

# Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties (1982) by Gleason L. Archer Quotes

In dealing with Bible problems of any kind, whether in factual or in doctrinal matters, it is well to follow appropriate guidelines in determining the solution. This is most easily done by those who have carefully and prayerfully studied the Bible over a number of years and have consistently and faithfully memorized Scripture. Some guidelines are as follows: 1. Be fully persuaded in your own mind that an adequate explanation exists, even though you have not yet found it. The aerodynamic engineer may not understand how a bumble bee can fly; yet he trusts that there must be an adequate explanation for its fine performance since, as a matter of fact, it does fly! Even so we may have complete confidence that the divine Author preserved the human author of each book of the Bible from error or mistake as he wrote down the original manuscript of the sacred text..... Carefully study the context and framework of the verse in which the problem arises until you gain some idea of what the verse is intended to mean within its own setting. It may be necessary to study the entire book in which the verse occurs, carefully noting how each key term is used in other passages. Compare Scripture with Scripture, especially all those passages in other parts of the Bible that deal with the same subject or doctrine.<sup>1</sup>

Many Bible difficulties result from a minor error on the part of a copyist in the transmission of the text. In the Old Testament such transmissional errors may have resulted from a poor reading of the vowels; Hebrew was originally written in consonants only, and the vowel signs were not added until a thousand years after the completion of the Old Testament canon.<sup>2</sup>

Whenever historical accounts of the Bible are called in question on the basis of alleged disagreement with the findings of archaeology or the testimony of ancient non-Hebrew documents, always remember that the Bible is itself an archaeological document of the highest caliber. It is simply crass bias for critics to hold that whenever a pagan record disagrees with the biblical account, it must be the Hebrew author that was in error. Pagan kings practiced self-laudatory propaganda, just as their modern counterparts do; and it is incredibly naive to suppose that simply because a statement was written in Assyrian cuneiform or Egyptian hieroglyphics it was more trustworthy and factual than the Word of God composed in Hebrew. No other ancient

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<sup>1</sup> 4

<sup>2</sup> 5

document in the B.C. period affords so many clear proofs of accuracy and integrity as does the Old Testament; so it is a violation of the rules of evidence to assume that the Bible statement is wrong every time it disagrees with a secular inscription or manuscript of some sort.<sup>3</sup>

In any court of law, whether in a civil or criminal case, the trustworthiness of a witness on a stand is necessarily an important point at issue if his testimony is to be received. Therefore, the attorney for the opposing side will make every effort in his cross-examination of the witness to demonstrate that he is not a consistently truthful person. If the attorney can trap the opposing witness into statements that contradict what he has said previously or furnish evidence that in his own community the man has a reputation for untruthfulness, then the jury may be led to doubt the accuracy of the witness's testimony that bears directly on the case itself. This is true even though such untruthfulness relates to other matters having no relationship to the present litigation. While the witness on the stand may indeed be giving a true report on this particular case, the judge and jury have no way of being sure. Therefore, they are logically compelled to discount this man's testimony. The same is true of Holy Scripture. If the statements it contains concerning matters of history and science can be proven by extrabiblical records, by ancient documents recovered through archaeological digs, or by the established facts of modern science to be contrary to the truth, then there is grave doubt as to its trustworthiness in matters of religion. In other words, if the biblical record can be proved fallible in areas of fact that can be verified, then it is hardly to be trusted in areas where it cannot be tested. As a witness for God, the Bible would be discredited as untrustworthy. What solid truth it may contain would be left as a matter of mere conjecture, subject to the intuition or canons of likelihood of each individual. An attitude of sentimental attachment to traditional religion may incline one person to accept nearly all the substantive teachings of Scripture as probably true. But someone else with equal justification may pick and choose whatever teachings in the Bible happen to appeal to him and lay equal claim to legitimacy. One opinion is as good as another. All things are possible, but nothing is certain if indeed the Bible contains mistakes or errors of any kind.<sup>4</sup>

The integrity of Scripture as the authoritative revelation of God is bound up with the issue of the inerrancy of its original inscripturation. It is impossible for a holy and righteous God to inspire any human author of the books of Scripture to write down that which is at any level misleading or false. He who sits in judgment on all wickedness and deceit will never stoop to the use or toleration of falsehood in the recording of His spoken revelation or of the historic or scientific facts chosen to compose the sixty-six books of His Bible. Nor is it conceivable that God in His

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<sup>3</sup> 6

<sup>4</sup> 11

perfection would allow any human agent whom He employs for the writing of Scripture to introduce elements of error or mistake simply on the ground of his humanness. The sovereign Lord who could use the wooden staff of Moses to bring down the ten plagues upon Egypt and part the waters of the Red Sea can surely use a fallible human prophet to communicate His will and His truth without blundering or confusion of any kind. The inerrancy of God's written Word as it was originally inspired is a necessary corollary to the inerrancy of God Himself. We must therefore condemn an attitude of indifference concerning the inerrancy of the original manuscripts of the Bible as a serious theological error.<sup>5</sup>

Deuteronomy 13:2-11 provides the penalty of death by stoning for any idolater or false prophet, even for a brother, wife, or child. Deut. 13:12-17 go on to say that even if it is an entire city that has turned to idolatry, every inhabitant within it is to be put to death, all houses are to be reduced to rubble and ashes, and all property is to be put under the ban. This is no visionary theory but a serious ordinance with inbuilt investigative procedures, reflecting a program that is meant to be carried out within contemporary Israel. But as we examine the account of Judah's religious situation in the seventh century B.C. (or, indeed, in the eighth century from the time of Ahaz on), we find that idol worship was tolerated and practiced in almost every municipality throughout the kingdom--except during the reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah. This would have meant the destruction of every city and town throughout the realm, even including Jerusalem itself. No one devises laws that are completely impossible to carry out in the light of contemporary conditions. The only period in Israel's history when such legislation could have been enacted and enforced was back in the days of Moses and Joshua--or possibly in the time of David. (Already by Solomon's time shrine worship on the "high places" was practiced.)<sup>6</sup>

To be sure, if we were to understand Genesis 1 in a completely literal fashion--which some suppose to be the only proper principle of interpretation if the Bible is truly inerrant and completely trustworthy--then there would be no possibility of reconciliation between modern scientific theory and the Genesis account. But a true and proper belief in the inerrancy of Scripture involves neither a literal nor a figurative rule of interpretation. What it does require is a belief in whatever the biblical author (human and divine) actually meant by the words he used.<sup>7</sup>

Genesis 1 is a sublime manifesto, totally rejecting all the cosmogonies of the pagan cultures of the ancient world as nothing but baseless superstition. The Lord God Almighty existed before all

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<sup>5</sup> 16

<sup>6</sup> 40

<sup>7</sup> 49

matter, and by His own word of command He brought the entire physical universe into existence, governing all the great forces of wind, rain, sun, and sea according to His sovereign will. This stood in stark contrast to the clashing, quarreling, capricious little deities and godlets spawned by the corrupt imagination of the heathen. The message and purpose of Genesis 1 is the revelation of the one true God who created all things out of nothing and ever keeps the universe under His sovereign control.<sup>8</sup>

From the survey of the first fifteen verses of chapter 2, it becomes quite apparent that this was never intended to be a general creation narrative. Search all the cosmogonies of the ancient civilizations of the Near East, and you will never find among them a single creation account that omits all mention of the formation of sun, moon, and stars or ocean or seas--none of which are referred to in Genesis 2. It is therefore quite obvious that Genesis 1 is the only creation account to be found in the Hebrew Scripture and that it is already presupposed as the background of Genesis 2.<sup>9</sup>

Although some other legal systems (such as the Hittite Code) allowed for the payment of blood-money as an alternative to the death penalty, this was expressly forbidden by the law of God. Numbers 35:31 states: "Moreover, you shall not take ransom for the life of a murderer who is guilty of death, but he shall surely be put to death" (NASB). Verse 33 goes on to say, "So you shall not pollute the land in which you are; for blood pollutes the land and no expiation can be made for the land for the blood that is shed on it, except by the blood of him who shed it" (NASB).<sup>10</sup>

There is a far wider implication that results from this restrictive interpretation: the two witnesses requirement applies not only to homicide cases but to any other crime for which a suspect could be bought to trial. Deuteronomy 19:15 says, "A single witness shall not rise up against a man on account of any iniquity or any sin which he has committed; on the evidence of two or three witnesses a matter shall be confirmed" (NASB). This two-witnesses rule therefore applies to theft, fraud, adultery (which is seldom performed in public view), embezzlement, or any other offense for which a man might be subject to criminal process. Every criminal guilty of any of these offenses would therefore get off scot-free if he had taken the prudent measure of committing his crime where two people did not happen to be watching him. It is safe to say that neither ancient Israel nor any other system of jurisprudence known to man could effectively function under such a

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<sup>8</sup> 50-51

<sup>9</sup> 60

<sup>10</sup> 140

restriction as that. How then are we to understand this requirement for two or more witnesses in the prosecution of an accused suspect? The answer is found in a study of the actual usage of the term 'ed ("witness") as employed in the Hebrew Scriptures. In Leviticus 5:1 we read, "Now if a person sins, after he hears a public adjuration to testify, when he is a witness, whether he has seen or otherwise known, if he does not tell it, then he will bear his guilt" (NASB). This verse clearly establishes that there are two kinds of witnesses who may offer testimony in a criminal process: those who have seen the crime actually being committed, and those who, though not eyewitnesses, have seen some evidence relative to the identity of the offender. One who has found a written death-threat, for example, or who has heard the accused express a desire or intention to kill, rob, or rape the victim, would be acceptable as a witness within this definition of 'ed (one who has pertinent knowledge concerning the crime even though he has not actually seen it being committed).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> 140-141