

## PROBLEM PASSAGES

### 1. Presuppositions.

- a. “The errantist’s outlook includes not only the possibility but the reality of errors in the Bible. Therefore, when he studies these problems one of his possible conclusions is that one or another of them is actually an error. The inerrantist, on the other hand, has concluded that the Bible contains no errors. Therefore, he exercises no option to conclude that any of these same problems is an example of a genuine error in the Bible. His research may lead him to conclude that some problem is yet unexplainable. Nevertheless, he believes it is not an error and that either further research will demonstrate this, or he will understand the solution in heaven.”<sup>1</sup>
  - (1) Illustration: “If a happily married man comes home unexpectedly one day to find his wife waving goodbye to a handsome man about to get into a car, what will he think?”<sup>2</sup>
- b. If my confidence in the Bible has been buttressed by years of proving it totally reliable, I won’t be easily shaken by a problem, and I certainly will not conclude the Bible is in error.<sup>3</sup> Familiarity with the Bible breeds respect, not contempt.

### 2. Two Creation Accounts

- a. Problem.
  - (1) Did vegetation sprout before or after Adam was created?
  - (2) **Ge 1:11-12** 11 And God said, Let the earth sprout (אֲשַׁד) vegetation (אֲשֵׁרֶת), plants (אֲשֵׁרֶת) yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth. And it was so. 12 The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.
  - (3) **Ge 2:5** 5 When no bush (אֲשֵׁרֶת) of the field (אֲשֵׁרֶת) was yet in the land and no small plant (אֲשֵׁרֶת) of the field (אֲשֵׁרֶת) had yet sprung up (אֲשַׁד)—for Yahweh God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man to work the ground, 6 and a mist was going up from the land and was watering the whole face of the ground— 7 then Yahweh God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.
- b. Solution.
  - (1) Ge 2 supplements Ge 1, it doesn’t contradict it. It adds detail. Ge 2:5 adds detail to Ge 1:11-12.
  - (2) The terms used in Ge 2:5 refer to plants that require cultivation, not to all kinds of vegetation. Plants that required cultivation either did not appear until Adam was created and could then cultivate them, or they appeared but did not grow until Adam was created.

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<sup>1</sup> Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 107.

<sup>2</sup> Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 107.

<sup>3</sup> Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 107.

- (a) “When verdure covered the earth, the sprouting of these types of vegetation was retarded, so that they might appear after man was already in full possession of his domain and in a position to give them their needed care.”<sup>4</sup>

### 3. Cain’s Wife.

#### a. Problem.

- (1) Where did Cain get his wife?
- (2) **Ge 4:17** 17 Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch.
- (3) **Le 18:9** 9 You shall not uncover the nakedness of your sister, your father’s daughter or your mother’s daughter, whether brought up in the family or in another home.

#### b. Solution.

- (1) Adam and Eve had many sons and daughters.
  - (a) **Ge 5:4** 4 The days of Adam after he fathered Seth were 800 years, and he had other sons and daughters.
- (2) The first marriages had to be between brothers and sisters. Such marriages must have been allowed at that time.
- (3) Not all of the provisions of the Mosaic law applied to the first generations of humans.
- (4) The genes of the first humans were less corrupted than ours today. So marriages between close relatives in the first few generations of the human race would not have been dangerous.

### 4. Wilderness Plague.

#### a. Problem.

- (1) How do we account for the different numbers?
- (2) **Nu 25:9** 9 Nevertheless, those who died by the plague were twenty-four thousand.
- (3) **1 Co 10:8** 8 We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day.

#### b. Solution.

- (1) Paul limited his 23,000 number to those killed on one day. The Numbers account may include additional deaths on following days.
- (2) The numbers are round, not exact. If the exact number was around 23,500, the round numbers in Numbers and 1 Corinthians would be generally correct.

### 5. David’s Census of Israel.

#### a. Problem.

- (1) Who incited David to carry out the census?
- (2) **2 Sa 24:1** 1 Again the anger of Yahweh was kindled against Israel, and he incited David against them saying, Go, number Israel and Judah.
- (3) **1 Ch 21:1** 1 Then Satan stood against Israel and incited David to number Israel.

#### b. Solution.

- (1) Both Yahweh and Satan were involved. This is common in the Bible.

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<sup>4</sup> H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis* (Columbus: Wartburg, 1942), 112-13.

- (a) **Job 1:8-12** 8 And Yahweh said to Satan, Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil? 9 Then Satan answered Yahweh and said, Does Job fear God for no reason? 10 Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. 11 But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face. 12 And Yahweh said to Satan, Behold, all that he has is in your hand. Only against him do not stretch out your hand. So Satan went out from the presence of Yahweh.
- (b) **2 Co 12:7** 7 So to keep me [Paul] from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited.
- (2) Satan is an instrument God may use. Here, God incited David through Satan.

## 6. The Killing of Goliath.

### a. Problem

- (1) Did David or Elhanan kill Goliath?
- (2) **1 Sa 17:50** 50 So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone, and struck the Philistine and killed him.
- (3) **2 Sa 21:19** 19 And there was again war with the Philistines at Gob, and Elhanan the son of Jaare-oregim, the Bethlehemite, struck down Goliath the Gittite, the shaft of whose spear was like a weaver's beam.

### b. Solution.

- (1) David and Jesse may have had second names. Solomon had two names.
- (a) **2 Sa 12:24-25** 24 Then David comforted his wife, Bathsheba, and went in to her and lay with her, and she bore a son, and he called his name Solomon. And Yahweh loved him 25 and sent a message by Nathan the prophet. So he called his name Jedidiah, because of Yahweh.
- (2) There could have been two Goliaths.
- (a) **2 Sa 21:20** 20 And there was again war at Gath, where there was a man of great stature, who had six fingers on each hand, and six toes on each foot, twenty-four in number, and he also was descended from the giants.
- (3) Words like "the brother of" could have been omitted from v. 19.

## 7. Differing Numbers in 2 Sa 24 and 1 Ch 21.

### a. Problem.

- (1) Why do so many numbers differ between 2 Sa 24 and 1 Ch 21?
- (2) **2 Sa 24:9** 9 And Joab gave the sum of the numbering of the people to the king. In Israel there were 800,000 valiant men who drew the sword, and the men of Judah were 500,000.
- (3) **1 Ch 21:5** 5 And Joab gave the sum of the numbering of the people to David. In all Israel there were 1,100,000 men who drew the sword, and in Judah 470,000 who drew the sword.
- (4) **2 Sa 24:13** 13 So Gad came to David and told him, and said to him, Shall three years of famine come to you in your land? Or will you flee three months before

your foes while they pursue you? Or shall there be three days' pestilence in your land? Now consider, and decide what answer I shall return to him who sent me.

- (5) **1 Ch 21:12** 12 ... Either three years of famine, three months of devastation by your foes while the sword of your enemies overtakes you, or else three days of the sword of Yahweh, pestilence on the land, with the angel of Yahweh destroying throughout all the territory of Israel. Now decide what answer I shall return to him who sent me.
- (6) **2 Sa 24:24** 24 But the king said to Araunah, No, but I will buy it from you for a price. I will not offer burnt offerings to Yahweh my God that cost me nothing. So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver.
- (7) **1 Ch 21:25** 25 So David paid Ornan 600 shekels of gold by weight for the site.

b. Solutions.

- (1) The difference in the total for [] may be accounted for by assuming the 800,000 [] did not include the 300,000 listed in 1 Ch 27:[], which if included would agree with the total in 1 Ch 21.5.
- (2) The 30,000 difference may involve the 30,000 mentioned in 2 Sa 6:1.
  - (a) **2 Sa 6:1** 1 David again gathered all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand.
- (3) The LXX says three years in both places, so the future in 2 Sa [] is likely a scribal error.
- (4) Perhaps David paid 50 shekels for the threshing floor alone, while the larger amount included the property surrounding it.

## 8. Taking a Staff.

a. Problem.

- (1) Should the disciples take a staff or not?
- (2) **Mt 10:9-10** 9 Acquire no gold, silver, or copper for your belts, 10 no bag for your journey, or two tunics, sandals, or a staff, for the labourer deserves his food.
- (3) **Mk 6:8** 8 He charged them to take nothing for their journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in their belts....
- (4) **Lk 9:3** 3 And he said to them, Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money, and do not have two tunics.

b. Solution.

- (1) Jesus may have allowed the disciples to take a staff if they already had one. If they did not have one, they were to go without one. They were not to buy a new staff.
- (2) The intent is clear: don't make any special provision for the mission.

## 9. The Mustard Seed.

a. Problem.

- (1) Why does Jesus call a mustard seed the smallest seed when it isn't? Poppy seeds are smaller.
- (2) **Mt 13:31-32** 31 [Jesus] put another parable before them saying, The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. 32 It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.

b. Solution.

- (1) “As small as a mustard seed” was a proverbial expression among Jews. Jesus was using popular language.
  - (a) **Lk 17:6** 6 And the Lord said, If you had faith like a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, Be uprooted and planted in the sea, and it would obey you.
- (2) The Greek word means “smaller” not “smallest.”
- (3) The point of the parable is the difference between the small seed and the full-grown mustard plant. A poppy doesn’t grow that tall.

## 10. The Blind Men of Jericho.

### a. Problem.

- (1) How many blind men did Jesus heal? Where did the healing happen?
- (2) **Mt 20:29-34** 29 And as they went out of Jericho, a great crowd followed [Jesus]. 30 And behold, there were two blind men sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was passing by, they cried out, Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David! 31 The crowd rebuked them, telling them to be silent, but they cried out all the more, Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David! 32 And stopping, Jesus called them and said, What do you want me to do for you? 33 They said to him, Lord, let our eyes be opened. 34 And Jesus in pity touched their eyes, and immediately they recovered their sight and followed him.
- (3) **Mk 10:46-52** 46 And they came to Jericho. And as [Jesus] was *leaving Jericho* with his disciples and a great crowd, *Bartimaeus, a blind beggar*, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the roadside. 47 And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me! 48 And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, Son of David, have mercy on me! 49 And Jesus stopped and said, Call him. And they called the blind man, saying to him, Take heart. Get up. He is calling you. 50 And throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. 51 And Jesus said to him, What do you want me to do for you? And the blind man said to him, Rabbi, let me recover my sight. 52 And Jesus said to him, Go your way. Your faith has made you well. And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him on the way.
- (4) **Lk 18:35-43** 35 As [Jesus] *drew near to Jericho*, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. 36 And hearing a crowd going by, he inquired what this meant. 37 They told him, Jesus of Nazareth is passing by. 38 And he cried out, Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me! 39 And those who were in front rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, Son of David, have mercy on me! 40 And Jesus stopped and commanded him to be brought to him. And when he came near, he asked him, 41 What do you want me to do for you? He said, Lord, let me recover my sight. 42 And Jesus said to him, Recover your sight. Your faith has made you well. 43 And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him, glorifying God. And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God.

### b. Solution.

- (1) Mark and Luke chose to focus on one of the blind men, who Peter must have known by name. They do not say *only* one blind man was healed.
- (2) Maybe the blind men pleaded with Jesus as he entered Jericho, but he healed them when they were leaving the city.

- (3) Maybe the blind man heard about Jesus when he was entering Jericho, and he called out to him when Jesus was leaving the city.
- (4) There was an old Jericho and a new Jericho. Maybe Matthew refers to the old Jericho and Mark and Luke refer to the new Jericho.

## 11. Zechariah's Father.

### a. Problem.

- (1) Who was Zechariah's father?
  - (a) **2 Ch 24:20** 20 Then the Spirit of God clothed Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest, and he stood above the people and said to them....
  - (b) **Mt 23:35** 35 ...So that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar.

### b. Solution.

- (1) "Son of" does not have to refer the next previous generation.
  - (a) **Ge 31:28** 28 And why did you [Jacob] not permit me [Laban] to kiss my sons [actually grandsons] and my daughters farewell?
  - (b) **Mt 1:1** 1 The book of the genealogy of Jesus Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham.
- (2) Probably Jehoiada was Zechariah's grandfather.

## 12. Zechariah vs. Jeremiah.

### a. Problem.

- (1) Why does Matthew attribute a quote from Zechariah to Jeremiah?
- (2) **Zec 11:13** 13 Then Yahweh said to me, Throw it to the potter—the lordly price at which I was priced by them. So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of Yahweh, to the potter.
- (3) **Mt 27:9-10** 9 Then was fulfilled what had been spoken by the prophet Jeremiah [actually Zechariah] saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him on whom a price had been set by some of the sons of Israel, 10 and they gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord directed me.

### b. Solution.

- (1) Jeremiah was placed at the beginning of the OT prophetic writings in the Babylonian Talmud. Matthew may have used Jeremiah's name to designate the section of the OT from which the Zechariah references come.
  - (a) **Mt 16:14** 14 And they said, Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.
  - (b) For example, "In the book by Smith, Jones said...."
- (2) Matthew may have had in mind Jeremiah's potter's house in Jer 18-19.
  - (a) **Jer 18:1-2** 1 The word that came to Jeremiah from Yahweh: 2 Arise and go down to the potter's house, and there I will let you hear my words.
  - (b) **Jer 19:1** 1 Thus says Yahweh, Go, buy a potter's earthenware flask, and take some of the elders of the people and some of the elders of the priests....

## 13. Abiathar vs. Ahimelech.

### a. Problem.

- (1) Who was high priest when David ate the tabernacle bread?
- (2) **1 Sa 21:1** 1 Then David came to Nob, to Ahimelech the priest. And Ahimelech came to meet David, trembling, and said to him, Why are you alone, and no one with you?
- (3) **Mk 2:26** 26 ...How [David] entered the house of God, in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him?

b. Solution.

- (1) The event happened during Ahimelech's priesthood, but he was soon killed.
- (2) Abiathar was exercising priestly functions at the time and became more prominent than his father.
- (3) It would be appropriate to say, "In the days of Jacinda Adern, the Prime Minister," when talking about something that actually happened when she was a normal MP.
- (4) "In the time" could be translated, "in the passage about." Only one Greek word, ἐπί, is used.

#### 14. Isaiah vs. Malachi.

a. Problem.

- (1) Why does Mark attribute Isaiah's prophecy to Malachi?
- (2) **Is 40:3** 3 A voice cries: In the wilderness prepare the way of Yahweh. Make straight in the desert a highway for our God.
- (3) **Mal 3:1** 1 Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. And the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says Yahweh of hosts.
- (4) **Mk 1:2-3** 2 As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way, 3 the voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight....

b. Solution.

- (1) Some manuscripts say, "in the prophets."
- (2) The quotation from Isaiah was the principle one in Mark's mind.
- (3) Isaiah's prophecy came first chronologically.

#### 15. The Death of Judas.

a. Problems.

- (1) How did Judas die? Who purchased the field?
- (2) **Mt 27:5** 5 And throwing down the pieces of silver into the temple, [Judas] departed, and he went and hanged himself.
- (3) **Ac 1:18** 18 Now this man [Judas] acquired a field with the reward of his wickedness, and falling headlong he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out.

b. Solution.

- (1) Judas hung himself, and something happened that caused his body to fall and burst open.
- (2) The priests must have bought the field in Judas's name because they did not want to appear to have anything to do with the money.

## 16. Stephen's Sermon.

- a. Problem.
  - (1) Why are Stephen's numbers so off?
  - (2) **Ge 46:27** 27 And the sons of Joseph, who were born to him in Egypt, were two. All the persons of the house of Jacob who came into Egypt were seventy.
  - (3) **Ex 12:40** 40 The time that the people of Israel lived in Egypt was 430 years.
  - (4) **Ac 7:6** 6 And God spoke to this effect—that his offspring would be sojourners in a land belonging to others, who would enslave them and afflict them 400 years.
  - (5) **Ac 7:14** 14 And Joseph sent and summoned Jacob his father and all his kindred, seventy-five persons in all.
  - (6) **Ga 3:17** 17 This is what I mean: the law, which came 430 years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void.
- b. Solution.
  - (1) Stephen could have said something erroneous, and Luke could have recorded it accurately.
  - (2) The difference between 400 and 430 is approximation.
  - (3) In Ga 3:17, Paul refer to the last confirmation of the Abraham covenant to Jacob and the giving of the law.
    - (a) **Ge 35:11-12** 11 And God said to [Jacob], I am God Almighty. Be fruitful and multiply. A nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall come from your own body. 12 The land that I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you, and I will give the land to your offspring after you.
  - (4) Stephen uses the LXX number of 75, which includes the son and grandson of Manasseh and the two sons and a grandson of Ephraim. Genesis doesn't include these.
  - (5) The total number of family members would have been much greater, including wives, grandchildren's, etc.

## 17. Conclusions.

- a. Plausible/reasonable solutions/explanations may always be found so that we need never conclude the Bible contains errors.
- b. Sometimes we simply don't have enough facts to solve the problems.
- c. People usually don't believe the Bible because they don't want to.
- d. We can believe there will be perfect resolution of all problem passages once all the facts are known.
- e. Although the New Testament sometimes quotes the Old Testament loosely, in paraphrase, or interpretively, this is never done in a way to deny the authority or accuracy of the original text.

## 18. Application.

- a. If someone asserts there are errors in the Bible, ask him or her to show you. Then do a little research.
- b. Realise every apparent discrepancy in Scripture has been dealt with sufficiently by someone.



- c. Believe in the inerrancy of Scripture—that it is totally truthful historically and doctrinally.

### ***Bibliography***

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