

Bible Difficulties By Design

Apparent Discrepancies

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Today we Christians face increasing verbal, and sometimes physically violent attacks for our association with Jesus Christ and the Bible. Evolutionists, homosexuals, criminals, judges, and politicians have free rein to express their hatred towards Christians. Even the Vice President of the United States has said that people who think the Ten Commandments should be enforced should be removed from existence. Professors, at all levels of education, increasingly take cheap shots at the Bible. Critics claim the Bible is full of discrepancies and contradictions. When this happens, do we doubt the reliability of the Bible? Does it bother our faith?

An article entitled "Biblical Interpretations Obey Social Prescriptions" by Simone Santini (who is an open atheist) declares, "Most religious groups have no trouble admitting that some of the things reported in the Bible are not true. Apart from very curious notions of celestial mechanics, there are logical inconsistencies: Matthew and Luke give two completely different genealogies of Jesus, so one of them has to be wrong."

Is it true that God's written Word is imperfect? That some of what is written in the Bible is wrong? Is the Bible riddled with errors, as the skeptics claim? Many arrogant scholars think the Bible should be considered myth, and only useful for its literary value! As incredible as it may seem, the Bible is being studied at the University of California on its Berkley campus—which is one of the most liberal campuses on earth. And, as you would expect, it is not only being studied for its theological value; but also for its significance for its folklore, for its mythology.

Anthropology Professor Alan Dundes (who is a professor there at the Berkley campus) skeptically states in his book, *Holy Writ as Oral Lit: The Bible as Folklore*, "Should it be the Ten Commandments? What were the names of the disciples? If these questions are hard to answer, it may be because the Bible has many discrepancies."

Dundes claims that there are variations within the same book as well as between the testaments. Here is another quote from him, "One chapter of Genesis clearly states that God created animals before he created man. In the very next chapter, it is clearly the other way around, with God creating man before animals."

Do you know the answers to these "unanswerable discrepancies"? In their pursuit to 'prove' the inaccuracies of the Bible, the critics show their own ignorance and

shallowness—as we see in Dundes' proclamation. Simply stated: the different outlines and order of events in Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 arrive simply from the condensation of the account in the first chapter and from the disregard for chronological order in the second. In the first, the writer gives a general—yet precise—account of the six days' work. But in the second chapter, he rephrases the story and (without following the order of time) gives some additional details. Everything in the additional account (in chapter two) is used in its relation to man, rather than time sequence.

So, you see that some discrepancies are easily answered; but these critics tend to not want to believe the simple truth. The narratives of the Bible do not contradict one another, but wonderfully complement each another. Many in the world are willingly fooled by the flagrant lies that the critics tell about the Bible's alleged imperfections. It is the attempt of the unbelieving attackers of the Bible to question its accuracy in order to cast doubt on the Supremacy of God. The Bible provides irrefutable evidence that God is Supreme; and He has purposefully (for His pleasure) designed the Bible in a way that seems, to the unconverted human being, to be riddled with errors, discrepancies, and contradictions.

The apostle Paul wrote emphatically, in I Corinthians 14:33, that "God is not the author of confusion but of peace." So how can these critics be right (that there are so many discrepancies and contradictions in the Bible)? Well, of course, they are not [right].

So why did our perfect, omnipotent God produce His written Word leaving so many unanswered questions and seeming contradictions? Why does He permit the discrepancies to exist? What good can come from them? God's declaration in Isaiah 55 sheds some light on this.

Isaiah 55:8-9 "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts."

There are no *true* discrepancies, or *valid* contradictions, in the Bible. God has given us His Word in the form that He has designed for us. He knew what He was doing when He inspired it. And it is perfect, according to His plan for the salvation of mankind.

Let us look at several reasons of why God designed the Bible the way He did. The God-designed difficulties in the Bible are there to stimulate our minds. Alleged discrepancies were intended to cause us to think deeply—to contemplate and meditate on the facts. They inspire us to search out the truth and make us curious and inquiring of new

knowledge and wisdom.

Here is one last quote, from a man who is totally devoid of wisdom and understanding. Professor Alan Dundes said, "The story of the women who came to the place where Jesus had been entombed has four different versions in the Gospels. In John 20:1, Mary Magdalene came along, and there was no mention of any other women. In Matthew 28:1, Mary Magdalene and a woman, known as 'the other Mary,' came together. But then in Mark 16:1-2, Mary Magdalene, Salome, and Mary the mother of James came. And finally, in Luke 24:9-10, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, Joanna, and a woman known as 'the other woman' came with them."

Critics, like Alan Dundes, deceitfully pull quotes from different translations of the Bible to show contradictions. Many times they are not concerned with the accuracy of their statements—only the end result of their efforts. This is 'the end justifies the means' Satanic principle. When people take it upon themselves to criticize God's written Word, lying comes easy to them. Satan is the father of lies, and it is his spirit that drives these critics.

Continuing this last quote from Dundes: "Discrepancies also exist over what the women saw, whether they were standing or sitting. If this had been a novel, it never would have been printed this way, because you would have had an editor in there saying, 'What do you mean there are twelve commandments? You already said there are ten.'"

So why did God not write the entire Bible like an historical, factual novel? Would that not have made it easier to understand? It is true that quite often, when we read a captivating novel, we cannot put it down. But, once we have finished it, we do not want pick it up again and read it—because we already know the ending, and we already know the details that are involved in it. We have completed the story; and we know the ending. There are no surprises. So, it does not draw us back to read it any time soon. It may be years before we have the desire to read it again.

Turn with me to Isaiah 28. God designed the Scriptures to have a different impact than a novel. By reading it (in its entirety—or here a little, there a little), we always find it thought provoking. Every time we pick it up, we read something that we have not noticed before—some spiritual gem to give us insight into the mind of God.

The world, however, is confused by it. The Bible's variation and style intrigues the critics, who work extra hard to disprove what they try so hard to deny. In Isaiah 28 we will find that God designed the Bible to stimulate our minds in this way.

Isaiah 28:9-15 "Whom will he teach knowledge? And whom will he make to understand the message? Those just weaned from milk? Those just drawn from the breasts? For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line. Here a little, there a little." For with stammering lips and another tongue He will speak to this people, to whom He said, "This is the rest with which you may cause the weary to rest." And, "This is the refreshing"; yet they would not hear. But the word of the LORD was to them, "Precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line. Here a little, there a little." That they might go and fall backward, and be broken and snared and caught. Therefore hear the word of the LORD, you scornful men, who rule this people who are in Jerusalem. Because you have said, "We have made a covenant with death, and with Sheol we are in agreement. When the overflowing scourge passes through, it will not come to us, for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood we have hidden ourselves."

Does this not describe the critics and skeptics? For those who are not called, but who favorably read their Bibles, find wisdom in *the letter* of the written Word. The newly called find a wealth of spiritual insight in *the milk* of the Word. And the long time members—those who have been studying diligently—find deeper spiritual meaning in *the solid food* of the Word.

Now turn with me to Hebrews 5, and we will continue this thought. The author of Hebrews was inspired to explain that, without continued study and revelation, we can regress to needing the milk of the Word—instead of solid food. Without an understanding of the milk, we cannot comprehend the solid food of the Word.

Hebrews 5:12-14 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age [i.e., those who are mature.], that is, those who by reason of use [Notice that word "use" there.] have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

So in order to be able to partake of solid food, we have to *use* our knowledge and we have to *use* the wisdom in God's Word. The analogy is very clear. A baby cannot advance to solid food if its body is not mature enough to handle it. Neither can the mind

of a Christian advance to assimilating spiritual knowledge (that solid, spiritual food) if his maturity level is only able to understand the milk.

These Bible critics are not even of the spiritual maturity of a baby—which is an incredible thought: they are void of understanding, of any type. The so-called "discrepancies" of the Bible have excited a great deal of mental action by people of all education levels. Though the seeming discrepancies of the Bible are a minor element of the overall theme, they have caused us to search the scriptures and to ask, "How are these difficulties resolved?" Quite often, things that are incomplete and hard to understand increase our curiosity.

You know that modern advertisement uses this similar method here. Remember the advertisement in the tabloid, *The National Enquirer*? It seemed like they ran it for years, on radio and on television. "For people with inquiring minds." They knew that, if they put absurd headlines in that trash paper (What else do you call it?), they would entice people and cause people to want to buy it.

Most people are curious when they do not fully understand what they see or hear. Sometimes, it is something that contradicts what we have firmly believed. This same principle is used in most headlines. They writers tell us only the amount of information needed to make us curious enough to read their articles.

Herbert Armstrong used this same technique. Remember that he was educated, and his earlier job was in advertising. Remember some of the titles to his booklets: "Just What Do You Mean—Born Again?" "Predestination—Does the Bible Teach It?" "Your Awesome Future—How Religion Deceives You" "What Will You Be Doing In The Next Life?" You see how these attention-grabbers (these titles) stimulate questions; and they get us to read more of what they are offering.

The Bible does the same thing. It also has these attention-grabbers. Notice the questions that arise from these scriptures here.

Proverbs 30:15 There are three things that are never satisfied, four never say, "Enough!"

Proverbs 30:18 There are three things that are too wonderful for me, yes, four that I do not understand.

Did you notice how they just make you want to know what the answers are?

Proverbs 30:21 For three things the earth is perturbed, yes, for four it cannot bear up.

Proverbs 30:24 There are four things which are little on the earth, but they are exceedingly wise.

Every one of those sections of Scripture makes you want to read the rest, to find out what the answer is. Now, just one more, very quickly:

Malachi 3:8 "Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed me! But you say [You see the question is there.], 'In what way have we robbed You?'

So the Bible uses these attention-grabbers; and it is very effective in making us curious, in making us interested, in finding the answer. Just as these literary hooks bait the curiosity of the reader, so also is a deeper interest awakened by examining two, or more, passages that appear to contradict each other. To illustrate this, let us compare John 15:15 with John 16:12. The last part of John 15 says...

John 15:15b For all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.

Notice there, that He says *all things* (He has made known). Then in John 16:12, the critics say that there is a discrepancy—that it is a contradiction.

John 16:12 "I [Christ] still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now."

So in the one scripture He said that He has told them everything. (At least, it appears that way.) But within probably two hours of the same statement, He seems to say the opposite. Why did Jesus say that He had made all things known to them, and then say that He still had many things to say to them—all in the same hour or so?

Well, John 15:15 is easily explained by adding a clarifying phrase—which we derive from what we read the rest of the New Testament. "All things that I have heard from My Father, [and this is the phrase we can add] **which were designed to you at present**, I have made known to you. The message I received for you I have faithfully

communicated."

The "many things" mentioned in John 16:12 were taught by Jesus immediately after His resurrection—and by Him (through the Holy Spirit) at subsequent times throughout the apostles' lives. So you see, even though the critics claim that there are discrepancies in these scriptures, there are none. It is just that they do not have an open mind to understand what God has so clearly put in here. Initially these two scriptures look like they contradict each other; but there is no contradiction—none whatsoever.

There is a basic spiritual principle contained within these two scriptures that helps us to understand why, at times, certain doctrines (or, principles) are hard to understand. God does not enlighten us until we are spiritually mature enough to make good use of the knowledge. Christ taught the disciples what they needed to know at their spiritual understanding level, and as it fit into His plan at that time.

The alleged contradictions are too numerous not to be **the result of divine design**. They provide a very effective method of instruction, which (when conveyed in this way) are more impressive and more likely to excite attention and interest. Contrasting biblical statements require careful contemplation, which results in a more lasting impression—compared to the imprint that we get when we just quickly read something.

It often happens that two apparently opposite scriptures may together enable us to direct our faith and our overcoming in the right direction—where one scripture does not give us the whole story. (For our overcoming, we need many scriptures.) One may be calculated to guard against certain areas on one side, and the other calculated to guard against certain areas on the other side. Neither one, taken alone, would convey the exact and entire truth; but both (taken in conjunction) enable us to fully understand the principle.

To illustrate this, on a physical level, look at how our bodies work. There are forces acting on the body that are balanced by opposite actions. When we walk, our stride consists of one arm swing back while the other swings forward. This combination of "opposite actions" balances the body and smoothes out our stride. The same is true for the movement of our feet. One pushes back to propel us forward. One arm or foot, acting alone, does little to help us walk smoothly.

Well, the same principle is involved in the Bible. We need all the scriptures—here a little, there a little—so that we can understand in a balanced way. Turn with me to Mark 10. I relate this to the blessings of material wealth. On the one hand, God tells us (through Mark and James) that poverty is a blessing. On the other hand, Job was given

wealth after he came to realize the true Sovereignty of God. And King Solomon wrote that riches are strength and poverty is destructive. But later, in the book of Proverbs, Solomon wrote that neither poverty nor riches are desirable.

Comparing these statements with each other, the skeptic immediately assumes these are contradictions; but pulled together—here a little, there a little—they teach us that **God's way is a way of balance**. Let us quickly read these scriptures to see what wonderful balance they add to a person's life. We will begin with the ones that discuss poverty as a blessing.

Mark 10:24-25 And the disciples were astonished at His words. But Jesus answered again and said to them, "Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

The rich man is described, in verse 24, as one who "trusts in riches"—making them his god. But notice in verses 26 and 27, the disciples were astonished beyond measure. They were stumped. All they could reply was with the question "Who then can be saved?"

To them, it looked impossible. Then Jesus told them "With men it is impossible, but with God all things are possible." God *can* cause a camel to go through the eye of a needle, *if* it is His pleasure. Nothing is impossible for Him!

If you will turn to James 2, we will take a look at another verse that has to do with poverty being a blessing.

James 2:5 Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?

Here James teaches that in humility there is something very favorable to developing true dedication to God. There is "humility" in being poor. The poor have less of that specific distraction and are more likely to call upon God for their basic needs than the wealthy.

Let us look at the contradiction here. We saw that poverty is a blessing. Now let us see

that riches are a blessing as well. Turn with me to Job 42. We will read there and see how riches are a blessing.

Job 42:12 Now the LORD blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning; for he had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, one thousand yoke of oxen, and one thousand female donkeys.

This was a miracle in the sense that God brought him back from nothing to a wealthy state, once he recognized God as Sovereign—and Job, himself, realized his true level of existence. Job would have been unable to handle the wealth had he not gone through this poverty and this severe suffering.

Let us look at another scripture that has to do with poverty being a blessing.

Proverbs 10:15 The rich man's wealth is his strong city; the destruction of the poor is their poverty.

So there are times when the wealth of the rich will avert danger and suffering. At such times, the poor may perish because of lack of money. The first part of Proverbs 10:15 here refers to wealth that is earned properly, through good work ethics. But, in contrast, the second part of Proverbs 10:15 refers to deserved poverty—the type that came because of foolishness, and that always causes one to sink deeper into bad habits. Riches are like a stronghold in their imagination, but not always in fact.

Turn with me to Proverbs 30, and we will look at how neither riches nor poverty are desirable. Remember that we are comparing what the critics say are contradictions, or discrepancies.

Proverbs 30:8-9 Remove falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches—feed me with the food allotted to me; lest I be full and deny You, and say, "Who is the LORD?" or lest I be poor and steal, and profane the name of my God.

We see here, in this prayer of Agur, he shows the principle that moderate competence is better than extreme poverty or extreme wealth. Either way will distract a person from proper reliance on our sustaining God. So it takes both. And this adds **the balance** that is needed in these scriptures that have to do with poverty—where (1) poverty is a curse,

(2) poverty is a blessing, and then we see (3) that neither are really what we want.

These kinds of conflicting statements spur us to investigate the written Word of God. While doing so, we unfold deep and rich meanings—which amply reward us for our efforts. So we can clearly see God's design in the difficulties of His written Word. It is obvious that they are there to stimulate our minds; but that is not the only reason they are there.

Let us look at another reason that God designed the Bible the way He did. God's design of the difficulties in the Bible are there to lead us to value ***the spirit*** above ***the letter***. Alleged discrepancies lead us to value the essentials of God's way of life—rather than its form, or occurrences.

We have no portrait of Jesus, no authentic description of His appearance. It is *by design* that no true relics of Jesus and the apostles remain today. Suppose the original written text of the inspired scriptures had been miraculously transmitted—in the original handwriting of the inspired authors, and perfect in every letter and figure. What would happen? The world would have gone mad over it, over time. Some of the greatest idolatry imaginable would have accumulated around tangible material. Bloody and devastating crusades would have been conducted for its possession. Men would have worshipped its physical writings in flagrant opposition to ***the spirit*** of God's written Word.

The Scriptures are given to us, in its present condition, in order to counteract this tendency towards idolatry. Over the years, I have occasionally ran into people attending the church of God, who have refused to write in their Bibles because they say they do not want to defile it. The value is not in the material that the Bible is contained on; but it is in the spiritual understanding that is imparted to us through the Holy Spirit. The alleged discrepancies in scriptures force us to look at ***the spirit*** above the physical—above the tangible.

II Corinthians 3:2-6 You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart. And we have such trust through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

The Jews of Paul's day insisted on emphasizing *the letter* of the law—but never broke through its **real spiritual meaning**. They did not seek out the true spiritual sense of the Old Testament. Therefore, they rested on the mere literal observance of the rites and ceremonies of religion—without understanding their true nature and design. Their service (though in many respects conforming to *the letter* of the law) became cold, formal, and hypocritical. They excelled in mere ceremonies, where little or no spiritual understanding was needed. As a result, there was little pure **spiritual** worship offered to God by those Jews.

They also rejected the Messiah, for whom the Old Covenant was designed—to prepare the way. The first covenant allowed people to live *by sight*. The second requires people to live *by faith*. We will see that in Hebrews 9.

Hebrews 9:11-15 But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.

The blood of animals purified the physical flesh. But Christ's unblemished sacrifice cleanses our minds on the spiritual level. There are many scriptures that help us to understand Christ's sacrifice, and many of them are claimed to be contradictions by the critics and the skeptics.

God does not usually reveal all truth concerning a specific subject in one passage alone. Remember what we saw in Isaiah 28. It is "here a little, there a little." To understand any subject in the Bible, we must review *all* the scriptural evidence—and not just bits and pieces.

II Peter 1:20 says, "no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation"—but each scripture is interpreted by, and in light of, other scriptures.

It is very common for mainstream Christians to quote part of Romans 3:20 (where it says, "Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight.") and from this passage alone to assume that salvation comes by faith in disobedience to God's law. Those who interpret this passage in this way neglect to tell us that in Romans 2:13, this same apostle Paul was inspired to write "not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified."

The skeptics love this false interpretation of Romans 3:20 here (where it talks about "the deeds of the law" and "no flesh shall be justified"), because it hands them "a contradiction" on a silver platter—delivered by professing Christians. *If* the one scripture is intended to reveal that we do not have to make any effort to obey God's law (to be justified and then be saved) but that we are saved by grace without obedience to God's law; *then* indeed, (in the mainstream Christian's mind) God contradicts Himself in His Word. So there we see why (in mainstream Christianity) they have so many doubts. And they really do not believe the Bible that they have—because they have contradictions in their beliefs (as we saw here) that causes them to doubt the entire Bible.

And *if* they wish to make Romans 3:20 say that, *then* they must consistently acknowledge that there are contradictions throughout all of the scriptures. *If* this is true, *then* they have no basis whatsoever for their faith. So you see there why they just do not understand.

Turn with me to Ephesians 2, and we will continue the thought of this same contradiction. Mainstream Christians insist on quoting Romans 3:20 with Ephesians 2:8-9 alone.

Ephesians 2:8-9 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.

You can see how those who do not want to obey the Bible (those in Protestantism and Catholicism) use this scripture to say that it is not "works"—it is not "obedience to the commandments." But those who quote this text so freely (to teach the doctrine of "no works") deceitfully never tell you what is in the inspired Scriptures.

James 2:14-20 What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does

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not have works, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?"

So there is no contradiction whatsoever between these scriptures. Rather by putting all the scriptures together, on one subject of *saving faith*—we learn that there are two kinds of faith. That is, (1) the kind that is blindly trusted in by the majority of Christianity today—which is nothing but a *dead faith*. And (2) one that is a *living faith*—that has "works" with it.

The same is true as to whether we believe that God has designed the Bible and that He has faithfully given it to us—because it takes that *living faith* to understand that. And that living faith requires that we pray, and study, and obey Him and what He says in it.

Biblical difficulties lead us to value *the spirit* beyond *the letter* of the Scriptures. That is, to value the essentials of God's way of life, rather than its form and occurrences. When a person emphasizes the letter only, and never breaks through to *its real spiritual meaning*—the real essence of why Christ died for us is understood on an emotional level rather than a spiritually active one. We must have a "faith *with works*" level of understanding in order to truly understand the sacrifice of Christ.

When we clearly see God's design in the difficulties of His written Word, it is obvious that they are there to lead us to value *the spirit* above *the letter* of the law.

So, let us look at another reason why God designed the Bible the way He did. God's design of the difficulties in the Bible are there to serve as a test of our moral character and faithfulness. Sometimes the scriptures present difficulties that may, occasionally, be unsolvable. They test our sincerity and faithfulness, and are a gauge to evaluate the honesty of our character—to whether we are really and truly giving the benefit of the doubt ("the doubt" being an unexplainable scripture, or a scripture that does not have all the information that is needed). Do we approach it that we are skeptical and we criticize it? Or, do we have an open mind—knowing that God will reveal it to us eventually, when we are ready to understand it?

To the world, Christ's teachings often have the appearance that they are obscure—if not offensive. To the critical and skeptical Jews, Jesus spoke many things in parables. Mark 4:11-12 quotes Christ's reason for parables and difficult scriptures.

Mark 4:12a That seeing they may see and not perceive, and hearing they may hear and not understand.

Please turn with me to John 6. A large section of this chapter is read at the Passover service. Adherence to the New Testament Passover is "a test" for many.

John 6:53 Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you."

To the critic, or the skeptic, this sounds like cannibalism. So, immediately, they want to jump on this and pick it apart. This statement effectively filtered out those hypocritical followers who found Christ's phraseology repulsive. Their lack of understanding and sincerity exposed them. In this way, He tested and exposed men's character and motives—and sifted out the chaff from among those who heard Him. This is exactly what Christ said:

John 6:60-66 Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this, said, "This is a hard saying; who can understand it?" When Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples complained about this, He said to them, "Does this offend you? What then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before? It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life. But there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who would betray Him. And he said, "Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father." From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more.

You see a reason that God has designed the Bible the way He has. The alleged discrepancies of the Bible provide an opportunity for a biased person to explain away and essentially hide the truth from himself. So our genuine handling of the spiritual difficulties of the Bible indicates the condition of our moral character and our spiritual understanding. Those who are inclined to find fault, always find fault with it. No matter what, or who, the criticism is toward—human nature always migrates toward criticism, and listening to the criticism of others.

God wants to be *revealed* to those who seek Him with their whole heart, and He wants to be *hidden* to those who disobey Him. The difficulties of the Bible were intended to make sinful people liable to punishment. People (who appreciate a fault-finding attitude, or are intent on misunderstanding the truth and urging sarcasm and silly objections) find, in the inspired Word of God, "difficulties" and "disagreements" which are designed as *stumbling stones* for those who criticize the Word. They are appointed to be disobedient because of their hardened and rebellious attitudes.

I Peter 2:8b They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed.

These people were appointed to misunderstanding the Word, and to seeing nothing but discrepancies and contradictions in it—because they are disobedient. Upon those who are willfully dedicated to error, God sends confusion so that they willingly believe the lie.

II Thessalonians 2:11-12 And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

God causes presumptuous critics to work out their own condemnation and ruin. Listen to this example of the delusion that God sends upon the arrogant skeptics. According to an article in Time magazine, entitled "Are the Bible's Stories True?" "There is no direct evidence, other than the Bible, to suggest that Abraham's exploits—his rejection of idolatry, his travels in Canaan, and his rescue of his nephew Lot from kidnappers in the Canaanite city of Lachish (later named Dan)—ever happened. Critics contend that several of the kings and peoples that Abraham supposedly encountered existed in widely separate time in history."

Now, continuing with the quote: "In reaction to these and other inconsistencies arising from over-reliance on the Bible, a second wave of super-skeptics immersed over the last five years. At last month's annual meeting in Philadelphia of the Society of Biblical Literature and the American Academy of Religion—the preeminent conference on biblical scholarship in the world—they were out in force. And, while there were differences among what individual scholars believed, radical minimalist, John Van Seters, of the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, summed up many of the held positions. 'The oldest books of the Old Testament,' he declared with pope-like confidence, 'weren't written until the Israelites were in exile in Babylon after 587 B.C. There was no Moses, no crossing of the Sea, and no revelation on Mt. Sinai.' "

Those who try to discredit God's written Word, and to treat it as any other book, will find themselves punished—according to their own methods—by the Designer of the Bible. God rebukes them by their own errors, and disciplines them by their own failures; and He gives them the reward of their own hands.

Job 34:11 For He repays man according to his work, and makes man to find a reward according to his way.

By their own ignorance, in trying to solve their own problems their own way, they will eventually witness their own downfall by the same systems they created to solve their problems.

Isaiah 3:10-11 Say to the righteous that it shall be well with them, for they shall eat the fruit of their doings. Woe to the wicked! It shall be ill with him, for the reward of his hands shall be given him.

So whatever our sins are (whether it be to discredit God's Word, or to disobey the Ten Commandments), we will receive the punishment that is applicable to those sins. Punishment does not always come quickly, as we know. Sometimes it comes *eventually*; but it always comes. So these critics and skeptics will eventually receive their just reward.

Every difficulty and discrepancy in the Bible is capable of a fair and reasonable solution. When the difficulties of Scripture are approached with a meek and reverent mind, they enhance our perception of God's truth and improve our faith. But when they are dealt with in a fault-finding and a dishonest manner, they will become judicial instruments of linking critical skepticism to its appropriate penalty. And that "appropriate penalty" will be **death**, if these people do not repent. It is easy to see *God's design* in the difficulties in His written Word. They are there to serve as a test of our loyal character.

Now, let us look at another reason why God designed the Bible the way He did. God's design of difficulties in the Bible are also there to illustrate analogies between the Bible and nature, making their *common Origin* clear—that God is the Designer, the Creator, the Sustainer of all physical life. The self-contradictions of the Bible are produced on a magnificent scale in nature. Wherever we look, the material universe provides unmistakable traces of God's infinite wisdom, His power, and His love.

The omnipotence of God is seen in the immensity and magnificence of the heavens and

the universe. Psalms 19:1 explains that the heavens declare the glory of God's work. The excellence of God's design is also seen in the earth's ecosystem. From the balmy breezes, to the refreshing dews and showers, to the melodious songbirds, to the flowers brilliant hues and pleasant odors—all these proclaim the excellence of its Designer. All these proclaim the Sovereignty of its Creator. And all of these proclaim the attributes of its Sustainer—as it does God's written Word.

In Job 26, we find the biblical descriptions of God are beyond human comprehension.

Job 26:7 He stretches out the north over empty space; He hangs the earth on nothing.

Wow—is that incredible! How can a Being, who can do that, not have designed His written Word with perfection?

Job 26:8-14 He binds up the water in His thick clouds, yet the clouds are not broken under it. He covers the face of His throne, and spreads His cloud over it. He drew a circular horizon on the face of the waters, at the boundary of light and darkness. The pillars of heaven tremble, and are astonished at His rebuke. He stirs up the sea with His power, and by His understanding He breaks up the storm. By His Spirit He adorned the heavens; His hand pierced the fleeing serpent. Indeed these are the mere edges of His ways, and how small a whisper we hear of Him! But the thunder of His power, who can understand?"

We only get a glimpse of God's omnipotent glory. God's ways can be compared to the physical page of the Bible. Look down at that physical page of your Bible. When you look at the flat side, you see no end of wisdom on that page. But when you turn that page up on its end, and you look down the edge of that page, that is all the wisdom that we are seeing from God—compared to all the wisdom that He has. We are just seeing a *mere edge* of His ways. And that is what He says there in verse 14. "Indeed these are the mere edges of His ways." So our understanding (of how great and wise God is) is just beginning of what we will understand.

How can we ever think, even for a moment, that the Bible (whose Designer is so *unlimited* in His attributes) would not have His written Word just as He designed it—perfect for His purpose. In Psalms 103, God gives us a comparison between His physical creation and His spiritual intervention.

Psalm 103:11-18 For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. As a father pities his children, so the LORD pities those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust. As for man, his days are like grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourishes. For the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more. But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, and His righteousness to children's children, to such as keep His covenant, and to those who remember His commandments to do them.

The criticisms of the disobedient are as insignificant as a dead flower that the wind blows away. Turn with me to Proverbs 1. Looking at the same arena but from another viewpoint, we see a very different picture. Anguish and agony, sorrow and suffering, appear to dominate the world; but God chooses not to intervene on behalf of those who hate His truth.

Proverbs 1:27-31 When your terror comes like a storm, and your destruction comes like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you. Then they will call on me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently, but they will not find me. Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the LORD, they would have none of my counsel and despised my every rebuke. Therefore they shall eat the fruit of their own way, and be filled to the full with their own fancies.

Those who seek to discredit the Bible will have to eat their own words, and those words will choke them. In nature, we see great conflicts and tremendous strife—which in appearance seem to seriously conflict with the character and attributes of God. Nevertheless, nature is God's handiwork.

Psalm 19:1 The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork.

Psalm 89:11-13 The heavens are Yours, the earth also is Yours; the world and all its fullness, You have founded them. The north and the south, You have created them; Tabor and Hermon rejoice in Your name. You have a mighty arm; strong is Your hand, and high is Your right hand.

When we clearly see God's design in the difficulties of His written Word, it is obvious that many are there to illustrate the analogies between the Bible and nature.

Let us begin to wrap this up and look at what we have been looking at here, and condense it. Consider the long interval of time that the Bible covers. (Almost 6,000 years of man's history.) Ponder the fact that about nineteen centuries have passed since the last book was written, and that during all but the last four centuries (of this time) that the Bible has been circulated and transmitted in manuscript form—that is, handwritten and copied. Consider also that our knowledge of ancient times is extremely limited and inconsistent. Many minute and sometimes-important circumstances regarding every event have passed irretrievably from mankind's memory.

When these obstacles are taken into account, it is easy to understand why (at times) an explanation of a Bible difficulty may seem inadequate. Although there may be some things about the Bible, in its present state, for which we cannot account, it is in our best interest to wait for more information from God (either by inspiration or revelation of facts). Nevertheless, what God has given in His written Word is sufficient for teaching a person, with God's Holy Spirit, His way of life.

Hebrews 1:1 says that God revealed Himself at various times and in different ways. He reveals His way of life (and our responsibility) in a *planned and calculated way*—not the way lightning strikes, but the way the sun gradually illuminates the morning. He who denies that the Scripture was designed by God (on account of its difficulties), for the same reason denies that the world was designed by Him. Why do these critics insist on believing that God contradicts Himself? The answer is here in Job 21.

Job 21:14-15a Yet they say to God, 'Depart from us, for we do not desire the knowledge of Your ways. Who is the Almighty, that we should serve Him?

The contradictions were designed to illustrate analogies between the Bible and nature—clearly showing that their common origin is God: the Designer, the Creator, and the Sustainer.

Let me use this "forest and trees" analogy to illustrate this thing. Imagine the setting being a beautiful, lush forest. The wind is rustling the leaves and the birds are singing. Now here is the dialogue:

The critic says, "It couldn't have been designed by an omnipotent God, because it is

imperfect. There are plants and trees that have fallen over and are rotting." God hears him, and He thinks to Himself, "That's the way I designed it; so that there would be a constant fertilizing of the other plants and trees."

The critic says, "There are termites in the trees, that causes the trees to die." God hears him and thinks, "That's the way I designed it; so that strong and new vegetation can flourish, as I prune the unfruitful vegetation."

The critic says, "What a poor ecosystem! The leaves fall off in the autumn and don't grow back until the spring." Loudly, God proclaims through His creation, "This is all part of My plan! The simplicity in it is for your peace, and enjoyment, and education. But for you to enjoy the simplicity, you have to have faith that I, the Sovereign God, have designed it this way. It is perfect according to My design and purpose. It is My pleasure to have it this way. Who are you to question Me? You, who can't see the forest for the trees."

The Bible has the same Designer as nature. And displaying similar, but with far less important, contradictions—God designed His written Word just as He intended. It is perfectly suited for teaching the essence of the gospel of the coming Kingdom of God.

Alleged contradictions are part of a carefully designed manual for salvation. These biblical difficulties were intended to stimulate our minds. They coax us to think deeply, to contemplate and meditate on the wisdom from above. They inspire us to search out the truth, and make us curious and inquiring of new knowledge and wisdom. The difficulties lead us to value the spirit above the letter of the Scriptures—to value the essentials of God's way of life rather than its appearance.

Many biblical principles are defined by difficult statements. These paradoxes serve to illustrate, to those God has called, the **wonderful potential** a submissive and obedient Christian has. (Mr. Armstrong called it "the incredible human potential.")

Turn with me to I Peter 2, and we will wind this down very quickly here.

I Peter 2:7-8 Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, "The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone," and "A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense." They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed.

Notice that they were *appointed* to this ignorance—mostly because of their

disobedience, and because they have not been chosen at this time to understand God's way of life.

I Peter 2:9 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

God has appointed the disobedient to stumble over the Bible. To them it is confusing; but from God's omnipotent perspective there are no true discrepancies and no valid contradictions in the Bible. God has given us His Word in the form He designed. He knew what He was doing when He inspired it; and it is perfect according to His plan of salvation. No critic can say anything otherwise and have any intelligence in his head. For the critics to condemn the Bible for its "discrepancies," and its "contradictions," and its "difficulties"—is silliness. It is like an infant baby (who has just been born from the womb) telling his parents, "I'm the boss, and I know better than you."

As we approach Passover, we can be deeply thankful for the understanding of the true significance of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ—which, to the world is a confusing paradox. But it has been revealed to us through the wisdom, inspiration, and the careful design with which God produced His written Word. What a wonderful blessing it is to have ready access to **the inspired written Word of God** in its present form. Designed to perfection by our faithful God, we have such a *wonderful gift* that He has given to us.