

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **THE INFALLIBILITY OF SCRIPTURE – DEALING WITH APPARENT OR ALLEGED ‘ERRORS’ IN THE BIBLE**

<sup>17</sup> *Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.  
John 17:17 (ESV)*

*The sum of your word is truth,  
and every one of your righteous rules endures forever.  
Psalm 119:160 (ESV)*

<sup>4</sup> *But he answered, “It is written,  
“Man shall not live by bread alone,  
but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”  
Matthew 4:4 (ESV)*

*“Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?  
Tell me, if you have understanding.  
Job 38:4 (ESV)*

*The words of the Lord are pure words,  
like silver refined in a furnace on the ground,  
purified seven times.  
Psalm 12:6 (ESV)*

*And the Lord said to Job:  
<sup>2</sup> “Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty?  
He who argues with God, let him answer it.”  
Job 40:1-2 (ESV)*

<sup>5</sup> *Trust in the Lord with all your heart,  
and do not lean on your own understanding.*

<sup>6</sup> *In all your ways acknowledge him,  
and he will make straight your paths.*

<sup>7</sup> *Be not wise in your own eyes;  
fear the Lord, and turn away from evil.  
Proverbs 3:5-7 (ESV)*

<sup>8</sup> *All the words of my mouth are righteous;  
there is nothing twisted or crooked in them.*

<sup>9</sup> *They are all straight to him who understands,  
and right to those who find knowledge.*

<sup>10</sup> *Take my instruction instead of silver,  
and knowledge rather than choice gold,  
Proverbs 8:8-10 (ESV)*

*Whoever despises the word brings destruction on himself,  
but he who reveres the commandment will be rewarded.  
Proverbs 13:13 (ESV)*

## Apparent mistakes or contradictions in the Bible

The Bible is a perfect, flawless book. In its original Hebrew or Greek, it contains no errors or contradictions. However, it is not necessarily perfect, or without errors, when you read it *in translation*, such as in English. Then, what you are reading is not the original text of the Bible, which God inspired. Instead it is the work of some committee, doing their best to translate into their own language what the original Hebrew or Greek says.

That is not always easy, to put it mildly. God certainly inspired the prophets and apostles when they wrote the Scriptures, but He does not necessarily inspire the *translators*. They make many mistakes, because translation is a very hard job. Sometimes it is almost impossible. There are therefore times where the way they choose to translate a Hebrew or Greek phrase into English is wrong, or confusing, or at least misses the real point.

So, we need to be clear about what we mean when we refer to the Bible as being the *infallible* Word of God. It is only infallible *in the original languages*, as set out above. However, some people, including many theologians and church leaders, would challenge even that. They would say that the Bible is "full of contradictions", even in the original Hebrew or Greek.

On the face of it they can appear to have a point, because there are times when, quite apart from the translation problems, the Bible does seem to contradict itself. It also contains some statements which sound to us to be wrong, or even impossible. However, when that occurs, you will find that there is always an explanation which completely solves the apparent problem, provided you are willing to dig for long enough until you find it.

Every time you look closely at these apparent contradictions or errors, it turns out that the Bible is correct after all. When you discover that, especially if you realize it many times over, it is actually faith-building. You realise afresh just how astonishing the Bible is. Let us look at a few examples of what some people have thought were errors or contradictions, but which aren't actually errors, or contradictions, at all. On the contrary, they further prove the infallibility and inspired nature of the Bible:

### Example 1 - The '*grammatical error*' in the very first verse of the Bible, Genesis 1:1

The book of Genesis opens with what looks like a very peculiar grammatical error. It seems to be a clear mistake, until you realise that it's actually deliberate. The verse uses the plural noun '*Elohim*', which is the Hebrew word for God, immediately alongside the singular form of the verb '*to create*'. So it basically reads "*In the beginning, God (plural noun) He (singular) created the heavens and the earth*".

So, the noun indicates that God is plural, i.e. three or more persons. But then the verb ending used indicates that He is one, or singular. It would be like saying "*The issue was put to the committee and he decided to.....*" We would all call that a mistake. However, that apparent 'error' in the Hebrew text of the first line of Genesis is no mistake. It is a deliberately provocative statement.

It hints, at the very start of the Bible, that God is three Persons and yet one God. The rest of the Bible eventually makes that clear. But the first verse of the book of Genesis just uses this apparent mismatch of plural noun and singular verb, without giving any explanation. God leaves it until much later to explain why. So, if you were to reject the Bible on the basis of that supposed 'mistake', you'd be making a big mistake yourself.

## **Example 2 - Was Jesus going to Jericho or from Jericho?**

In the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, we are told of how Jesus restored the sight of an old blind man, Bartimaeus. The problem is that, according to Matthew and Mark, it was done as Jesus was *leaving* Jericho but, according to Luke, it happened as Jesus was *approaching* Jericho. So, who is right? We shall firstly set out the verses which say it was as He was leaving. The capital letters have been added by me to highlight the key words:

*<sup>29</sup> And as they WENT OUT OF Jericho, a great crowd followed him. <sup>30</sup>And behold, two blind men sitting by the roadside, when they heard that Jesus was passing by, cried out, "Have mercy on us, Son of David!" <sup>31</sup>The crowd rebuked them, telling them to be silent; but they cried out the more, "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!" <sup>32</sup>And Jesus stopped and called them, saying, "What do you want me to do for you?" <sup>33</sup>They said to him, "Lord, let our eyes be opened." <sup>34</sup>And Jesus in pity touched their eyes, and immediately they received their sight and followed him.*

*Matthew 20:29-34 (RSV)*

*And they came to Jericho; and AS HE WAS LEAVING Jericho with his disciples and a great multitude, Bartimae'us, a blind beggar, the son of Timae'us, was sitting by the roadside.*

*Mark 10:46 (RSV)*

But now look at how Luke seems to say the opposite:

*As he DREW NEAR TO Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging;*  
*Luke 18:35 (RSV)*

This seems like a definite error, for which there can surely be no possible explanation. But it isn't. The answer is quite simple once you realise that there are *two Jerichos*, right alongside each other. One is *old* Jericho, which was destroyed at the time of Joshua. The other is *new* Jericho. That is because Jericho was subsequently rebuilt by Hiel of Bethel (see 1 Kings 16:34).

So, all it means is that Jesus was leaving one Jericho and going to the other when He came across blind Bartimaeus. So, He was both leaving and arriving. Therefore, Matthew, Mark and Luke are all correct. They just have different places in mind when they use the word 'Jericho', i.e. the old one or the new one.

## **Example 3 – Lack of any evidence of the existence of Pontius Pilate – until a stone slab with an inscription about him was discovered upside down.**

During Jesus' active ministry, and at the time of His trial and crucifixion, the Roman Governor of Judea was a man called Pontius Pilate. We first hear of him in Luke chapter three when John the Baptist was starting out on his ministry:

*<sup>1</sup> In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, <sup>2</sup>during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness.*

*Luke 3:1-2 (ESV)*

Then when Jesus was put on trial, this man, Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor, was one of the people who tried Jesus. It was he who sentenced Jesus to death:

*<sup>1</sup>Then the whole company of them arose and brought him before Pilate. <sup>2</sup>And they began to accuse him, saying, "We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ, a king." <sup>3</sup>And Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the*

*Jews?" And he answered him, "You have said so." <sup>4</sup>Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, "I find no guilt in this man."*

*Luke 23:1-4 (ESV)*

*<sup>23</sup>But they were urgent, demanding with loud cries that he should be crucified. And their voices prevailed. <sup>24</sup>So Pilate decided that their demand should be granted. <sup>25</sup>He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, for whom they asked, but he delivered Jesus over to their will.*

*Luke 23:23-25 (ESV)*

So, that's who Pontius Pilate was and that's what he did. But there's a problem. Although he is referred to very clearly in all four gospels, there is no mention of him in any historical records. That's actually because he fell out with Caesar who then ordered that every trace of the existence of Pontius Pilate should be destroyed so that his name would be blotted out.

Therefore, for most of the history of the Church, the only evidence that we had for the existence of this man was in the Bible. He is not referred to anywhere else. Some might say that that calls the Bible into question. That was how things stood for 19 centuries, until after the State of Israel had been recreated in 1948.

Then, some years later, when archaeological work was being carried out at Caesarea, a large stone slab was found upside down. It had been lost since the first century. On the underside of it was an inscription in Latin which was about Pontius Pilate! It had been discarded but then used as a piece of stone when making another building. So, archaeology yet again proved that what the Bible says is true, regardless of whether there are any other historical records.

#### **Example 4 - Is God peaceful or warlike?**

This is typical of the kind of problem which people raise, where the Bible describes God in one way in one passage and then describes Him in the opposite way somewhere else. For example in Exodus we are told:

*The LORD is a man of war; the LORD is his name.  
Exodus 15:3 (RSV)*

However, in Paul's letter to the Romans, he speaks of God as the "God of peace":

*The God of peace be with you all. Amen.  
Romans 15:33 (RSV)*

One might ask how God can be both a 'man of war' and 'the God of peace' at the same time? Is it a contradiction? Not at all. It is really simple, as are all the other examples where God is described in two opposite ways in different passages. The explanation here is that in relation to His enemies, i.e. the wicked, God is warlike. He has said He will destroy them (See Books Five and Six). He will also judge and punish them.

However, with those who love Him, God is at peace. He is therefore full of love, mercy, grace and kindness in relation to them. There is actually no inconsistency. God simply treats the wicked and the righteous in different ways. The difference is not really in Him, but in the people He is dealing with. It also depends on what God is doing at a particular time.

### **Example 5 – Does Jesus’ date of birth match up with what the Bible says about the timings of the reigns of Herod the Great and Governor Quirinius ?**

I am indebted to the late Dave Hunt of The Berean Call and also the nineteenth and early twentieth century writer, Sir Robert Anderson, the former head of CID at Scotland Yard, for this slightly complicated example. This seems at first sight to be an error in the Bible, but then, when you examine it carefully, you discover that the details are completely consistent.

Indeed, it proves that the men who wrote the Bible were eye witnesses who wrote their accounts shortly afterwards, while the information was still fresh in their minds. That’s an important point to note because some critics of the Bible allege that it was written “centuries later” and therefore cannot be relied upon as accurate history. However, apostle Peter specifically tells us that he and the other apostles were eye witnesses of the things they wrote about:

*<sup>16</sup>For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. <sup>17</sup>For when he received honor and glory from God the Father and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," <sup>18</sup>we heard this voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain.*

*2 Peter 1: 16-18 (RSV)*

So let us turn now to the question of *when* Jesus was born and how that fits in with the other facts we are told in the Bible about the dates of the reigns of King Herod (the Great) and Governor Quirinius of Syria. If we look firstly at Matthew chapter two, it says that when Jesus was born, King Herod the Great was still alive and ruling over Israel:

*<sup>1</sup>Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, <sup>2</sup>"Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East, and have come to worship him."*

*Matthew 2:1-2 (RSV)*

We also know that Herod the Great tried to kill Jesus and that Jesus’ mother Mary fled with Joseph to Egypt to hide Him from Herod:

*<sup>13</sup>Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there till I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." <sup>14</sup>And he rose and took the child and his mother by night, and departed to Egypt, <sup>15</sup>and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, "Out of Egypt have I called my son." <sup>16</sup>Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, was in a furious rage, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time which he had ascertained from the wise men.*

*Matthew 2:13-16 (RSV)*

However, shortly afterwards, when Herod the Great died, Mary and Joseph took Jesus back to Israel, to live in Nazareth:

*<sup>19</sup>But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, <sup>20</sup>"Rise, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead." <sup>21</sup>And he rose and took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. <sup>22</sup>But when he heard that Archelaus reigned over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee. <sup>23</sup>And he went and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, "He shall be called a Nazarene."*

*Matthew 2:19-23 (RSV)*

All of that is fair enough so far, but the problem is that we know that Herod the Great died in the year that we call 3BC. Therefore, for Jesus to have been born while Herod the Great was still alive, and for Mary and Joseph to need to spend some time hiding in Egypt to avoid Herod, then Jesus would have to have been born earlier than 3 BC, in say 4 or 5 BC. But that presents a timing problem as a result of this next passage from Luke's gospel:

*<sup>1</sup>In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled. <sup>2</sup>This was the first enrollment, when Quirin'i-us was governor of Syria. <sup>3</sup>And all went to be enrolled, each to his own city. <sup>4</sup>And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, <sup>5</sup>to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. <sup>6</sup>And while they were there, the time came for her to be delivered. <sup>7</sup>And she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.*

*Luke 2: 1-7 (RSV)*

We are told by Luke that Quirinius was Governor of Syria when the decree was made by Caesar Augustus about the census, which required Joseph to travel to Bethlehem in order to enrol. The problem is that the history books said (until the late nineteenth century) that Quirinius was Governor of Syria *from AD 6 onwards*. Therefore our problem is that Matthew chapter two requires Jesus to have been born *before 3 BC*, but Luke chapter two seemed to require Him to have been born *after AD 6*.

The solution is simple, though it was not discovered by archaeologists until quite recently. It is that Quirinius was Governor of Syria *twice*. His second period in office began in AD 6, but he had had an earlier period in office from 4 BC to 1 BC. That therefore fits perfectly with the time when King Herod the Great died in 3BC. It is also perfectly consistent with Jesus being born, as He was, in the autumn of the year we call 4 BC.

That is actually where our calendar ought to start from. However, when our calendar was calculated in the fourth century they got the start point wrong. They thought that Jesus was born in what we might call the year zero. In fact He was born earlier than that in what we would call 4 BC. Thus the real year 2000 was actually in what we call 1996.

We could summarize the problem as follows:

- 1) To fit in with the time when we know King Herod the Great died, in 3 BC, Jesus would have to have been born *before 3B C*, i.e. in 4 BC or earlier.
- 2) But if Quirinius only became Governor of Syria in AD 6, as was thought until recently, then Jesus would have to have been born *after AD 6*.
- 3) However, given what we now know, i.e. that Quirinius had an earlier period in office as Governor of Syria from 4 BC to about 1 BC, then the dates actually fit perfectly.

Therefore we see that these passages from Luke and Matthew, which were thought by some to be contradictory and irreconcilable, match up perfectly once you realise the correct facts. The intricacy and complexity of all of that background detail, and the fact that the Bible turns out in the end to be exactly right on every single point, proves two things:

- a) that the Bible is flawlessly accurate and thus inspired by God;
- b) that it had to have been written at the time by eye-witnesses. It would have been impossible for any bogus writer to have fabricated a false story even 20-30 years later, let alone centuries later. There is no way that such an imposter writing later on, and pretending to be Luke or Matthew, could have got all of these tiny details to match up with each other. It would be impossible.

Nobody would have been aware of all these little facts at any later time, so as to be able to get the dates of King Herod's death and of Governor Quirinius's first term in office to line up correctly, without making any errors.

**Example 6 – Why did apostle Paul not seem to know who the High Priest was in Acts chapter 23? How could he have been unaware of who and what Ananias was when he was right in front of him in the Sanhedrin in all his robes etc?**

One passage of Scripture that used to puzzle me was in Acts chapter 23 where apostle Paul was brought before the Council known as the Sanhedrin, over which the Jewish High Priest presided. What is curious about it is that it gives the impression that Paul does not realise that Ananias is the High Priest, even though it is a meeting of the Sanhedrin and Ananias was presiding over it. Presumably Ananias was wearing the robes of his office and was also surrounded by elaborately dressed officials and priests. That would make it unmistakably obvious who and what he was. This is what happened:

*But on the morrow, desiring to know the real reason why the Jews accused him, he unbound him, and commanded the chief priests and all the council to meet, and he brought Paul down and set him before them. <sup>1</sup>And Paul, looking intently at the council, said, "Brethren, I have lived before God in all good conscience up to this day." <sup>2</sup>And the high priest Anani'as commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth. <sup>3</sup>Then Paul said to him, "God shall strike you, you whitewashed wall! Are you sitting to judge me according to the law, and yet contrary to the law you order me to be struck?" <sup>4</sup>Those who stood by said, "Would you revile God's high priest?"*

*Acts 22:30–23:4 (RSV)*

So, Ananias strikes Paul in the face and Paul rebukes him for doing so, because Ananias was breaking the law. But when those around condemn Paul for daring to rebuke the High Priest, Paul makes this strange reply:

*And Paul said, "I did not know, brethren, that he was the high priest; for it is written, 'You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.'"*

*Acts 23: 5 (RSV)*

I always used to assume that somehow Paul did not realise who or what Ananias was, despite Paul being a former Pharisee himself and also the official setting and the elaborate garments being worn. Yet I also felt it was odd, because it would be like sitting in front of a High Court Judge, dressed in his red robes, and somehow not being aware that he was a Judge. However, it turns out that there is a simple explanation which comes from the Jewish historian, Josephus.

It is that Ananias had previously been the High Priest, but he had then been replaced by another man. Later on his successor was murdered and Ananias came back and *illegitimately* usurped the position of High Priest. Thus he became High Priest again, but only by grabbing the role for himself by corruption and manipulation, without ever being validly appointed. Therefore, once you realise all of that, Paul's strange remark makes perfect sense. It was said *ironically*, as a side swipe at Ananias, referring to the illegitimacy of his usurped position. It means:

- a) It would have been wrong to publicly rebuke Ananias if he had been the High Priest.
- b) However, Paul did not accept that Ananias was validly appointed. Thus he was not truly the High Priest at all. Those present on that day probably knew that very well, though they were not bold enough to say so. At any rate, they would have understood the irony in Paul's voice.
- c) What's more, in the light of all that, it was right for Paul to rebuke him in public as he did.

Again we see a level of precise detail which proves that the book of Acts was written at the time by eye-witnesses. Who could possibly have known of that small detail about Ananias' illegitimacy as a usurper if the book had been written decades or centuries later? Moreover, the fact that that tiny detail turns out to be so perfectly accurate once you examine it clearly, gives us confidence that the rest of the book of Acts is equally accurate and true.

### **Example 7 - How much money did King David pay for the threshing floor and surrounding land in Jerusalem and whom did he pay?**

We are told that King David bought a threshing floor and the surrounding land. The question is how much did David pay for it and whom did he pay? Let's look at two passages which refer to this incident, firstly 2 Samuel. In each passage *I have put the key words in capital letters*:

*<sup>18</sup>So Gad came to David that day and said to him, "Go up, erect an altar to the LORD on the threshing floor of ARAUNAH THE JEBUSITE." <sup>19</sup>David went up according to the word of Gad, just as the LORD had commanded. <sup>20</sup>Araunah looked down and saw the king and his servants crossing over toward him; and Araunah went out and bowed his face to the ground before the king. <sup>21</sup>Then Araunah said, "Why has my lord the king come to his servant?" And David said, "To buy the threshing floor from you, in order to build an altar to the LORD, that the plague may be held back from the people." <sup>22</sup>Araunah said to David, "Let my lord the king take and offer up what is good in his sight. Look, the oxen for the burnt offering, the threshing sledges and the yokes of the oxen for the wood. <sup>23</sup>Everything, O king, Araunah gives to the king." And Araunah said to the king, "May the LORD your God accept you." <sup>24</sup>However, the king said to Araunah, "No, but I will surely buy it from you for a price, for I will not offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God which cost me nothing." **SO DAVID BOUGHT THE THRESHING FLOOR AND THE OXEN FOR FIFTY SHEKELS OF SILVER.** <sup>25</sup>David built there an altar to the LORD and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. Thus the LORD was moved by prayer for the land, and the plague was held back from Israel.*

*2 Samuel 24:18-25 (NASB)*

Now look at the seemingly different account in 1 Chronicles:

*<sup>18</sup> Then the angel of the LORD commanded Gad to say to David, that David should go up and build an altar to the LORD on the threshing floor of ORNAN THE JEBUSITE. <sup>19</sup> So David went up at the word of Gad, which he spoke in the name of the LORD. <sup>20</sup> Now Ornan turned back and saw the angel, and his four sons who were with him hid themselves. And Ornan was threshing wheat. <sup>21</sup> As David came to Ornan, Ornan looked and saw David, and went out from the threshing floor and prostrated himself before David with his face to the ground. <sup>22</sup> Then David said to Ornan, "Give me the site of this threshing floor, that I may build on it an altar to the LORD; for the full price you shall give it to me, that the plague may be restrained from the people." <sup>23</sup> Ornan said to David, "Take it for yourself; and let my lord the king do what is good in his sight. See, I will give the oxen for burnt offerings and the threshing sledges for wood and the wheat for the grain offering; I will give it all." <sup>24</sup> But King David said to Ornan, "No, but I will surely buy it for the full price; for I will not take what is yours for the LORD, or offer a burnt offering which costs me nothing." **SO DAVID GAVE ORNAN 600 SHEKELS OF GOLD BY WEIGHT FOR THE SITE.** <sup>26</sup> Then David built an altar to the LORD there and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. And he called to the LORD and He answered him with fire from heaven on the altar of burnt offering.*

*1 Chronicles 21:18-26 (NASB)*

So, we see in 2 Samuel that David paid 50 shekels of silver to a man called Araunah. However, in 1 Chronicles we are told that David paid 600 shekels of gold to a man called Ornan. Which is right? The answer is that both are right. The solution to the first point is that Araunah and Ornan are two alternative renderings of the same name. As for the price, David *initially* paid 50 shekels of silver for



the oxen and for part of the land, i.e. just for the 'threshing floor', where he quickly built an altar. However he *later* paid 600 shekels of gold for the whole site, which was much larger.

It had to be large, because the whole Temple was subsequently built on that site. David's initial wish was simply to erect an altar on the threshing floor, where he had seen the angel of the LORD. Later David decided he wanted to build an entire Temple, which meant the whole site was needed. The land, which was the size of a farm, was then purchased and David's son, Solomon, later built the Temple on it. So the solution is that there was one seller, but two transactions – the first smaller, and the second larger. Therefore, there is no error or contradiction at all.

### **Example 8 - Did Absalom have sons or not?**

In 2 Samuel we are told that King David's rebellious son, Absalom, had *three* sons, but later we are told that he had *no* sons. Here are the passages, which appear to contradict each other:

*<sup>27</sup>To Absalom there were born three sons, and one daughter whose name was Tamar; she was a woman of beautiful appearance.*

*2 Samuel 14:27 (NASB)*

*<sup>18</sup>Now Absalom in his lifetime had taken and set up for himself a pillar which is in the King's Valley, for he said, "I have no son to preserve my name." So he named the pillar after his own name, and it is called Absalom's Monument to this day.*

*2 Samuel 18:18 (NASB)*

The solution to this is very simple. Absalom *did* have three sons, but they all died in infancy. Thus their names were not recorded, which they would have been if they had lived to adulthood. So, when Absalom was older he built a pillar to commemorate himself. He did so precisely because he no longer had any sons to continue his name, given that they had all died as children.

If we had the time and the space we could go on and on giving more examples of apparent contradictions and then solving, or explaining them, as above. There are lots of these, but what is extraordinary is that absolutely all of them have an explanation. I have never yet come across even one that could not be fully explained. Doesn't that strike you as odd?

If the Bible was an ordinary book like any other, and was written only by fallible men, it would contain at least some mistakes. I have never come across any book that didn't have some mistakes, however hard the writer may have tried to eliminate them. The fact that the Bible has none is, in itself, proof of supernatural inspiration. It even seems likely that God deliberately put these apparent contradictions into the Bible precisely in order to enable this point to be made.

**One benefit of these apparent contradictions is that they prove that each book of the Bible was written at the time by eye-witnesses, not years later, as some liberals and sceptics think they were.**

I spent nearly 30 years practising law of one kind or another. I have had particular exposure to the law, and practice, of evidence. When I represent a client and am examining documents or verbal testimony or written statements, one of the key ways of determining whether evidence is genuine or false is to look to see whether it fits alongside, or contradicts, other evidence.

If one sees a series of identical witness statements which use exactly the same phrases, one is inclined to doubt the evidence. That's because it is too similar and is likely to be contrived. The witnesses have probably got together and decided what their story is going to be.

However, if various documents, letters and statements are all written by different people in different ways with their own styles, emphasising different issues or events, and if they even seem, at first sight, to contradict each other, but on closer examination, are actually consistent, then that evidence is very solid. That is exactly how the Bible is.

One's initial impression is that some things seem not to fit, but then it turns out that they do. Even the smallest details tally exactly, including names, dates and places. Moreover, where such small but precise factual details are included in an account, and yet they are completely consistent with various other facts, it is conclusive evidence that it was written *at the time, by eye-witnesses*.

That's because even a few years or decades later, let alone centuries later, nobody would have the precise knowledge of those small details that would be needed if they were to try to invent the account without making any errors or including any inconsistencies or anachronisms. Imagine that you were to try to write a fictional account now of some event in the year 1850, or even 1950. How could you do it without getting some things wrong about the customs of the day, or dates, or technology, or what was the name of the Company's accountant or what was on the radio at the time and so on?

That is why novelists always fail to get 100% of the small background details exactly right, however hard they try to research their facts. So, when we see the prophets and the apostles *always* getting *all* the little details exactly right, we can be sure they wrote the books or letters themselves, at the time. It verifies their authenticity.

Conversely, if you examine the Koran, it contains very clear and obvious errors. That is because it was composed in the seventh century by Mohammed. He did not have direct, first-hand knowledge of the people and places he spoke about. He therefore made some really major mistakes. For example he confused two women, both called Miriam, and thought they were the same woman. The first was Moses' sister, Miriam who lived about 1500 years BC. The other was Jesus' mother Mary, whose name in Hebrew is Miriam.

So, because Mohammed was not inspired by God, and also because he could not read and write, he had to rely on his own hazy recollection of what he had heard from others about the Old and New Testaments. Therefore he got the facts very wrong on this point, and on many other things as well.