

# **A Gift From Heaven**

*Is the Bible Contradictory?*

*The Creator*

*God Tests Faith*

## **Lesson 9**

REFORMED  
EVANGELISM  
TASKFORCE

# Is the Bible Contradictory?

A great number of people are of the opinion that the Bible is contradictory in many places. Numerous books and pamphlets have been published in which these so-called contradictions are identified. The conclusion which is drawn is that the Bible is not the infallible Word of God. This is, however, a wrong conclusion because in the Bible contradictions are out of the question. Just read along and see for yourself.

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## Do the Facts Agree?

In *2 Sam. 24* you'll find practically the same story as in *1 Chron. 21*. The first version, however, reads as follows: "again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he incited David against them saying, 'Go, number Israel and Judah.'" (*2 Sam. 24:1*) But in the first verse of *1 Chron. 21* you'll find: "Satan stood up against Israel, and incited David to number Israel." Our first inclination is to say that these passages are contradictory, because the one book ascribes to God what Satan is doing in the other book. One can cite a number of other instances of so-called contradictions in the Bible.

Let us take a look at a few others. When you read *2 Sam. 16:18-23* and *1 Sam. 17:55-58*, it would appear as though in one passage Saul knew David and his father, whereas in the other passage he did not. Further, in *Matt. 21:2* we read about an ass and her colt which Jesus requires for His festive entry into the city of Jerusalem. But in *Luke 19:30* only the colt is mentioned. Now, what are we to think? Were there two animals or was there only one? Matthew writes that the two robbers who were crucified on each side of Jesus, were slandering Him (*Matt. 27:44*). Luke, on the other hand, writes that only one of them slandered Him (*Luke 23:39*).

One famous example is the apparently great contradiction between the following two texts. In *Rom. 4:5* we read, "However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness." In *James 2:24*, however, we find, "You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone." To make matters even more complicated, both writers are referring to Abraham. Is it not clear that they are presenting contradicting views?

Is the Bible, then really the infallible Word of God? Several contradictions can be attributed to errors that were made in copying the Bible. And even in the handing down of the original manuscripts certain errors have crept in. It is easy to make that kind of error. This also happens in our own days. In spite of all the care and attention spent on this project, you may have run into a number of printing errors. But you are not going to blame the author for the mistakes made by the printer. Similarly, we can't call the Bible unreliable just because later on in time some writers made errors in copying the original text. It is not difficult to discover these errors and to correct them. There is even a special scientific discipline that deals with this work: text criticism. This is something entirely different from criticism of the Bible as the Word of God. Text criticism is not an attack on the Bible but is performed with great reverence for the Bible.

## The Opposite of Being Contradictory

When you take a closer look at the so-called contradictions in the Bible mentioned above, you will discover that actually they do not exist. With every passage of the Bible you have to take the larger context into account, and to keep in mind the author's objective. In the book of Kings, for instance, certain kings who played a major political role are mentioned very briefly, whereas other kings who were much less important politically are described at great length. It is evident that the author's purpose is to show the significance of a monarch in light of the kingdom and the service of God. The only portions of Israel's history that are described are the ones needed to demonstrate how God, in spite of the sins of his people, makes His kingdom come and fulfills His promises. The description of the history of Israel is dominated by the Saviour who is going to arrive at some future date.

The two books of Kings form one continuous story with the two books of Samuel. Samuel especially emphasizes how frequently both king and people break the covenant with God. The objective of the books of Chronicles is, however, entirely, different. These books describe the glory which God bestows on David and his house. At the same time they point out the enmity of Satan against God and His people. In view of all this, the seeming contradiction can be explained. In the book of Samuel it is God who turns David against Israel. God's anger is kindled because of the sins of His people. But Chronicles shows that God is using Satan as a means to prompt David to organize a census.

Also the other contradiction dealing with Saul's knowledge about David's descent or not, can be explained. Certainly, Saul would have known who David's father was, but he is totally amazed that just a simple shepherd and harp player is able to slay an enormous giant like Goliath. Saul's question is prompted by his amazement: Does that run in the family? Did David get that from his father?

## Accepting in Faith

Also, there is no essential difference between the accounts of Matthew and Luke about one or two animals during the entry of Jesus in Jerusalem. Every farmer in the near east knew that a colt refuses to move when the mother does not come along. Matthew mentions that in his gospel. Luke only mentions that Jesus was riding on the colt. And then the different accounts about one or both criminals slandering Jesus are not contradictory either. Matthew demonstrates from what side the slandering comes, even from those crucified with Christ. Luke, on the other hand, shows Jesus' majesty in His sufferings for both a criminal and a Roman centurion changed their minds and opinions. It is quite possible that at first both criminals slandered Jesus. But later one of them was so impressed by the majesty of Christ in His suffering that he came to his senses and repented.

The contradiction between the statements of Paul and James is also an illusion when it becomes clear what each writer has in mind. In his letter to the Romans Paul is warning his reader against the teachings of the Jews. They rejected Jesus as Saviour and believed that one could be saved by meticulously keeping the law. In other words, they thought that they could be saved through their own efforts (*Rom. 4:1-8*). Paul explains that Abraham was not justified because of his works, but because he put his trust in God's Word. The genuineness of Abraham's faith became abundantly clear when God tested him by ordering him to sacrifice his only son, Isaac (*Gen. 22*). And just like Abraham, says Paul, you can only be saved through faith in Jesus Christ. In case you should now conclude that all one needs is faith, and one's conduct and behavior in life is no longer important, James says with reference to the same event with Abraham: "Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?" (*James 2:21*)

It would appear that this is exactly the opposite of what Paul writes, but it is not. Both Paul and James are proclaiming a living faith. This is a faith that is visible in what one does and does not do. Good deeds cannot save you, says Paul. Only through faith you can be acquitted by God. James points out, however, that if you profess to believe, but it is not at all visible in your life, then your faith is dead. As a matter of fact, Paul also writes clearly about this. He says that what really counts is that you have faith that expresses itself in love (*Gal. 5:6*).

Superficially, there may seem to be a contradiction between what both apostles had written, but in fact it is about the same thing. What counts is not a faith that is only talk, but a faith in which there is harmony between talk and walk.

## Be Conquered by the Gospel

Careful examination shows that the so-called contradictions in the Bible are just illusionary. Of course, in certain places there are things that are hard to explain. But it is always better to leave those words that seem to be contradictory in their proper place, rather than resort to negative criticism.

Jesus Christ accepted the entire Old Testament as the Word of God. Whoever has the nerve to use the crowbar of criticism on it, comes in conflict with the saying of Jesus that "scripture cannot be broken." (*John 10:35*) The Word of God has power and authority. Bible criticism must be rejected if one wants to follow in the footsteps of Jesus.

Take and read the Bible. Let yourself be conquered by the love of God, a love which the Bible is full of. Simply believe in the message of the Bible.

# The Creator

## *Article 1*

Have you ever wondered how this world came into existence? Many people are confused about this question because there are so many answers. The most common answer is either creation or evolution. That makes matters confusing, but it becomes much worse as you discover that there are many theories which mix elements of both creation and evolution. Where can a person find a clear answer?

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### **The Father Speaks About Creation**

The first article of the Apostles' Creed states that God is the Creator of both heaven and earth. Since God is the Creator, He is the only one who can give us reliable information about the origin of the world and the universe. To get our knowledge, we are dependent on whatever He wishes to reveal to us about these matters. God does that in *Genesis 1 and 2*. A lot of people have difficulties with the story of creation as it can be found in the Bible. Many scientific theories have been advanced to explain the origin of the world and of life. More often than not they are in conflict with what Genesis tells us. They turn away from it, or they try to reconcile scientific theories with the Bible.

Science, however, cannot get any further than unproven theories and hypotheses. Trying to reconcile its theories with the contents of the Bible is utter foolishness. Trying to merge creation and a theory like evolution is not a reasonable compromise, but a show of unbelief. God does not give His opinion of how creation occurred in *Genesis 1 and 2*. He gives us facts, facts which we must humbly accept without changing them to suit our preferences (*Job 38:4*).

### **The Message of Genesis 1 and 2**

The revelation of *Genesis 1 and 2* is gospel, the good news of salvation. Since its very beginnings the church has understood it this way. It begins this good news by confessing that the Creator is the Father, the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our heavenly Father tells sinful people how He created a world that was perfectly good (*Gen. 1:13*). With much loving care He framed and furnished a home for man to live in. On this delightful and glorious earth man was able to communicate with God, and God wanted to communicate with man. Then, after the beautiful creation story, we read how man plunged the world into sin. Man was responsible for the destruction of paradise (*Gen. 3:17*).

However, God does not tell us about the earth's beginning and subsequent fall simply to depress us. He reveals how it once was because in the entire history of mankind He has been working to restore the relationship between God and man. Through the work of the Son, God has been calling men back to His service. God sent His beloved Son into the world so that one day God and man could again live together as they did in paradise (*John 3:16*).

Notice now how the beginning of the Bible is connected with the end (*Rev. 21:1-8*). The dwelling place of man as found in the first chapters of Genesis, with God the Father as the head of the household of man, will some day be completely restored. But there is more. The glory of that restored home will be greater than that of the original one. It will be filled with the beloved children of God, because the Creator is at the same time the Father of mankind. But in the new world, the new paradise, there will only be room for those who have lived according to the commandments of God. "But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, as for murderers,

fornicators, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their lot shall be in the lake that burns with fire and sulphur, which is the second death” (*Rev. 21:8*).

## **The Restoration of the World**

The world was created out of nothing. Whatever has come into being has come about through the Word of the Almighty God alone. “And God said...” (*Gen. 1:3; Ps. 33:6; Heb. 11:3*). It follows that the restoration of this world should be left up to that very same Almighty God. And since He is the faithful Father of all mankind He will do it.

# God Tests Faith

## *Genesis 21-23*

We have seen that God does whatever He promises to do (*Gen. 21:1-7*). He showed this very clearly to Abraham and Sarah. They eventually received the son God had promised them after they, humanly speaking, could no longer have any children. God had waited so long with the fulfillment of His promise to demonstrate to them that the fulfillment came from Him alone. But no matter how long it took before the son of Abraham and Sarah was born, they were always convinced that God was going to perform what He had promised. Paul puts it this way in his letter to the Romans: “He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead because he was about a hundred years old, or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah’s womb. No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised” (*Rom. 4:19-21*).

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### **Through Faith Alone - Ishmael**

Immediately after the miraculous birth of Isaac, Abraham’s faith is put to the test again. God had said that He would generate the offspring of Abraham through Isaac exclusively, so it is for this reason that Abraham has to send his other son, Ishmael, together with his mother, away into the desert. Ishmael and Isaac were no longer permitted to live together in Abraham’s family circle. As you can imagine, it was not easy for Abraham to obey God and send Hagar and Ishmael away. Yet, he does. He firmly believes that God is able to fulfil His promise to give him many descendants through Isaac alone. In addition, God gave Abraham promises for Ishmael. Ishmael’s descendants would one day form the Arabic nations. However, the enmity between Ishmael and Isaac would be perpetuated among the descendants of both of them. Even today the Arabs and the Israelites are at odds with each other.

After Abraham had sent Ishmael away with his mother, God once more puts Abraham to the test. We would be inclined to say that Abraham had given sufficient proof that he had trusted completely in God’s promise, yet God tests him again.

### **Through Faith Alone - Isaac**

Exactly how does Abraham see Isaac? Does he consider Isaac only as the son who is going to continue his tribe? Or does he recognize that Isaac belongs to God, an instrumental part in the fulfillment of the Messianic promise? Is Isaac, in the first place, the son of Abraham, or is he the son of the promise? To settle this issue, God tests Abraham again.

Abraham receives a very disturbing order. He is told to sacrifice Isaac as a burnt offering to God. With many questions racing through his mind, Abraham takes his son on the journey. He has three days to ponder God’s order. For three days he wrestles in his spirit with God. Finally, father and son arrive in the land of Moriah on the dreaded mountain which God appointed as the place of sacrifice.

Many questions must have arisen in the heart of Abraham. Is God, then, perhaps like those idols to whom children were sacrificed to appease them? How could God ever fulfil His promises if his only son had to die?

Yet, in spite of all this, he keeps his faith in the truthfulness and the power of God. This is evident from his words to his servants "...I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you" (*Gen. 22:5*). And he said to Isaac, "God will provide himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son" (*Gen. 22:8*).

Abraham has reached the stage of faithful obedience to God. But it was God who saw to it that Abraham remained obedient; Abraham was unable to do that by himself. God even helped Abraham take the knife to slay his son, but then it was enough. The voice of the angel of the Lord sounded, "...For now I see that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me" (*Gen. 22:12*).

And just as Abraham had predicted earlier, God Himself supplied an animal for the sacrifice. A ram had strayed away from the flock and caught its horns in the thicket. It took Isaac's place on the altar.

Yes, Abraham believed. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews says later, "By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was ready to offer up his only son, of whom it was said, 'Through Isaac shall your descendants be named.' He considered that God was able to raise men even from the dead; hence, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back" (*Heb. 11:17-19*). This means that Abraham, as it were, received his son back from the realm of death. When Abraham had passed the test, something marvelous happened. The angel of the Lord called Abraham again and then God reconfirmed His oath that His promises would come true. All the people of the earth would be blessed in Abraham because he had listened to the voice of God. And God follows through on His promise. Centuries later John the Baptist sees Jesus walk up to him, and John exclaims "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (*John 1:29*).

You can see that, just as God provided the ram, He provided the offering for the sin of the world. God sacrificed His own Son, and allowed Him to die on the cross, so that whoever believes in Him shall be saved.

## Through Faith Alone - Christ

Since Abraham believed, he was declared righteous. God grants righteousness to him (*Gen. 15,16*). This means that God no longer attributed his sins to him. And that is why he was called the father of all believers. Whoever believes in the forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, will be justified together with Abraham (*Rom. 4:22-25*). The promises of God are not focused on Abraham himself, nor on his son Isaac, but on the Saviour who is to come.

For Abraham, his son Isaac was but the beginning of the fulfillment of the promise. Jesus Himself says later, "Your father Abraham rejoiced that he was to see my day; he saw it and was glad" (*John 8:56*). Through faith he knew the complete fulfillment would be in the future. He remained a stranger in the land that had been promised to him. This status was especially apparent when Sarah died. To bury her he had to buy a grave, a sepulchre. The

very heir of the land of promise does not even own a few square yards of it! We read that "by faith he (Abraham) sojourned in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he looked forward to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (*Heb. 11:9,10*). Whoever has the same faith as Abraham, the same unshakable trust in God's promises, can look forward with him to "the city with foundations", the new Jerusalem, the new heaven and the new earth in which all God's promises will be fulfilled.

# Questions for Lesson 9

## Is the Bible Contradictory?

1. What is the purpose of text criticism? What is the purpose of Scripture criticism? Why is the first permitted and even required, whereas the second is not?
2. In Luke 20:21-44 Jesus Himself points out an apparent contradiction in the Bible (*Ps. 101:1* as compared with, for instance, *Ps. 132:18*). How would you answer the question Jesus asks?
3. Would it be of great importance to hunt for all kinds of so-called contradictions in the Bible? Please elaborate.

## The Creator

1. In *Gen. 1* we read that creation took six days. Now read through *Ps. 104*. The days of creation can be followed quite accurately in this Psalm. Try to match a verse of this Psalm with each of the days of creation.
2. *Revelation 21* gives us an account of the new world to come. How will it be different from the world of today? (*Rev. 21:4*)
3. Modern science starts with the basic assumption that matter always existed. All of life, it is said, has evolved through the ages from a primary, original cell. What is the Bible's counter argument? (See *Heb. 11:3; Rom. 4:17, Col. 1:16; Ps. 33:6*)

## God Tests Faith

1. The prediction of Abraham in *Gen. 22:8* comes true in verse 13. What is the deeper meaning of verse 8? (See *John 1:29* and *1 Peter 1:19*)
2. What does the Bible mean with the term justification by faith? (See *Rom 5: 1*, also *Gen. 15:6*, and *Rom. 4:22*)
3. Abraham's faith and ours do not merit anything. Why not?