

Does the Bible Contradict Itself?

A beginner-friendly guide to differences, difficult passages, context, and faithful interpretation

Purpose

Understand what a contradiction is, why differences between biblical passages are not automatically contradictions, how context and literary genre help resolve apparent conflicts, how to investigate difficult examples responsibly, and why unanswered questions do not require us to abandon confidence in Scripture.

Welcome

The Bible contains sixty-six books written through many human authors across many centuries. It includes history, law, poetry, wisdom, prophecy, Gospels, letters, genealogies, speeches, parables, prayers, and symbolic visions.

Because the Bible contains so much material, readers naturally encounter passages that appear difficult to fit together.

One Gospel may mention one angel at Jesus' tomb while another mentions two. One account may summarize an event while another provides additional details. Proverbs 26:4 says not to answer a fool according to his foolishness, while the next verse says to answer a fool according to his foolishness. Paul says people are justified by faith apart from works of the Law. James says a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.

Do these passages contradict one another?

Sometimes an apparent contradiction is resolved by reading the surrounding context. Sometimes two writers describe different parts of the same event. Sometimes the same word is used in different senses. Sometimes a writer arranges material by theme rather than strict chronology.

Other questions are more difficult and remain debated among faithful interpreters. Christians should not pretend every problem has a quick answer. We should also avoid calling every difference a contradiction before examining what each passage claims.

The Short Answer

The Bible contains differences, tensions, difficult passages, and accounts told from different perspectives.

A difference is not automatically a contradiction.

A contradiction occurs when two statements affirm and deny the same thing, in the same sense, at the same time, and under the same conditions.

For example:

- "The tomb was empty on Sunday morning."
- "The tomb was not empty on Sunday morning."

If both statements referred to the same tomb, time, and meaning, they would contradict.

But these statements do not contradict:

- "Mary went to the tomb."
- "Mary and other women went to the tomb."

The first does not say Mary went alone. It simply focuses on her.

Many alleged contradictions disappear when readers distinguish between different details, perspectives, times, word meanings, summary and fuller description, general principles and particular situations, human actions and God's ultimate purpose, ordinary language and technical precision, and what the Bible records versus what it approves.

Some questions require more study, and a few may remain unresolved. An unanswered question is not automatically a proven contradiction.

Memory Anchor

Different is not the same as contradictory. First determine what each passage actually claims.

Scripture Translation

This guide primarily uses Scripture references rather than extended quotations so readers can verify each statement in their own dependable Bible translation.

A prayer before you begin

Father, You are the God of truth. Give me patience, humility, and wisdom as I study difficult passages. Protect me from shallow answers, careless accusations, and prideful certainty. Help me understand what Your Word actually says, see Jesus clearly, and respond with faith and obedience. In Jesus' name, amen.

PART ONE

What Is a Contradiction?

Simple meaning

A contradiction occurs when one statement affirms what another denies in the same sense, at the same time, and under the same conditions.

Consider:

- Peter was inside the house at noon.
- Peter was outside the house at noon.

If both refer to the same Peter, house, noon, and location, they contradict.

But these may not:

- Peter was inside the house at noon.
- Peter was outside the house at one o'clock.

The time is different.

A difference is not automatically a contradiction

Two writers may select different details without denying one another. Matthew mentions an angel at Jesus' tomb; Luke mentions two. Matthew does not say only one angel was present. He focuses upon the one who speaks.

An incomplete account is not necessarily inaccurate

Every account is selective. A report saying "A storm damaged the town" is compatible with a fuller report naming wind, rain, and lightning damage.

The Gospel writers openly select material according to their purposes.

Key passages

- Luke 1:1–4.
- John 20:30–31.
- John 21:24–25.

Memory Anchor

A contradiction requires more than different wording or details. One statement must truly deny what the other affirms.

PART TWO

Begin With Context

Read the sentence

A verse may seem to conflict because one or both passages have been removed from their sentences. Words receive meaning through grammar and literary setting.

Read the paragraph

The paragraph identifies who speaks, who is addressed, what question is answered, whether language is literal, poetic, ironic, conditional, or symbolic, and whether the writer approves or merely reports something.

Read the whole book

A writer may define a term or develop an argument across chapters. Paul and James cannot be compared faithfully by isolating individual sentences.

Locate the passage in the Bible's story

A command to Israel under the Mosaic covenant may function differently from a command to the church. A promise to exiles is not automatically an unconditional promise to every believer.

Ask what kind of writing you are reading

History, poetry, wisdom, prophecy, parable, letter, and apocalyptic vision communicate truth in different ways.

Memory Anchor

Before comparing verses, read both in their sentences, paragraphs, books, genres, and places in the biblical story.

PART THREE

The Bible Records Words It Does Not Approve

Not every speaker tells the truth

The Bible records statements from Satan, false prophets, foolish counselors, enemies, confused disciples, grieving people, and deceivers.

Genesis 3 truthfully records the serpent's lie without teaching the lie is true.

Job's friends

Job's friends say many religious-sounding things, but God later rebukes them for not speaking rightly about Him. Their speeches must be read within the whole book.

Ecclesiastes

Ecclesiastes explores life "under the sun." Individual statements belong within the book's movement toward fearing God and keeping His commands.

Narrative description is not moral approval

The Bible records polygamy, violence, deception, abuse, idolatry, and corruption. Recording an action does not mean commanding or approving it.

Key passages

- Genesis 3:1–5.
- Judges 17:6.
- 2 Samuel 11–12.
- Job 42:7–9.
- Ecclesiastes 12:13–14.
- 1 Corinthians 10:1–12.

Memory Anchor

Ask whether Scripture is teaching a statement, quoting someone, or reporting what happened.

PART FOUR

Different Perspectives Can Be Complementary

Eyewitnesses select details

Two truthful witnesses may emphasize different parts of one event. One may focus on the speaker; another may mention everyone present. One summarizes; another describes stages.

The Gospels have distinct purposes

Matthew emphasizes Jesus as Israel's Messiah. Mark emphasizes His authority, suffering, and servant mission. Luke gives an orderly account attentive to history, outsiders, prayer, and the Spirit. John selects signs so readers may believe and have life.

The resurrection accounts

The Gospels agree that Jesus died, was buried, women came to the tomb, the tomb was empty, heavenly messengers announced He had risen, Jesus appeared alive, and the disciples became witnesses.

They differ in named women, emphasized appearances, summarized movements, and recorded words. Naming some people does not deny others. Focusing on one speaker does not deny another.

Memory Anchor

Different witnesses can truthfully describe the same event while selecting different people, details, and moments.

PART FIVE

Summary and Expansion

Ancient writers often summarized events

One writer may compress actions into a sentence; another expands them. Compression does not imply everything happened at one instant.

The centurion's servant

Matthew 8 describes a centurion coming to Jesus. Luke 7 says he sent elders and friends. A person can be described as doing something through authorized representatives. Matthew focuses on the responsible requester; Luke supplies intermediaries.

Jairus's daughter

Matthew compresses the crisis so Jairus reports his daughter dead. Mark and Luke narrate the stages: she is dying, then messengers report her death. All agree Jairus sought Jesus, the girl died, and Jesus raised her.

Memory Anchor

One writer may summarize what another narrates in stages. Compression is not contradiction.

PART SIX

Numbers, Ordinary Precision, and Everyday Language

The Bible often uses ordinary language

We say "There were a hundred people," "I waited all day," "Everyone heard," "The sun rose," or "The whole city attended." Such expressions can communicate truth without mathematical or scientific technicality.

Sunrise is a simple example

Saying "the sun rose" accurately describes what an observer sees. It is not a technical claim that the sun travels around a motionless Earth. This is phenomenological or observational language.

Hyperbole is intentional emphasis

"Everyone in town was there" may describe a very large crowd, not every resident. Jesus' commands about removing an offending eye or hand communicate the seriousness of sin, not instructions for self-mutilation.

Round numbers

One account may give a precise figure while another rounds. That is not contradictory unless both claim incompatible exactness.

Ancient population and military counts

Difficulties may involve numeral copying, different systems, included leaders, rounding, group terms, or different manuscript readings.

Genealogies may be selective

Genealogies can skip generations to emphasize a line, establish legal descent, or create a memorable structure. "Son of" can mean descendant.

Memory Anchor

Ancient writers used ordinary observation, hyperbole, round numbers, selective genealogies, and conventions appropriate to their purposes.

PART SEVEN

Proverbs 26:4–5

The apparent contradiction

Verse 4 says not to answer a fool according to his foolishness. Verse 5 says to answer a fool according to his foolishness. They are intentionally together.

Different dangers require different responses

The first warns against becoming like the fool. The second warns against allowing foolishness to appear wise.

Wisdom applies truth to circumstances

Ask whether answering draws you into foolishness, whether silence lets harm spread, whether the person will listen, who else is affected, and what response is truthful and loving.

Memory Anchor

Sometimes wisdom remains silent; sometimes wisdom answers. The situation determines which danger must be avoided.

PART EIGHT

Paul, James, Faith, and Works

The apparent conflict

Paul teaches justification by faith apart from works of the Law. James says a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.

The same words can be used differently

Paul opposes earning right standing through human achievement. James opposes a claimed faith producing no obedience or care. Paul asks how guilty sinners are accepted. James asks what kind of faith is genuine.

Abraham in Paul and James

Romans 4 points to Genesis 15:6, when Abraham believed and was counted righteous. James points to Genesis 22, when Abraham's faith was demonstrated through obedience.

Paul rejects works as the basis of justification. James presents works as evidence of living faith. Paul also teaches believers are saved for good works.

Key passages

- Genesis 15:1–6.
- Genesis 22:1–18.
- Romans 3:21–31.
- Romans 4:1–8.
- Galatians 5:6.
- Ephesians 2:8–10.
- James 2:14–26.

Memory Anchor

We are saved by grace through faith apart from earning. Saving faith does not remain alone but produces obedience.

PART NINE

Does God Change His Mind?

God does not change in character

Numbers 23:19, 1 Samuel 15:29, Malachi 3:6, and James 1:17 teach that God is faithful, truthful, and unchanging in character and ultimate purpose.

Some passages say God regretted or relented

Genesis 6 describes grief over wickedness. Exodus 32 describes God relenting after Moses interceded. Jonah describes God relenting when Nineveh repented.

Unchanging character can produce different actions

God consistently opposes sin and shows mercy toward repentance. If people move from rebellion to repentance, His response changes because His holy and merciful character does not.

Warnings can be conditional

Jeremiah 18 explains that announced judgment may be withheld when a nation turns from evil, and announced blessing may be withheld when people turn to evil.

Anthropomorphic language

Scripture describes God's actions in human relational language so we understand His grief, response, judgment, and mercy. This does not mean He discovers information or changes moral character.

Memory Anchor

God's character does not change. His consistent holiness and mercy lead Him to respond differently to rebellion and repentance.

PART TEN

Can People See God?

Some passages say people saw God

Jacob says he saw God face to face. Israel's elders saw the God of Israel. Isaiah saw the LORD.

Other passages say no one can see God

Exodus 33 says no one sees God's face and lives. John says no one has ever seen God. Paul says God dwells in unapproachable light.

Different senses of seeing

Scripture distinguishes visible manifestations, visions, experienced presence, limited glory, and God's unveiled divine fullness.

God revealed through the Son

The unseen God is made known through Jesus, the eternal Son who became human and reveals the Father.

Key passages

- Genesis 32:24–30.
- Exodus 24:9–11.
- Exodus 33:18–23.
- Isaiah 6:1–7.
- John 1:1–18.
- John 14:8–11.
- 1 Timothy 6:13–16.

Memory Anchor

People saw true manifestations of God, but no one has comprehended His unveiled divine fullness. Jesus makes the Father known.

PART ELEVEN

Who Incited David to Take the Census?

The two passages

Second Samuel 24 describes the LORD's anger and David being moved toward the census. First Chronicles 21 says Satan incited David.

Different levels of agency

Satan acts with evil intent. David chooses sin and remains responsible. God, without approving evil, permits the event within judgment and sovereign purpose.

A similar pattern appears in Job

Satan attacks Job; God permits limits and remains sovereign. Job refers to God's ultimate authority without declaring Satan righteous.

God is not the author of evil

Sovereignty does not mean moral approval of sinful motives. Scripture can attribute an event to God's ultimate judgment and identify a sinful secondary agent.

Key passages

- 2 Samuel 24.
- 1 Chronicles 21.
- Job 1–2.
- James 1:13–17.

Memory Anchor

Satan incited evil, David chose sin, and God sovereignly permitted the event within judgment. These are different levels of agency.

PART TWELVE

How Did Judas Die?

Matthew's account

Matthew 27 says Judas returned the silver and hanged himself. The priests used the money to buy the potter's field.

Acts' account

Acts 1 describes Judas acquiring a field with the reward of wickedness and falling headlong, his body bursting open.

Possible relationship

Judas hanged himself; his body later fell and was ruptured; the priests bought the field with his money; the purchase could be attributed to him because it used his betrayal money.

Unanswered details

The passages do not explain precisely how the body fell. A proposed harmonization should be distinguished from explicit text. The accounts do not require mutually exclusive causes of death.

Memory Anchor

Matthew describes Judas's hanging; Acts describes his fall and bodily destruction. These may be successive parts of one event.

PART THIRTEEN

The Genealogies of Jesus

Matthew and Luke differ

Matthew traces through David's son Solomon. Luke traces through David's son Nathan. Names between David and Joseph differ substantially.

Common explanations

Proposals include legal versus biological lines, Joseph's versus Mary's ancestry, adoption or levirate marriage, different branches converging in Joseph, and ancient genealogical conventions.

No explanation is accepted by every interpreter.

What is clear?

Matthew structures groups emphasizing Jesus as son of David and Abraham and royal Messiah. Luke traces to Adam, emphasizing solidarity with humanity. Both identify Jesus within Israel and Davidic hope.

Memory Anchor

Matthew and Luke arrange Jesus' ancestry differently for distinct purposes. Several explanations exist, but some details remain debated.

PART FOURTEEN

The Creation Accounts

Genesis 1

Genesis 1 gives a structured cosmic sequence moving from an unformed and unfilled world toward ordered realms and inhabitants. Humanity is created in God's image.

Genesis 2

Genesis 2 focuses on humanity, Eden, the command, animals, marriage, and the man and woman.

Does Genesis 2 give a contradictory order?

Some translations make Genesis 2:19 sound as though animals were created after Adam. The Hebrew form can be understood as referring to God's earlier creation before bringing them to Adam.

Genesis 2 need not present a second complete chronology. It focuses on Adam's need for a corresponding partner.

Different scale and purpose

Genesis 1 is wide-angle; Genesis 2 is close-up. Questions about the length and structure of creation days remain debated but are distinct from whether the chapters deny one another.

Memory Anchor

Genesis 1 gives the wide view; Genesis 2 focuses on humanity, Eden, marriage, and responsibility.

PART FIFTEEN

Do the Resurrection Accounts Contradict?

Who went to the tomb?

The Gospels name different women. John begins with Mary Magdalene and later uses “we,” suggesting awareness of others. Naming selected women does not exclude others.

How many angels?

Matthew and Mark emphasize one messenger; Luke and John mention two. If two were present, one could be the principal speaker.

Where did Jesus appear?

The Gospels describe appearances in Jerusalem and Galilee. Jesus could appear in multiple places before His ascension.

What did the women do?

Mark 16:8 describes their initial fearful flight and silence. Other accounts report their later telling the disciples.

The central testimony

All agree Jesus died, was buried, the tomb was empty, women first witnessed it, heavenly messengers announced resurrection, Jesus appeared alive, and the disciples became witnesses.

Memory Anchor

The Gospels arrange resurrection details differently while agreeing that Jesus died, the tomb was empty, and He appeared alive.

PART SIXTEEN

Does God Tempt People?

God tested Abraham

Genesis 22 says God tested Abraham. James says God does not tempt anyone with evil.

One word can carry related senses

Testing evaluates, reveals, strengthens, or proves faith. Tempting entices toward sin. A trial can function differently according to the agent's purpose.

God's purpose in Genesis 22

God did not permit Abraham to kill Isaac. The test revealed faith, and God provided a substitute. The event points toward God's provision and ultimately His Son.

Memory Anchor

God tests faith for faithful purposes; He does not entice people to commit evil.

PART SEVENTEEN

Law, Grace, and Different Covenants

Does the Old Testament teach law and the New grace?

The Old Testament contains grace: God chose Abraham, rescued Israel, forgave sin, showed covenant love, and promised restoration. The New Testament contains commands to obedience and holy living.

Different covenant settings

Some laws were specifically for Israel under Moses: sacrifices, priests, ritual purity, foods, national courts, inheritance, and calendar observances.

Jesus fulfills the Law and inaugurates the new covenant. Christians do not offer animal sacrifices because His sacrifice fulfills them. This is redemptive fulfillment, not reversal of God's character.

Key passages

- Exodus 20.
- Jeremiah 31:31–34.
- Matthew 5:17–20.
- Mark 7:14–23.
- Acts 10.
- Romans 3:21–31.
- Galatians 3.
- Hebrews 8–10.

Memory Anchor

The Bible's covenants develop across history. Fulfillment and changed application are not contradictions in God's character.

PART EIGHTEEN

Does the Bible Teach Peace or Violence?

Jesus is the Prince of Peace

Jesus teaches enemy love, mercy, reconciliation, and peacemaking. He suffers rather than establishing His kingdom through sinful violence.

The Bible also records war and judgment

The Old Testament describes wars and divine judgment. The New Testament warns of final judgment and Christ's defeat of evil.

Different categories should not be collapsed

Distinguish personal revenge, government authority, defense, divine judgment, Israel's unique covenant role, ordinary warfare, final judgment, and symbolic apocalyptic imagery.

A conquest command should not automatically be applied to the church. Christians cannot declare modern political or military goals equivalent to ancient Israel's unique commands.

When the Old Testament troubles you

Read the full account. Study history and covenant. Consider God's patience, judgment, holiness, and concern for victims. Distinguish description from command. Examine how Jesus fulfills the story. Faithful Christians may disagree about details; honest difficulty is not rebellion.

Memory Anchor

Biblical peace, human violence, government, and divine judgment are different categories requiring context.

PART NINETEEN

Translation Differences Are Not Automatic Contradictions

One original word can have several meanings

Spirit can mean wind, breath, human spirit, spiritual being, or the Holy Spirit. World can mean creation, humanity, or a rebellious system. Flesh can mean physical existence or humanity under sin.

Different translations emphasize different features

One preserves form closely, another makes meaning explicit, and a third preserves ambiguity. Differences do not imply dishonesty.

Compare responsibly

1. Read footnotes.
2. Compare the paragraph.
3. Identify wording, manuscript, grammar, or interpretation issues.
4. Consult dependable help.
5. Avoid unsupported claims that “the Hebrew” or “the Greek really means” something.

Memory Anchor

Translation differences may reveal semantic range or different ways of expressing the same meaning.

PART TWENTY

Some Difficulties Are Ethical Rather Than Logical

Not every objection alleges contradiction

Some readers ask whether an action, command, judgment, law, or prayer is morally good.

Examples include:

- The conquest of Canaan.
- Warfare and divine judgment.
- Laws concerning slavery or servitude.
- Treatment of women, foreigners, or enemies.
- Imprecatory psalms asking God to judge evildoers.
- Severe Old Testament penalties.
- The Flood.
- Final judgment and hell.

These are serious questions, but they are not automatically contradictions.

Different questions require different methods

A logical question asks whether both statements can be true. A historical question asks what happened. A textual question asks what the wording said. An interpretive question asks what it means. An ethical question asks how an action is consistent with God's holiness, justice, mercy, and love.

The conquest narratives

Study God's patience toward evil, entrenched violence and idolatry, God as Creator and Judge, Israel's unique calling, limits on Israel, Israel's later judgment for similar sins, ancient warfare language, and the movement toward Jesus and final judgment.

Christians disagree about some warfare rhetoric, including expressions such as “destroyed all” when members of the same groups later appear. These questions deserve study and cannot authorize modern Christians to declare their wars divinely commanded.

Imprecatory psalms

These psalms ask God to judge evil. They arise from violence, betrayal, oppression, and injustice. They do not authorize personal revenge; they bring anger into God's presence and entrust judgment to Him.

Christians read them in light of God's hatred of evil, victims' suffering, enemy love, Jesus' injustice, the cross, and final judgment.

A responsible response

1. Name the moral question honestly.
2. Read the full passage.
3. Study history and covenant.
4. Distinguish description from approval.
5. Distinguish Israel's role from the church's mission.

6. Consider victims of the evil judged.
7. Read the whole biblical story.
8. Connect the passage to Jesus.
9. Consult responsible interpreters.
10. Avoid answers minimizing suffering or holiness.

Memory Anchor

A moral objection is not automatically a logical contradiction. Ethical difficulties deserve honest, careful, Christ-centered study.

PART TWENTY-ONE

What If I Cannot Resolve a Difficulty?

Distinguish possible from proven contradiction

If a responsible explanation is possible, contradiction has not been demonstrated. A proposed explanation need not be proven to show two passages are not logically impossible to reconcile.

Do not force a weak solution

It is acceptable to say:

- “This explanation is possible.”
- “Several solutions have been proposed.”
- “The evidence does not allow certainty.”
- “I do not yet know how these details fit.”

An unanswered question is not a contradiction

Not knowing how statements fit is different from proving they cannot fit. Our historical, linguistic, cultural, and manuscript knowledge is limited.

Continue reading

Write down the question, consult trustworthy help, return later, and receive what is clear in the surrounding passage.

Keep Jesus central

Christian faith rests upon God revealed through Jesus—His life, death, resurrection, authority, and saving work.

Final Beginner Memory Anchor

Study hard questions honestly. Hold possible solutions humbly. Trust what Scripture makes clear.

QUICK FAQ

Does the Bible contain differences?

Yes. Writers select, arrange, summarize, and emphasize differently.

Is every difference a contradiction?

No. A contradiction requires one statement to deny what another affirms in the same sense and circumstances.

Why do the Gospels sound different?

They present the same Jesus for distinct audiences and purposes.

Does one angel versus two contradict?

Not necessarily. Saying one spoke does not mean only one was present.

Why are some numbers different?

Reasons may include rounding, counting methods, included groups, variants, or copying difficulty.

Do Paul and James disagree about salvation?

No. Paul rejects earning; James rejects a claim to faith producing no transformed life.

Does God change His mind?

God does not change in character or ultimate purpose. He responds consistently to rebellion and repentance.

Why do the genealogies differ?

They structure ancestry differently and may trace different legal or family lines. Several explanations exist, but details remain debated.

Are morally difficult passages contradictions?

Not necessarily. Ethical questions require study of God's character, judgment, covenant, history, and the movement toward Jesus.

What if I cannot explain a passage?

Write the question, read context, compare translations, use trustworthy resources, and remain honest.

WANT TO GO DEEPER?

Intermediate Guide

This section examines logical contradiction, historical reporting, Gospel composition, harmonization, and theological interpretation more closely.

The logical form of a contradiction

The law of noncontradiction says a statement cannot be true and false in the same respect, time, and conditions.

Before alleging contradiction, identify the proposition, subject, time, key terms, circumstances, and whether exhaustive precision is claimed.

Contradiction, tension, paradox, and mystery

CONTRADICTION — two claims cannot both be true in the same sense.

TENSION — two truths are difficult to hold together but do not logically deny each other, such as sovereignty and responsibility.

PARADOX — a statement appears contradictory but is coherent when understood, such as losing life to find it.

MYSTERY — revealed truth exceeding complete understanding without violating logic. The Trinity is one God in three Persons, not one Person and three Persons in the same sense.

Authorial selectivity

Every history selects due to space, purpose, audience, evidence, design, and emphasis. John says Jesus did many other signs not recorded.

TELESCOPING compresses events or generations.

TOPICAL ARRANGEMENT groups material by theme rather than strict chronology.

The words of Jesus

Parallel accounts may differ because Jesus taught similar material more than once, spoke in Aramaic or Hebrew while Gospels preserve Greek, writers translated differently, summarized, selected portions, or followed ancient reporting conventions.

IPSISSIMA VERBA means exact words. IPSISSIMA VOX means authentic voice or meaning. This distinction recognizes faithful substance without dismissing Gospel wording as invention.

Ancient quotation conventions allowed combining, summarizing, or adapting quotations while faithfully representing sources.

The Synoptic Gospels

Synoptic means “seen together.” Matthew, Mark, and Luke share material and order while retaining distinctive content.

The Synoptic Problem asks about literary relationships. Proposals include Markan priority, Matthean priority, shared oral or written sources, and combinations. Luke acknowledges earlier accounts. Literary dependence is not plagiarism or denial of inspiration.

Harmonization

Healthy harmonization respects wording, distinguishes text from assumptions, uses plausible explanations, allows selection, and admits uncertainty.

Unhealthy harmonization rewrites the text, invents events, treats proposals as proven, erases emphasis, or refuses difficulty.

Use minimal assumptions needed to show accounts can reasonably fit.

Semantic range

WORLD can mean creation, humanity, inhabited world, or rebellion.

LAW can mean Mosaic Law, Pentateuch, Old Testament, command, principle, or moral instruction.

FLESH can mean physical existence, descent, or humanity under sin.

JUSTIFY can mean declare righteous, vindicate, or demonstrate a claim.

Contradictions are falsely created when one definition is forced everywhere.

Phenomenological and observational language

Scripture describes the world as it appears. “The sun rose” is truthful ordinary language, not a technical astronomical claim.

Words such as all, every, whole, and world can function rhetorically. “All Judea” need not mean every individual without exception.

Hyperbole communicates forcefully. Removing an offending eye dramatizes sin’s seriousness rather than commanding mutilation.

Genre and truth

POETRY uses parallelism, imagery, metaphor, personification, and hyperbole.

WISDOM expresses patterns, not unconditional guarantees.

APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE uses beasts, horns, numbers, and cosmic signs symbolically.

PARABLES teach through crafted stories.

Different calendars, dates, and counting methods

INCLUSIVE COUNTING treats part of a day as a day, helping explain “after three days” and “on the third day.”

REGNAL YEARS differ based on accession counting, calendar beginnings, co-regencies, and national systems.

PASSOVER CHRONOLOGY in John and the Synoptics remains debated. Proposals involve broader festival terminology, different calendars, preparation language, and theological emphasis.

Divine agency and secondary causes

Scripture attributes one event to multiple agents. Joseph’s brothers intended evil while God intended good. Assyria acts proudly while serving judgment. Wicked people crucify Jesus within God’s saving purpose.

Key passages

- Genesis 50:20.
- Isaiah 10:5–19.
- Acts 2:22–24.
- Acts 4:27–28.

Progressive revelation

God disclosed His plan across history. Later Scripture explains, fulfills, or deepens earlier revelation without making it false. A seed and mature tree differ in development without contradiction.

Jesus fulfills Law, sacrifice, priesthood, temple, kingship, and covenant promise. Fulfillment can change application without declaring God mistaken.

Inerrancy and authorial intention

Inerrancy commonly means Scripture, in its original writings and rightly interpreted according to intention and genre, does not affirm falsehood.

It does not require modern scientific vocabulary, exhaustive reporting, mathematical precision where none is claimed, strict chronology, identical parallel wording, denial of round numbers or figures, or approval of every recorded act.

A poem should not be judged as a laboratory report, a summary as an exhaustive transcript, or a proverb as an unconditional guarantee.

Accommodation

God communicates truth in understandable language, images, cultures, and forms. Accommodation is not deception; a teacher can communicate truth at a learner’s level.

Textual variants and apparent contradictions

Some apparent conflicts involve copying differences, especially parallel Old Testament numbers. Check footnotes and manuscript evidence before alleging contradiction.

Textual criticism does not solve every interpretive difficulty. Textual and interpretive questions must be distinguished.

Ethical objections and logical analysis

A moral objection can be important without being a contradiction.

“God commands Israel to judge a Canaanite city” and “Jesus commands followers to love enemies” come from different covenant settings, agents, and roles. This does not settle every ethical question, but they are not automatically direct contradictions.

Ethical interpretation asks who has authority, whether action is described or commanded, whether a command is universal or unique, what evil is judged, how patient God was, how Israel is accountable, how the passage leads to Christ, and what authority the church has.

Imprecatory prayer and enemy love

Psalms ask God to judge enemies; Jesus commands enemy love. Entrusting judgment to God can coexist with refusing personal revenge. The New Testament commands love and also cries for divine justice.

Key passages

- Psalm 10.
- Psalm 94.
- Matthew 5:43–48.
- Romans 12:14–21.
- 2 Timothy 4:14.
- Revelation 6:9–11.

Archaeology and historical evidence

Archaeology illuminates places, buildings, inscriptions, rulers, culture, languages, economics, warfare, burial, and worship. It does not preserve every event or person. Lack of discovery is not automatic disproof, and interpretations can change.

Epistemic humility

Readers may lack complete history, ancient-language fluency, literary knowledge, manuscripts, chronological certainty, or awareness of assumptions.

Four responsible conclusions

1. RESOLVED — context or evidence explains the difference.
2. PROBABLY RESOLVED — one explanation fits though not every detail is proven.
3. SEVERAL POSSIBILITIES — multiple responsible explanations exist.
4. CURRENTLY UNRESOLVED — evidence does not permit confidence.

Currently unresolved does not mean proven contradiction.

A responsible process for investigating an apparent contradiction

1. Write both claims accurately.
2. Read both passages completely.
3. Identify who speaks.
4. Identify genre.
5. Define key words.
6. Identify time and circumstances.
7. Ask whether completeness is claimed.
8. Look for summary and expansion.
9. Compare translations and footnotes.
10. Study historical and cultural conventions.
11. Identify whether the objection is logical, textual, historical, interpretive, theological, emotional, or ethical.
12. Consult responsible interpreters.
13. Evaluate proposed solutions.
14. State the conclusion modestly.
15. Return to the message.

Common Mistakes

Mistake 1: Calling every difference a contradiction

Better practice: Identify exact mutually exclusive claims.

Mistake 2: Reading isolated verses

Better practice: Read sentence, paragraph, book, and biblical setting.

Mistake 3: Assuming every account is exhaustive

Better practice: Allow selection and emphasis.

Mistake 4: Demanding modern reporting conventions

Better practice: Understand ancient summary, quotation, genealogy, chronology, and numbers.

Mistake 5: Ignoring genre

Better practice: Read each literary form appropriately.

Mistake 6: Forcing one definition everywhere

Better practice: Let context determine meaning.

Mistake 7: Presenting a possible solution as certain

Better practice: Distinguish text from inference.

Mistake 8: Rejecting all harmonization

Better practice: Responsible harmonization can show compatibility.

Mistake 9: Forcing weak harmonization

Better practice: Admit assumptions and unknowns.

Mistake 10: Treating unanswered questions as error

Better practice: Lack of explanation is not proof of impossibility.

Mistake 11: Using contradiction for moral objection

Better practice: Distinguish logical from ethical and emotional difficulty.

Mistake 12: Dismissing moral questions

Better practice: Ethical objections deserve honest study.

Mistake 13: Losing Jesus in details

Better practice: Return to Scripture's witness to Christ.

Intermediate Worksheet

Passage One:

Passage Two:

1. What does each explicitly affirm?

2. What does neither claim?
3. Who speaks or writes?
4. Who is addressed?
5. What is the genre?
6. What is the context?
7. Are words used in the same sense?
8. Is the time the same?
9. Are people or conditions the same?
10. Is completeness claimed?
11. Could summary and expansion be involved?
12. Could different levels of agency be involved?
13. Could round numbers or counting conventions be involved?
14. Could observation or hyperbole be involved?
15. Could translation or textual evidence be involved?
16. What kind of objection is this?
17. What historical information matters?
18. What explanations are proposed?
19. Which best fits?
20. What assumptions are required?
21. Is it resolved, probable, several possibilities, or unresolved?
22. What truth remains clear?

Final Review

- Have I quoted both passages accurately?
- Have I read both contexts?
- Have I identified genre?
- Have I distinguished reporting from approval?
- Have I defined key words?
- Have I checked time, subject, sense, and circumstances?
- Have I allowed selection, summary, and expansion?
- Have I considered observation, hyperbole, and ancient conventions?
- Have I checked translations and footnotes?
- Have I identified logical versus ethical objection?
- Have I distinguished possible from proven solution?
- Have I admitted uncertainty?
- Have I returned to Jesus?

Review And Reflection

1. What is a contradiction?
2. Why is difference not contradiction?
3. Why can one Gospel mention one angel and another two?
4. How can summary and expansion fit?
5. How can "the sun rose" be true observational language?
6. Why do Proverbs 26:4–5 belong together?
7. How do Paul and James differ in usage?
8. In what sense does God not change?
9. How can people see God while no one has seen His fullness?
10. How do sovereignty and Satan's action fit the census?
11. How can Judas's accounts describe different aspects?
12. Why do genealogies differ?
13. How do Genesis 1 and 2 differ in focus?
14. What do all resurrection accounts share?
15. What is testing versus tempting?
16. How does covenant development differ from contradiction?
17. Why examine translation differences in context?
18. How is ethical objection different from logical contradiction?

19. What is healthy harmonization?
20. Why is an unanswered question not a proven contradiction?

A Seven-Day Reading Path

DAY 1: DIFFERENT DETAILS, SHARED EVENT

Read Matthew 28:1–10, Mark 16:1–8, Luke 24:1–12, and John 20:1–18. List shared and distinctive details.

DAY 2: FAITH AND WORKS

Read Romans 3:21–31, Romans 4:1–8, Ephesians 2:8–10, and James 2:14–26. Which errors do Paul and James oppose?

DAY 3: DOES GOD CHANGE?

Read Numbers 23:19, Exodus 32:7–14, Jeremiah 18:1–12, Jonah 3:1–10, and Malachi 3:6. How do character and response fit?

DAY 4: SEEING GOD

Read Exodus 24:9–11, Exodus 33:18–23, Isaiah 6:1–7, John 1:1–18, and 1 Timothy 6:13–16. What kinds of seeing appear?

DAY 5: DAVID'S CENSUS

Read 2 Samuel 24, 1 Chronicles 21, Job 1–2, and James 1:13–17. Which agents, motives, and responsibilities appear?

DAY 6: JUDAS AND THE GENEALOGIES

Read Matthew 1:1–17, Matthew 27:1–10, Luke 3:23–38, and Acts 1:15–26. What is emphasized and what remains open?

DAY 7: HOW JESUS READ SCRIPTURE

Read Matthew 5:17–20, Luke 24:25–49, John 5:39–47, and John 10:34–36. How did Jesus receive, fulfill, and use Scripture?

Key Passages For Further Study

- Genesis 1–2 — Complementary views of creation.
- Genesis 22:1–19 — God tests Abraham and provides.
- Genesis 50:15–21 — Human evil and God's purpose.
- Exodus 32:7–14 — God relents from judgment.
- Numbers 23:19 — God does not change like humans.
- 2 Samuel 24 — David's census under judgment.
- 1 Chronicles 21 — Satan incites David.
- Proverbs 26:4–5 — Wisdom may require silence or response.
- Jeremiah 18:1–12 — Judgment and blessing respond to action.
- Jonah 3–4 — God relents when Nineveh repents.
- Matthew 1:1–17 — Matthew's genealogy.
- Matthew 5:43–48 — Love for enemies.
- Matthew 8:5–13 — The centurion in summary.
- Matthew 27:1–10 — Judas and the field.
- Matthew 28:1–10 — Resurrection account.
- Luke 3:23–38 — Luke's genealogy.
- Luke 7:1–10 — The centurion's representatives.
- Luke 24:1–49 — Resurrection account.
- John 1:1–18 — The unseen God revealed.
- John 20:1–31 — Resurrection testimony.
- Acts 1:15–26 — Judas's field and replacement.
- Romans 3–4 — Justification by faith.
- Romans 12:14–21 — Love enemies and entrust judgment.
- Ephesians 2:8–10 — Saved by grace for good works.
- James 1:2–18 — Testing and temptation.
- James 2:14–26 — Living faith through works.
- Revelation 6:9–11 — The faithful cry for justice.

Final Encouragement

The Bible is not afraid of careful reading. Its writers tell truth through real language, history, literary forms, purposes, and perspectives. Some apparent contradictions disappear quickly. Some require ancient language or culture. Some have several explanations. Some remain difficult. Some raise moral or emotional questions rather than logical contradiction.

Faithful confidence does not require pretending every question is easy. It requires treating Scripture fairly.

Do not demand that poetry function like science, that summary include every detail, that mentioning one person excludes others, or that one word mean the same everywhere.

Do not mistake observational language for scientific error, hyperbole for falsehood, God's unchanging character for identical action in changing circumstances, covenant fulfillment for reversal, moral struggle for contradiction, or an unanswered question for proven error.

Bring questions into the light. Read carefully. Compare responsibly. Use trustworthy help. Hold solutions humbly. Receive what Scripture makes clear.

Most importantly, follow where the Bible leads—to Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah, crucified Savior, risen Lord, and coming King.

Final Memory Anchor

Read the words. Study the context. Respect the genre. Identify the question. Compare the accounts. Follow the story to Jesus.

A prayer of response

Father, thank You for Scripture through many writers and centuries. Help me study patiently and honestly. Protect me from dismissing Your Word too quickly or defending it carelessly. Give me discernment between tension and contradiction, humility about what I do not know, and faith in what You make clear. Meet me in passages that trouble me morally or emotionally. Lead me through every question to Jesus. In His name, amen.

A Call To Salvation

The Bible's central message is clear.

God created human beings to know, love, and live under His good rule. All people have sinned and fall short of His glory. Sin brings death and separation, and we cannot rescue ourselves through morality, knowledge, religion, church attendance, or intentions.

God did not leave us without hope. Jesus Christ, the eternal Son, became truly human. He lived without sin, died for our sins, was buried, and rose bodily.

The resurrection accounts contain different details but unite in proclaiming the crucified Jesus alive.

Salvation is God's gift received by grace through faith. Scripture calls us to repent, believe, confess Jesus as Lord, and trust God raised Him.

Read:

- Mark 1:14–15.
- John 3:16–18.
- Romans 3:21–26.
- Romans 5:6–11.
- Romans 10:9–13.
- 1 Corinthians 15:1–8.
- Ephesians 2:1–10.

If You Are Ready To Turn To Jesus

Speak honestly to God. Admit your sin. Believe Jesus died and rose. Ask forgiveness. Trust Him. Surrender to His loving authority.

A prayer is not magic. Jesus saves. Prayer expresses genuine repentance and faith.

A simple prayer of faith

Lord Jesus, I know that I have sinned and cannot save myself. I believe You died for my sins and rose again. Please forgive me, make me new, and teach me to follow You. I place my trust in You. Amen.

If you have trusted Jesus, begin reading His Word, pray, and connect with a faithful local church where Scripture is taught, the gospel proclaimed, and Christ honored.

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- Reveal the heart of the Father.
- Magnify Jesus.
- Be grounded in Scripture.
- Encourage readers to open their Bibles.
- Build confidence, not dependence.

Rooted in Scripture — Pointing to Jesus