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Jim Meritt's List of Bible Contradictions: Answer Key

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The following replies are to alleged Biblical contradictions cited by Jim Meritt (not a Bible scholar, but an oceanographer) on the web page, "A List of Biblical Contradictions" at <http://www.infidels.org/news/atheism/extra/bible-contradictions.html>. I've covered most of his entries on this page; now as I have developed this website as an encyclopedia, we turned this into a matter of brief comments on individual points made uniquely by Meritt, followed by links to solutions to contradictions.

Meritt begins with explanations of *various methods I've seen to "explain"* alleged contradictions and errors. These require a reply first.

1. *"That is to be taken metaphorically" In other words, what is written is not what is meant. I find this entertaining, especially for those who decide what ISN'T to be taken as other than the absolute WORD OF GOD - which just happens to agree with the particular thing they happen to want...*

Meritt is correct to chastise those who manipulate the Bible to support doctrines of their own invention. However, this does not mean that the Bible - which is, after all, a composition of literature - cannot make use of literary techniques such as metaphor. This objection cannot be offered to replace critical evaluation, and merely begs the question of whether something is or is not being taken as "the absolute Word of God" (note that saying that something is metaphorical is not *necessarily* somehow saying it is not absolute; that's another issue) without reference to genre considerations.

One particular type of verse Skeptics like to criticize is that which uses the word "all" or some form of it. Anyone would recognize a statement like, "Everybody in the world likes ice cream," or, "I'm putting all I have into it" as an idiomatic statement indicating strong feeling or considerable (but not exclusive) weight.

But the Bible is not allowed to do that, apparently. If the Bible says "All the kings of the world came to Solomon for his wisdom," then that means that the Bible says that even King Nxtetchthan from the Yucatan paddled over for a look-see. Serious readers would understand that such a phrase simply means that Solomon was famous for his wisdom and that a considerable number of rulers (not all) admired his wisdom and came to him to partake of it. More so does this apply in matters of ANE literature, in a period when oral performance was a key to effective communication. (See also comments on [Jeremiah 7:22](#) and foundational essays on [proverbial literature](#).)

2. *"There was more there than..." This is used when one verse says "there was a" and another says "there was b", so they decide there was "a" AND "b" -which is said nowhere. This makes them happy, since it doesn't say there WASN'T "a+b". But it doesn't say there was "a+b+little green martians". This is often the same crowd O.O. insists theirs is the ONLY possible interpretation (i.e. only "a") and the only way. I find it entertaining they they don't mind adding to verses.*

This apparently refers to the process of "filling in" details to resolve alleged contradictions, in other words, harmonization. However, this is not the same thing as saying that a particular part of the Bible has only one interpretation. Nor is it an illegitimate practice (see [here](#) for details).

Briefly, we may consider that many crimes and civil matters would be unresolvable if we were not permitted to look at seemingly contradictory facts and statements and try to reach the truth by means of an "a and b" formula. To use a simplified

example: A crime is known to have been committed at 10:30; one witness says he saw the suspect at the scene at 10:25; another says, no, the witness was with me, about three miles away, at 10:25. Investigation suggests that the latter witness' time estimate was based on a clock that was ten minutes slow at the time, and the suspect is nailed.

But following the principle delineated by Meritt, it would have us just throw up our hands in despair and let the suspect go from the start.!

Dan Barker makes a similarly erroneous statement:

Many of the defensive attempts are arguments from silence. Some apologists assert that since the writer of John does not say that there were not more women who visited the tomb with Mary, then it is wrong to accuse him of contradicting the other evangelists who say it was a group of women. But this is a non-argument. With this kind of thinking, I could claim that the people who accompanied Mary to the tomb included Mother Teresa, Elvis Presley, and Paul Bunyan. Since the writer of John does not specifically exclude these people, then there is no way to prove that this is not true--if such fragile logic is valid.

We may agree, obviously, that it is not wise to get overly creative when resolving seemingly contradictory accounts. When invoking speculative factors - which indeed, ultimately and by nature, are arguments from silence - we should choose only reasonable speculations that fit in with the characters, setting, the known facts of the situation, and human nature. Thus adding in "litle (sic) green martians" or "Mother Teresa" etc. would indeed be ludicrous. But adding in people who might have been there would not be unreasonable.

3. "It has to be understood in context" I find this amusing because it comes from the same crowd that likes to push likewise extracted verses that support their particular view. Often it is just one of the verses in the contradictory set is suppose to be taken as THE TRUTH when if you add more to it it suddenly becomes "out of context". How many of you have gotten JUST John 3:16 (taken out of all context) thrown up at you?

Meritt's sources of amusement aside, context is an important issue when considering any quoted phrase, whether in the Bible or elsewhere. Meritt would probably agree with the statement, and say out loud, "I believe fundamentalists are wrong when they say the Bible is inerrant." If I were to quote Meritt thereafter as saying, "I believe...the Bible is inerrant," he would undoubtedly object, however, to being quoted "out of context."

4. "there was just a copying/writing error" This is sometimes called a "transcription error", as in where one number was meant and an incorrect one was copied down. Or that what was "quoted" wasn't really what was said, but just what the author thought was said when he thought it was said. And that's right - I'm not disagreeing with events, I'm disagreeing with what is WRITTEN. Which is apparently agreed that it is incorrect. This is an amusing misdirection to the problem that the bible itself is wrong.

How this is "misdirection" is quite unclear. But it is not "the bible" that is wrong in a translation or transcription error; it is the translator or transcriber that is wrong. We may wonder if Meritt is familiar with the various issues involving translation of Biblical languages. (See our brief essay on [Inerrancy and Human Ignorance](#), and our essay on [copyist errors](#), for details.)

Following Meritt's (apparent) logic means that if someone wants to translate Meritt's phrase, "I'm not disagreeing with events, I'm disagreeing with what is WRITTEN" into German, and it comes out reading, "I like sticking weinerschnitzel in my ear and I like riding goats bareback," then it is Meritt's fault, not the translator's fault, and it would merely be an "amusing misdirection" on Meritt's part to say that his words were translated improperly.

We will use this sort of answer frequently, since Meritt uses the King James Bible in his quotes. The KJV has its good points, but it was put together before some of the linguistic, archaeological and cultural information we have today, so it should be expected to contain miscues.

5. *"That is a miracle". Naturally. That is why it is stated as fact.*

Since no context is offered for this comment, it is rather difficult to reply. However, it is unquestionable that the Bible depicts events that can be described as miraculous. Any place where God is said to have a part COULD have a "miraculous" element (whatever that is defined to mean).

6. *"God works in mysterious ways" A useful dodge when the speaker doesn't understand the conflict between what the bible SAYS and what they WISH it said.*

And undoubtedly a last resort, which we will not, and do not, subscribe to.

Note: Entries below that skip numbers are answered elsewhere; consult the Encyclopedia's Scripture entries for answers.

Now answered [here](#).

2. War or Peace?

Now answered [here](#).

3. Who is the father of Joseph?

We refer our reader to [Glenn Miller's exposition](#) on this subject.

4. Who was at the Empty Tomb?:

Now answered [here](#).

5. Is Jesus equal to or lesser than?

For an answer to this one, see our essay on [Wisdom theology](#) explaining the exact nature of Jesus' relationship with the Father in contemporary Jewish terms. The question confuses ontological and functional subordination.

7. The number of beasts in the ark

Now answered [here](#).

8. How many stalls and horsemen?

Now answered [here](#).

9. Is it folly to be wise or not?

Now answered [here](#).

10. Human vs. ghostly impregnation

I do not see what the issue is here. There is no "ghostly impregnation" listed in the passages and Meritt does not explain the issue.

11. The sins of the father

For a full answer on this, see this [article](#).

12. The bat is not a bird

Now answered [here](#).

13. Rabbits do not chew their cud

For response, see [here](#)

14. Insects do NOT have four feet

See [here](#).

15. Snails do not melt

Now answered [here](#).

16. Fowl from waters or ground?

See [this item](#).

17. Odd genetic engineering

Now answered [here](#).

18. The shape of the earth

Now answered [here](#)

19. Snakes, while built low, do not eat dirt

Now answered [here](#).

20. Earth supported?

Now answered [here](#).

21. Heaven supported too

JOB 26: 11 The pillars of heaven tremble and are astonished at his reproof.

Now answered [here](#).

22. The hydrological cycle

Now answered [here](#).

25. Righteous live?

Now answered [here](#).

26. How did Judas die?

Now answered [here](#).

27. Jesus' first sermon plain or mount?

Now answered [here](#).

28. Jesus' last words

Now answered [here](#).

29. Years of famine

Now answered [here](#).

31. God be seen?

Now answered [here](#).

33. Ascend to heaven

Now answered [here](#).

34. What was Jesus' prediction regarding Peter's denial?

35. How many times did the cock crow?

Now answered [here](#).

36. Who killed Saul

Now answered [here](#).

37. How many beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount

Now answered [here](#).

38. Does every man sin?

Now answered [here](#).

39. Who bought potter's field

Now answered [here](#).

41. Who bears guilt?**Runner Up: Golden Duh Award**

Now answered [here](#).

42. Do you answer a fool?**WINNER: GOLDEN DUH AWARD**

Now answered [here](#).

43. How many children did Michal, the daughter of Saul, have?

Now answered [here](#).

45. Marriage?

Proverbs 18:22

1 Corinthians 7 (whole book. See 1,2,27,39,40)

This one was never explained by Meritt, so we cannot answer it.

46. Did those with Saul/Paul at his conversion hear a voice?

Now answered [here](#).

47. Where was Jesus three days after his baptism?

Now answered [here](#).

48. How many apostles were in office between the resurrection and ascension?

Now answered [here](#).

49. Judging

Now answered [here](#).

50. Good deeds

Now answered [here](#).

51. For or against?

Now answered [here](#).

52. Whom did they see at the tomb?

Now answered [here](#).

-JPH