebellious parents produce rebellious children."

In other words, even if it's implied that the children were held responsible for the moral guilt, it's because they too were participating with the father by committing these sins right along side him.

Now, we must understand, the children will pay for their own sins just as the father or mother will pay for their own sins as seen in Deuteronomy 24:16; Job 19:4; Jeremiah 31:30; and Ezekiel 18:20.

2. The second way to look at this verse is in the meaning of the word *iniquity* [Hebrew: *avon*] which means "perversity, evil, fault, mischief, sin."

Then Exodus 20:5 would then be speaking of the *consequences* of the father's sin much like alcoholism can cause poverty in a family effectively passing the *consequences* of the father's sin to the children for generations to come.

Another example is if a mother contracts AIDS through adultery and passes it on to the unborn child. Again, we can see the *consequences* of the action can be passed down to the third or fourth generation.

The Deut. 24:16; Ezekiel 18:20, etc. passages speak of the *guilt* of a parents sin that are never held against the children, "The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son." (Ezekiel 18:20)

The bottom line is that God "visits the iniquities...of those who hate Him", not those who love and revere Him.

When we give our lives to Jesus Christ and become Christians, we become a "new creation" according to the Bible:

- 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."

Now, since we are a "new creation", how can it be said that a Christian can be cursed:

- Romans 8:1 says, "There is therefore *now no condemnation* to those who are in Jesus Christ, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit." (emphasis added)

The bottom line is that each of us is held accountable for our own sins and not for the sins of our family members from previous generations.

6. Deuteronomy 7:2 – Is God guilty of genocide of Israel's enemies?

Deuteronomy 7:2 says, "and when the LORD your God delivers them over to you, you shall conquer them and utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to them."

Several times in the Old Testament, God ordered similar commands when invading the Promised Land (See Deuteronomy 2:34; 3:6; 20:16-18; Joshua 11:20; 1 Samuel 15:18).

One thing we know for sure is that God is very patient with mankind:

- 2 Peter 3:19 says that God "is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance."

We also know that God was merciful and patient enough to allow centuries (Genesis 15:13-16) to go by to see if the people of Canaan would repent (Jeremiah 18:8) or continue down their own destructive path.

Deuteronomy 20:16-18 helps shed some light on this issue:

- "However, in the cities of the nations the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, do not leave alive anything that breathes. Completely destroy them — the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites — as the LORD your God has commanded you. Otherwise, they will teach you to follow all the

detestable things they do in worshiping their gods, and you will sin against the LORD your God”

Ultimately, the Israelites failed in completely following this command and what happened is exactly what God said would happen (See Judges 2:1-3; 1 Kings 11:5; 14:24; 2 Kings 16:3-4; 17:16-18).

One of the detestable practices that the Canaanite, Moabite and Ammonite religions would do was to practice child-sacrifice, generally understood to mean burning the victim to death.

Because the Israelites did not completely wipe out the Canaanites and the others in the land, Israel ended up practicing the same sorts of idolatry as the nations they let live and were carried off to captivity by Assyria (See 2 Kings 16:3; 17:16-18).

The bottom line is that these nations were exceedingly wicked and caused Israel to do the same wicked things (2 Kings 17:16-17) but we know that God is *just* (Deuteronomy 32:4; Psalm 18:30), *righteous* (Exodus 9:27; Matthew 27:45-46; Romans 3:21-26), *merciful* (Exodus 34:6; Psalm 31:19; 1 Peter 1:3; John 3:16; John 17:3) and *holy* (Isaiah 6:3; Habakkuk 1:13; Exodus 3:2,4,5; Hebrews 12:29) and we should focus on trusting Him and His ways even when we don't understand or see the big picture.

7. Judges 11: 31-39 - Did Jephthah sacrifice his daughter as a burnt offering?

This story documents how Jephthah said that if God would give him victory in battle against the “people of Ammon”, the first thing that came out of his house upon returning home would be offered up as a “burnt offering” to the LORD.

Upon returning from battle after defeating the Ammonites, Jephthah's daughter came “out to meet him...and she was his only child.”(Judges 11:34)

I believe that Jephthah did not sacrifice his daughter as a burnt offering for the following reasons:

1. Jephthah would have been aware of God's law prohibiting human sacrifice (Leviticus 18:21; 20:2-5; Deuteronomy 12:31).
2. The Bible doesn't say that Jephthah's daughter was sacrificed as a burnt offering. In fact, Romans 12:1 tells us that we are offered to God "as a living sacrifice" and she could have been dedicated to ministry in the temple much the same way as Samuel would later be dedicated to temple ministry (1 Samuel 1).
3. It appears by the text that since she would have been dedicated to temple ministry, she would have had to remain a virgin in the Jewish context of the day.

This is supported by the fact that she was allowed to mourn for two months and went out with her friends and "bewailed her virginity", not "bewailed her impending death."

4. It would have been easy for Jephthah's daughter to have gotten married in those two months and lose her virginity. There would have been no need to mourn her virginity unless dedicated to the temple and would thus have lived a life of perpetual virginity.

Being "his only child", Jephthah's family line would have stopped there and this would have given his daughter, and her virginity, plenty to mourn about.

We then read of Jephthah in Hebrews 11:32 as one of the *champions of faith* mentioned along side of Gideon, Barak, Samson, David and Samuel.

Jephthah made a rash and poor vow to God, but I believe if he followed through with sacrificing his daughter as a "burnt offering", it would have been equivalent to "two wrongs don't make a right."

Nevertheless, this story teaches us that we should not make rash vows to God (James 5:12). God would have never wanted Jephthah to

sacrifice his daughter as a "burnt offering" (Leviticus 20:1-5) and the Bible is clear that God never commanded human sacrifice and indeed He says "nor did it come into My heart." (Jeremiah 7:31; 19:5; 32:35)

8. 2 Samuel 6:6-7 – Why did God kill Uzzah for trying to keep the Ark of the Covenant from falling off the cart?

In these verses 1-6, we read of David gathering his people and deciding to move the Ark of the Covenant, which the Philistines had previously captured around 1050 BC and then returned after seven months (1 Samuel 6:1).

Verse 3 says that they "set the ark on a new cart", brought it out of the house of Abinadab (verse 4) and as they were moving it, the ox stumbled and Uzzah reached out his hand to steady the ark (Verse 6).

Verse 7 then says that "the anger of the LORD was aroused against Uzzah, and God struck him there for his error and he died there by the ark of God."

2 Samuel 5:19, 23 sets the scene where David "inquired of the LORD" regarding the direction to take against the Philistines but we find that those words are ominously missing from the 2 Samuel 6:1-3 verses. The parallel account in 1 Chronicles 13:1 says that David consulted with his "captains...and every leader" instead of "inquiring of the LORD."

Instead, David chose expediency over properly transporting the ark as God had commanded.

In Exodus 25:14, 15; Numbers 4:15, God commanded that the ark was to never be touched and was only to be moved by the Levites. The ark was to be covered with a veil and then carried with poles on the shoulders of the Levites.

So why did God kill Uzzah if David was at fault?

God told Moses and Aaron in Numbers 4:15 that “the sons of Kohath shall come to carry [the holy things], but they shall not touch any holy thing, lest they die.”

Even if Uzzah were not a Kohathite or even a Levite, he still would know what the law taught in Numbers 4 and 7. God not only keeps His promises, but also fulfills His threats! ⁸

We need to remember that even with our purest motives, God must have His hand in it and it must be done and performed God’s way, according to God’s will and according to God’s word and not ours.

9. Job 40:15; 41:1 – What are the Behemoth and Leviathan?

Job 40:15 says, “Look at the behemoth, which I made along with you; he eats grass like an ox...” and then verses 16 through 24 go on to describe a massive creature that lives on land.

Job 41:1 says, “Can you draw out Leviathan with a hook...” and then the remainder of the chapter goes on to describe a massive untamable creature that lives in the sea.

Four popular explanations are used to explain what is being shown to us here in the Book of Job:

1. Mythological creatures.

We can pretty much rule out that God is using mythological creatures as examples of His Sovereign power and that Job’s not as wise as he thinks he is and he doesn’t have the ability to control things he knows nothing about.

2. Hippopotamus and crocodile respectively.

This gets us closer to the meaning of the text but you'd have to do some far reaching gyrations since the descriptions do not completely fit.

For example, verse 17 says that the behemoth "moves his tail like a cedar" but we know that a hippo's tail is nowhere close to a tree.

We also read of leviathan in verses 19-21 that "out of his mouth go burning lights...smoke goes out of his nostrils...his breath kindles coals" and this is poetic but crocodiles cannot start fires with their breath.

3. Dinosaurs or similar type creatures.

Some scholars have guessed that the Behemoth was the largest of all the land animals, a mighty dinosaur, while Leviathan was the largest and fiercest of all the aquatic dinosaurs. Such animals may well have lain behind the spiritual applications.⁹

Several key points here that support this view is that God told Job to "look at" the behemoth (verse 15) and God said He "made" the behemoth along with Job.

The twelve creatures that God mentions in Job 38:39 through 39:30 are real animals, so these two creatures could be expected to be real as well.

4. Gods demonstration of His triumph over evil

The context of the book of Job is that although we cannot see the big picture at times, God is sovereign and in total control over all evil.

Even when Job accused God of unfairness, God answered Job in 40:8, "Would you indeed annul My judgment?" or "Would you discredit My justice?" (NIV)

Here God challenged, and then rebuked Job, and then goes on to show him that only He is the one who ultimately triumphs over evil.

"The forces of moral disorder, though veiled under mythopoetic language about ferocious and untamable creatures, are used here as a symbol of those who can only be handled by God behind the scenes on behalf of all who must suffer in ignorance of what is ultimately going on."¹⁰

Views 3 and 4 are the most popular and which ever view is correct, we can walk away knowing that God knew what He was doing in Job's life and He knows what He's doing in our lives. All we have to do is place our "cares upon Him for He cares for us." (1 Peter 5:7)

10. Psalm 5:5 - How can God hate people when the Bible says that God is love?

Psalm 5:5 says, "The boastful shall not stand in Your sight; You hate all workers of iniquity."

How do we reconcile verses that say that God hates or abhors certain people like in Psalm 5:4-6; 11:5; Proverbs 6:16-19; Jeremiah 12:8 and Hosea 9:15?

This is indeed one of those passages where we scratch our heads and say to ourselves, "Doesn't God hate the sin but love the sinner?"

We must understand that God loves perfectly and He also hates perfectly. In other words, human beings can do neither and so we wrestle with the concept of a God who hates or abhors certain individuals who blatantly and willfully reject Him.

The difficulty lies in our understanding of the word "hate". Humans understand hate as "an emotion; a desire for retaliation and an injury to those who have personally hurt us; a desire for revenge; malicious and willful contempt towards something or someone."

Human anger and hate arouse emotions that, if left unchecked, can become dangerously close to all sorts of evil thoughts as well as acts.

But Biblical hatred is the attitude of a rejection of evil or a strong aversion to and repulsion of anything that is evil. It's not emotional, but judicial, an expression of His awesome holiness.

Judicial simply means that God is "decreeing or proceeding from His court; a judicial decision."

The Bible describes God as a "righteous or just Judge" (Psalm 7:11), and as such, cannot tolerate evil and wickedness and His justice demands that sin ultimately be forgiven or punished in the form of eternal separation from God.

The Bible also says that "He so loved the world that He gave His only Son" (John 3:16) and that God "is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9) and that "God is love" (1 John 4:8).

So when we understand that hate is an attitude of rejection of evil, we can see that as the Righteous Judge, God separates Himself from the sinner because of the sin.

The bottom line is that God is sovereign and makes His choices according to His sovereign will.

God tells Moses in Exodus 33:19, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion."

11. Matthew 5:48 – Can humans be perfect?

Matthew 5:48 says, "Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect."

The Bible teaches repeatedly that humans are imperfect and sinful:

- Romans 3:23 says, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."
- See also Matthew 22:18; Mark 7:21-22; John 8:34

In fact, 1 John 1:8 teaches that, "if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."

When we look at Matthew 5:43-48, in context we see that Jesus is teaching on loving our enemies.

The Jewish leaders of the day had taught that we should "love your neighbor and hate your enemies" (verse 43) but Jesus authoritatively taught that we should "love our enemies" (verse 44) because God's love has extended to everyone (verse 45).

Since God the Father is our standard, Jesus was telling us to be "perfect" or complete in loving others as He is perfect.

The word *perfect* [Greek: *teleios*] can mean "complete or completeness" and comes from the root word [Greek: *telos*] and basically means that we should "labor for, to grow towards, to set out for or a point aimed at, a result, a purpose or a conclusion."

In other words, we are to aim for perfection in loving as God loves but again, we will never gain a sinless perfection as pointed out above.

Here's where the good news of Jesus Christ comes in. Jesus' perfection is applied to us, as believers!

- Hebrews 10:14 says, "For by one offering He [Jesus] has perfected forever those who are being sanctified."

Jesus' one perfect sacrifice removed sin forever for those who belong to Him. It is not because of our righteousness, because our righteousness is imperfect and thus worthless, but the righteousness of Jesus is perfect and it has been laid to our accounts.

So how could Jesus demand the impossible task that we be perfect?

- Jesus later said in Matthew 19:26, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

12. Matthew 7:1 - Doesn't this verse seem to say that we are not to judge people?

Matthew 7:1 says, "Judge not, that you be not judged."

At first glance it appears that Jesus is saying that we are to never judge people so that we will not be judged.

But then in John 7:24, Jesus says "Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment."

How can we balance these two verses that seem to be contradicting one another?

When we apply the *Basic interpretive Principle* that *Scripture Interprets Scripture*, we see that in the context of Matthew 7:1-6, Jesus is teaching that we should not judge *hypocritically*.

First, Jesus says in verse 2 that God will judge us with the same type of judgment or the same standard that we ourselves judge others.

And second, in verses 3 and 4, Jesus explains that we “look at the speck in [our] brother’s eye but do not consider the plank in [our] own eye.”

Finally, in verse 5, Jesus teaches us that we need to “first remove the plank from your own eye, then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.”

Jesus is teaching that we are to judge because we “will know them by their fruits” (Matthew 7:16) but we’re to not judge hypocritically.

David, called “a man after God’s own heart (Acts 13:22), had the right heart attitude when he said in Psalm 51:10, 12 “Create in me a clean heart O God and renew a steadfast spirit within me....Restore to me the joy of Your salvation and uphold me by Your generous Spirit”.

David was then able to “teach transgressors Your ways and sinners shall be converted to You.” (verse 13)

Galatians 6:1 says, “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.”

13. Matthew 12:31 – What is the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit?

Matthew 12:31 says, “Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men.”

The word *blasphemy* [Greek: *blasphemia*] means “vilification, evil speaking, railing” and is generally defined as a “defiant irreverence”.

Blasphemy against Jesus or “anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man” will even be forgiven as seen in verse 32 but “the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven”.

The title "Son of Man" designates Jesus' humanity and to denigrate, misjudge or belittle Jesus on the basis of an incomplete understanding or incomplete knowledge of Him can be forgiven if a person realizes who Jesus really is, turns from their sin, and repents as seen in 1 John 1:9:

- 1 John 1:9 says that, "if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

So, what does that mean, "blasphemy against the Holy Spirit"?

Dr. John MacArthur says:

- "The blasphemy against the Holy Spirit was something more serious and irredeemable. It not only reflected unbelief, but determined unbelief – the refusal, after having seen all the evidence necessary to complete understanding, even to consider believing in Christ."¹¹

Simply put, when a person hears of Jesus, hears of the saving knowledge of the Holy Spirit's power to turn and forgive sins and when this person hardens their heart and willfully rejects Christ's saving knowledge – if when they die in their sins never having received that forgiveness of sins due to unbelief, hardness of heart and downright rejection, they have essentially "blasphemed the Holy Spirit."

One of the functions of the Holy Spirit is that He reveals Jesus to us:

- Jesus says in John 16:13, 14, "However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. *He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you.*" (emphasis added)

I've heard it stated that if you're worried that you have committed the unforgivable sin of "blasphemy of the Holy Spirit", you probably haven't. But "Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts" (Hebrews 3:7) because today, at this moment, "now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2).

14. Matthew 24:34 – What generation is Jesus referring to?

Matthew 24:34 says, "Assuredly, I say to you, *this generation* will by no means pass away till all these things take place."

One of the most common objections that arise from atheists is that this verse proves that Jesus was a false prophet since the events He just mentioned (Matthew 24), didn't take place in the lifetime of His hearers.

Preterism teaches that "this generation" is referring to the lifetime of His hearers or His contemporaries and that these were fulfilled spiritually and that Jesus' coming (verse 30) was His judgment upon mankind in AD 70 at the destruction of Jerusalem.

While it's true that every time in the New Testament that Jesus uses "generation", He's referring to the contemporary generation living at the time He's speaking, we need to look at the context of the conversation each and every time "generation" is used.

When we look at "all these things" Jesus just mentioned in Matthew 24:2-33), e.g., the end of the age (verses 5-14), the Great Tribulation (verses 15-28), the sign of Jesus' return (verses 29-31), we can conclude that Jesus was speaking of a yet future event because "all these things" are just too universal and too cataclysmic to have happened at the sacking of Jerusalem in AD 70 as preterism teaches.

For example, during the admittedly devastatingly local destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, it did not involve "famines, pestilences and earthquakes" (verse 7), Christians being "hated by all nations" (verse 9), the "gospel... [being] preached in all the world" (verse 14), the "abomination of desolation" (verse 15), the "sun darkened, the moon not giving of its light" and the "heavens shaken" (verse 29).

Clearly, the Great Tribulation (verse 29) did not happen and Jesus certainly did not appear at that time (verses 30, 31).

So, in response to the disciples earlier questions as to “what will be the sign of Your coming” (verse 3), Jesus says that after these things take place, the *generation* alive at this time i.e., *a future generation*, will not pass away and will see these things happen.

15. Mark 16:17 – Are all Christians supposed to speak in tongues?

In Mark 16:17 when Jesus is giving the *Great Commission*, He says, “And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues.”

The Mark 16:17 passage was fulfilled at Pentecost (Acts 2:4-11) when “they were all filled with the Holy Spirit” and they spoke in intelligible languages that were not known to the speakers themselves but known by the people around them.

This was also fulfilled later on in the life of the early church (Acts 10:46; 19:6; 1 Corinthians. 12:10 and 14:1-24).

Remember that God did miraculous things in the book of Acts and even though it seems like miracles were happening left and right, they were, in reality, happening over approximately a thirty year period.

These happened so that God could establish the credibility of the Apostles in the early Church.

Notice in 1 Corinthians 12:8, 10 that the gifts are *given* to us, “for to one is given...to another different kinds of tongues to another the interpretation of tongues.”

Also notice in 1 Corinthians 12:30 that not all Christians receive the same gifts, “Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?” but the Holy Spirit “works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.” (12:11)

So, we see it's a gift that is given (12:8, 10), we see that not everyone is given the gift of tongues (12:11, 30) and in 1 Corinthians 13:6-24, Scripture teaches us the proper way that tongues should be used in the body.

16. John 1:1 – How can Jesus be God when the Bible teaches that there is only one God?

John 1:1 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

The Bible teaches us that there is one God but that He's made up of three separate and distinct persons – The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

The Bible calls this the "Godhead" (Romans 1:20; Colossians 2:9) but the terminology is also referred to as the Trinity.

With that being said, we can define the Trinity as:

- "Within the one Being that is God, there exists eternally three coequal and coeternal persons, namely, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit."¹²

Dr. Walter Martin says that the Trinity "was derived from biblical passages where honest, godly men said, 'Hey, 2 Peter says there is a Person called the Father, and he's God. And Acts chapter 5 says there is a Person called the Spirit, and he's God. And John 1 says there's a Person called the Word and he's God.' You've got Three Persons, and Deuteronomy 6 says, 'There is only one God.' Logical conclusion: the Three Persons, somehow, are the One God. That's how Trinitarian theology started."¹³

One of the best ways to demonstrate that Jesus is the Second Person of the Trinity or within the Godhead, is by using the first Chapter in each of the following books:

- John 1:1 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."
- Colossians 1 tells us that "all things were created by Him" (verse 16) and that He is "before all things" (verse 17) and that "God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him" (verse 19).
- In Hebrews 1:8, the Father says of Jesus, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever."
- 2 Peter 1:1 says, "To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of *our God and Savior Jesus Christ*." (emphasis added)
- Revelation 1:8 says, "I am the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End...who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."
- Jesus then applies these titles to Himself at the end of Revelation in 22:13.

Also, Jesus claimed to be the "Son of God" and this term has a huge significant meaning since the ancients used the term "son of..." to carry the important metaphorical meaning "of the order of".

This phrase was often used in the Old Testament and a good example is 1 Kings 20:35 where the "sons of the prophets" meant "of the order of the prophets." Likewise, in Nehemiah 12:28, "sons of the singers" meant "of the order of singers".

So when Jesus is called the "Son of God", the ancient people knew Jesus was saying "of the order of God" and this is why the Jews insisted on killing Jesus and said, "We have a law, and according to that law He [Jesus] must die, because He claimed to be the Son of God." (John 19:7)

Jesus was claiming God as his Father, i.e. "Son of God" or "of the order of God" and that was equivalent to "making Himself equal with God" (John 5:18).

John 10:29-33 bears this out since Jesus claimed four times in these verses that God was His "Father" and thus Jesus was the "Son of God" or "of the order of God" and the Jews were going to kill Him, why? – "because You, being a man, make Yourself God."

The Jews knew exactly what Jesus was saying by claiming the title "Son of God", Jesus was identifying himself as God!

17. John 10:34 – Are we gods?

John 10:34 says, "Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your law, '*I said, "You are gods"'*?"

Context is always important when reading and understanding Scripture.

Many groups pull this verse out of the Bible "as is" not realizing that Jesus had just finished saying that "I and My Father are one" (verse 30).

The Jews then picked up stones to stone Jesus because they thought He was blaspheming since Jesus was making Himself out to be equal with God.

Jesus responds by quoting Psalm 82:6 which talks about judges who judge unjustly:

- Psalm 82:6 says, "[God] said, 'You are gods, and all of you are children of the Most High.'"
- When we look at the whole of the chapter, in context, we can see that God is talking to judges who are unjust and showing partiality in verse 2.

By quoting Psalm 82:6, Jesus is essentially saying, "Look, in the Old Testament, God gave some, 'divine status as divinely appointed judges'¹⁴, why do you find it incredible that I would use the Son of God designation for Myself?"

These men who had no claim to deity were angry to the point of stoning Jesus who was the only one among them who in reality did have the claim to Deity.

We can now see that this verse is being used by Jesus, the only true Deity among them as a defense to His own Deity and not to the deification of man.

18. Acts 1:18 – How did Judas die?

Matthew 27:5 says, "Then [Judas] threw down the pieces of silver in the temple and departed, and went and hanged himself."

Acts 1:18 says, "Now this man [Judas] purchased a field with the wages of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his entrails gushed out."

Isn't this a contradiction in the Bible?

These verses are mutually complementary in the respect that Judas hung himself exactly as Matthew 27:5 says and the Acts 1:18 verse simply adds that Judas fell and his intestines burst out.

This is exactly what we find would happen if Judas hung himself on a tree overlooking a cliff and his weight caused it to break and he landed on sharp, jagged rocks below.

Thus, there is no contradiction but a harmonization of the two verses.

19. Acts 2:38 – Are we baptized for the forgiveness of sins?

Acts 2:38 says, "Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ *for the remission of sins*; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'" (emphasis added)

This verse seems to contradict the Bible in other places where it teaches that we are saved "by faith alone" (Romans 4:4; Ephesians 2:8-9). How do we reconcile these verses?

The word *for* [Greek: *eis*] can also mean "with a view to" or "because of".

This verse would then be rendered "be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ *because of* the remission of sins."

We know that Scripture doesn't contradict itself so we know that one place cannot say that baptism is necessary for salvation *and* in another place "faith alone" is necessary for salvation.

We call this hermeneutical concept of Scripture *the analogy of Scripture* [Latin: *analogia Scriptura*] or in other words, when Scripture is correctly interpreted, it will not contradict itself.

All we have to do is turn to our Bibles, the *final court of arbitration* to see that close to 200 times in the New Testament, salvation is said to be *by faith alone* – with no works in sight:

- John 3:15 tells us that "whoever *believes in Him* should not perish but have eternal life." (emphasis added)
- John 5:24 says, "Most assuredly, I say to you, *he who hears My word, and believes in Him who sent me has everlasting life*, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life." (emphasis added)

- In John 11:25 Jesus says, "I am the resurrection, and the life. *He who believes in Me*, though he may die, he shall live." (emphasis added)
- John 12:46 says, "I have come as a light into the world, that *whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness*." (emphasis added)

The New Testament repeatedly states that salvation is a free gift from God – salvation is by grace and grace alone entirely apart from the law or any works:

- Ephesians 2:8, 9 says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast."
- Titus 3:5 says, "not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us..."
- Romans 3:20 tells us that "by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified [declared righteous before God] in His sight..."
- See also Romans 4:4; 11:6 and Galatians 2:26

Further more, Paul stated in 1 Corinthians 1:14-16 that he "rejoiced" that he had not baptized any of the Corinthians except Crispus, Gaius and the household of Stephanas.

Dr. John MacArthur comments:

- "This statement is inexplicable if baptism is necessary for salvation. Paul would then in effect be saying he was thankful that only those few were saved under his ministry. The apostle clearly distinguishes baptism from the gospel in 1 Corinthians 1:17, where he says that "Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel." How could Paul have made such a statement if baptism was necessary for salvation."¹⁵

20. 1 Corinthians 11:27 – What does it mean to take communion in an unworthy manner?

1 Corinthians 11:27 says, "Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord."

There can be many ways that we "partake in an unworthy manner" of communion.

For example, if we are taking communion ritualistically and just "going through the motions," or if we harbor bitterness and anger in our hearts, or if we have sinned against a brother or sister and are holding back on forgiving others.

We should come to the communion table with the utmost of reverential awe and brokenness realizing that this ordinance that the Lord commanded us to do, shouldn't be taken lightly considering the passion and excruciating pain on the cross He endured for you and me.

This is why the next verse says that we should "examine ourselves" to make sure our hearts are right before God.

Psalm 139:23 says "Search me, O God and know my heart. Try me, and know my anxieties and see if there is any wicked way in me and lead me in the way everlasting."

This is an excellent prayer to have in your heart as we come to the communion table.

21. 2 Corinthians 12:2 – What does it mean to be "caught up to the third heaven"?

2 Corinthians 12:2 says, "I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago – whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I

do not know, God knows – such a one was caught up to the third heaven.”

Mormons will cite this verse as a “proof text” that there are three heavens or three degrees of glory after this life. According to Mormon theology, there is the *Celestial* Kingdom for faithful practicing Mormons, the *Terrestrial* Kingdom for less than faithful practicing and non-Mormons, and the *Telestial* Kingdom for basically everyone else.

These concepts were unfamiliar to the Jewish mindset.

Scripture teaches that the three heavens consist of:

1. *The atmospheric Heaven* – Deuteronomy 11:11 says, “but the land which you cross over to possess is a land of hills and valleys, which drinks water from the rain of heaven.”
2. *The starry/planetary Heaven* – Genesis 1:14 says, “Then God said, ‘Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night...’”
3. *The dwelling place of God or the highest heaven* – Isaiah 63:15 says, “Look down from Your heaven and see from Your habitation, holy and glorious.”

This last or third heaven is where God dwells in Supreme Majesty and where His Throne resides and all angelic beings and heavenly hosts worship and praise Him and where we will be ushered one day when we die.

This is the heaven where Paul was referring in the 2 Corinthians passage.

22. Ephesians 4:9-10 – Did Jesus go to hell when He died?

Ephesians 4:9-10 says, "(Now this, 'He ascended'--what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.)"

The Old Testament speaks of a place called "Sheol" which simply means "abode of the dead" or "the underworld" and the NASB often translates Sheol as "the grave".

We get a picture of Sheol/Hades in Luke 16:19-31 where Lazarus and the rich man went when they died.

Sheol/Hades has two compartments or "holding places" where one side is called "Abraham's bosom" (verse 22) and the other side is "torment" or the "lost side" (verse 23).

Ephesians 4: 9-10 simply teaches that when Jesus died, He went to Sheol/Hades to free the believing captives who were held in captivity.

When Jesus ascended to Heaven, He took the believers from "Abraham's bosom" with Him (Ephesians 4:8-10). The "lost side" or "tormented side" of Sheol/Hades has remained unchanged. The unbelieving dead go there and await their final judgment which is still in the future.

Did Jesus go to Sheol/Hades? Yes, according to Ephesians 4:8-10 and 1 Peter 3:18-20 but He did not go to Hell, since it will not be populated until the final judgment (Revelation 20:13, 14).

Jesus later said on the Cross to the thief beside Him, "...today you will be with Me in Paradise." (Luke 23:43) Jesus' body was in the tomb but His soul/spirit went to "Abraham's bosom" side of Sheol/Hades. He then took all the righteous dead with Him to Heaven or "Paradise".

Today, when a believer dies, we are ushered into the presence of God.

Did Jesus go to Hell? No. Did Jesus go to Hades/Sheol? Yes.

Conclusion

Many marvelous books on apologetics, commentaries and discipleship have been written that can help with difficult Bible passages. Start building your library of Godly Christian authors but never let these works replace Bible reading – they should only supplement Bible reading.

Don't let difficult Bible verses bring you down but learn from Godly men who have spent their lives studying the word of God BUT always, always, always compare what they say to the Bible itself, since the Scriptures are our *final court of appeal*.

Sir Isaac Newton (1643-1727) stated that "he stood on the shoulders of giants." This metaphor simply means that he continued his pursuit of understanding and education by studying the research and books written by people before him to further educate himself.

When we run into a Biblical difficulty, don't give up what you know for what you don't know.

Reverend E. Paul Hovey once stated, "Men do not reject the Bible because it contradicts itself, but because it contradicts them."¹⁶

Jesus stated in John 8:31-32, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free."

Resources used for this teaching and recommended reading material:

1. *When Skeptics Ask*, Norman Geisler and Ron Brooks, Baker Book House Co., ISBN 0801011418
2. *When Critics Ask*, Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe, Victor Books Co., ISBN 0896936988
3. *101 Most Puzzling Bible Verses*, Time Demy and Gary Stewart, Harvest House Publishers, ISBN 9780736911759
4. *Hard Sayings of the Bible*, Walter Kaiser Jr., Peter Davids, F.F. Bruce, Manfred Brauch, InterVarsity Press, ISBN 083081423X
5. *Bible Answers For Almost All Your Questions*, Elmer L. Towns, Thomas Nelson Publishing, ISBN 0785263241
6. *One Minute Answers to Skeptic's Top Forty Questions*, Charlie H. Campbell, Aquintas Publishing, ISBN 1597519995
7. *New Testament Commentary on Acts 1-12* Dr. John MacArthur, Moody Press, ISBN 0802407595
8. *New Testament Commentary on 1 Timothy*, Dr. John MacArthur, Moody Press, ISBN 0802407595

If you have questions or comments, please feel free to email Robby Beum at robby@calvaryaurora.org

Notes

1. Norman L. Geisler and Thomas Howe, *When Critics Ask*,(Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1992), p. 15
2. Norman L. Geisler and Thomas Howe, *When Critics Ask*,(Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1992), p. 11
3. J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible, Vol. 5* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1983), p. 729
4. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), p. 442.
5. Charlie H. Campbell, *One Minute Answers to Skeptics' Top Forty Questions* (Aquintas Publishing, 2005), p. 73
6. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), p. 414.
7. <http://www.gotquestions.org/God-harden-Pharaoh-heart.html> accessed 05/04/2008
8. Kaiser Jr., Davids, Bruce and Brauch, *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL,: InterVarsity Press, 1996), p. 220
9. Kaiser Jr., Davids, Bruce and Brauch, *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL,: InterVarsity Press, 1996), p. 262
10. Ibid.
11. Dr. John MacArthur, *New Testament Commentary on Matthew* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1987), p.312
12. James R. White, *The Forgotten Trinity* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 1998), p. 26.
13. John Ankerberg & John Weldon, *The Trinity* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1997), p. 4.
14. Norman L. Geisler and Thomas Howe, *When Critics Ask*,(Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1992), p. 417
15. Dr. John MacArthur, *New Testament Commentary on Acts 1-12* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1994), p. 74
16. Charlie H. Campbell, *One Minute Answers to Skeptics' Top Forty Questions* (Aquintas Publishing, 2005), p. 56