Are there contradictions in the Bible?

Apologetics · https://thebiblicalroots.org/answers/are-there-contradictions-in-the-bible/

No—the Bible does not contain true contradictions. While there are passages that may appear difficult or even tension-filled at first glance, careful attention to context, genre, language, and perspective consistently shows that these are not genuine logical contradictions (Ps 119:160; John 17:17). Scripture presents a unified and coherent message, even though it was written by many authors over centuries.

A contradiction, strictly defined, would mean that the Bible affirms and denies the same thing in the same sense at the same time. What we actually find in Scripture are differences in emphasis, complementary perspectives, or passages that require careful interpretation. These are features of authentic historical and literary documents, not evidence of error.

Different perspectives, not contradictions

Many alleged contradictions arise from comparing parallel accounts—especially in the Gospels. For example, one Gospel may mention one angel at the tomb (Matt 28:2), while another mentions two (Luke 24:4). This is not a contradiction: one writer highlights a single figure, while another includes both. The accounts are complementary, not mutually exclusive. This is exactly what we would expect from independent eyewitness testimony rather than collusion (cf. John 21:25).

Context and genre matter

Some tensions arise when we read different types of literature in the same way. The Bible contains narrative, poetry, prophecy, parable, and apocalyptic imagery. For example, poetic language in Psalms (“the sun rises,” Ps 19:6) is not making a scientific claim but using observational language. Likewise, apocalyptic imagery in Revelation is symbolic and should not be interpreted as straightforward literal description in every detail.

Progressive revelation

Some apparent contradictions arise from not recognizing that God’s revelation unfolds over time. Later Scripture may clarify, expand, or fulfill earlier revelation. For example, the sacrificial system in the Old Testament is not contradicted by the New Testament but fulfilled in Christ (Heb 10:1–10). What appears to be tension is often the movement from promise to fulfillment.

Transmission and translation issues

In a few cases, differences in numbers or wording (e.g., in historical accounts) reflect manuscript variations or translation decisions. These are well-documented and do not undermine the overall reliability of the text. As with any ancient document, minor textual variants exist, but none affect core doctrines or the central message of Scripture.

From a theological standpoint, Scripture affirms its own truthfulness: “The sum of your word is truth” (Ps 119:160), and Jesus prays, “Your word is truth” (John 17:17). Different Christian traditions may articulate this in terms such as *inerrancy* or *infallibility*, but all orthodox traditions agree that Scripture is trustworthy in what it teaches.

Key Scriptures to Study

Core teaching passages

Psalm 119:160 — The entirety of God’s Word is truth
John 17:17 — God’s Word is truth
2 Timothy 3:16 — Scripture is God-breathed and authoritative

Supporting theological framework

Luke 1:1–4 — Careful historical investigation behind the Gospel accounts
2 Peter 1:20–21 — Scripture originates from God through human authors
Hebrews 1:1–2 — God’s revelation unfolds progressively

Clarifying or balancing passages

Proverbs 18:17 — A matter appears one way until examined fully
John 21:25 — Not every detail is recorded; selectivity is expected
1 Corinthians 13:12 — Our understanding is partial and growing

Objections & Misconceptions

Common Objection: “The Gospels contradict each other.”
Response: The Gospels present the same events from different perspectives, emphasizing different details. This is characteristic of independent eyewitness accounts and strengthens, rather than weakens, their credibility.

Common Objection: “There are numerical discrepancies in the Bible.”
Response: Some differences in numbers reflect manuscript transmission or ancient recording

conventions. These are minor and do not affect any doctrinal teaching or the overall reliability of Scripture.

Common Objection: “If there are any differences at all, doesn’t that mean the Bible is unreliable?”
Response: Not at all. All historical documents contain minor variations. What matters is whether the core message is consistent and trustworthy—and in the case of the Bible, it clearly is.

Common Objection: “Christians just explain away contradictions.”
Response: Responsible interpretation does not ignore difficulties but examines them carefully. Many alleged contradictions dissolve under closer study of context, language, and historical background.

Why This Matters

If the Bible truly contained contradictions at its core, it would undermine confidence in its message about God, salvation, and truth. But because Scripture is coherent and trustworthy, it provides a stable foundation for faith and life.

Practically, this means believers can approach the Bible with confidence rather than suspicion. Apparent tensions should invite deeper study, not doubt. Over time, many of these difficulties become opportunities to better understand the richness and depth of God’s Word.

Recommended Resources

Beginner

- *The Bible Project* — “How to Read the Bible” series
- R. L. Solberg, *What God Has Made Clean* (for careful, text-driven interpretation)

Intermediate

- Gleason Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*
- Norman Geisler & Thomas Howe, *When Critics Ask*

Advanced

- D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*
- John Wenham, *Easter Enigma*