**Difficult Passages of the Bible – Responding To The Critic’s Claims**

\*\* The following are passages and topics found in the Bible that are often used by critics as a “reason” for not wanting to believe in Christianity. In dealing with people, our goal is to lovingly challenge them to consider the answers to the “difficulties” the Bible seems to present. Keep in mind that no matter how you answer, some people will not listen.

**1) Supposed discrepancies in the resurrection accounts.**

**What critics say:** The claim is that there are problems with the resurrection stories as recorded in the Gospels. This includes questions such as how many angels were actually at the tomb? Which women showed up first and how many were there? Was Mary Magdalene the first individual to encounter Jesus?

*How many women came to the tomb Easter morning? Was it one, as told in John? Two (Matthew)? Three (Mark)? Or more (Luke)?…* - *Atheist blogger Bob Seidensticker*

**Our response:** What follows is a chronological approach to what the Gospels say regarding the events surrounding the resurrection. It must be noted, and stated, that the Gospels do not contradict each other but they all focus on certain aspects of what happened on that Easter morning. This actually shows there was no deliberate attempt by the writers to collaborate on their stories, which would make their credibility suspect.

We must never read just one Bible verse when it comes to these discussions. Though certain women are named in the Gospels, when we see the Gospels as a whole, there is no contradiction. Read **John 20:1-2**.

 **A. Chronology and other information regarding the resurrection morning:**

\*\* The following is from **“compellingtruth.org”** with additional thoughts:

 1) An angel rolls away the stone from the tomb before sunrise **(Mt. 28:2-4)**. The guards are seized with fear and eventually flee.

 2) Women who are followers of Jesus visit the tomb and discover His body missing **(Matt. 28:1; Mk. 16:1-4; Lk. 23:55-24:1-3; Jn. 20:1-2)**.

 3) Mary Magdalene leaves to tell Peter and John **(Jn. 20:1-2)**.

 4) Other women remain at the tomb; they see two angels who tell them of Christ’s resurrection **(Mt. 28:5-7; Mk. 16:5-7; Lk. 24:4-8)**.

\*\* Some argue that there is an error here in the Bible. Some of the passages note “men” or “man” or “angels.” Which is it? In the Bible, angels at times took on the form of men **(Gen. 18:1-2; Gen. 19:1)**. These angels at the tomb took on the appearance of a man.

 5) Peter and John run to the tomb and then leave **(Lk. 24:12; Jn. 20:3-10)**.

 6) *Christ’s First Appearance*: Mary Magdalene returns to the tomb; Christ appears to her **(Jn. 20:11-18)**.

 7) *Christ’s Second Appearance*: Jesus appears to the other women (Mary, mother of James, Salome, and Joanna), noted in **Mt. 28:8-10**.

 8) At this time, the guards report the events to the religious leaders and are bribed to lie **(Mt. 28:11-15)**.

 **B. An additional point to keep in mind:**

 1) Some make a big deal over the fact that the Gospels do not agree on the number of angels that were at the tomb. Matthew and Mark note that there was one angel (the one who spoke), and Luke mentions two. Is this a contradiction? No, if there were two, there had to be at least one. Plus, the writer’s focus on one or two does not change the story. It doesn’t matter how many angels were there.

**2) Jesus and the Mustard Seed – Doesn’t Jesus know botany?**

**What critics say:** They claim that Jesus was wrong in **Matthew 13:31-32; Mark 4:30-33 and Lk. 13:18-19** when the Lord said that the “mustard seed” was the smallest seed on earth and that when it grows it is larger than all the garden plants. The fact is, there were and are smaller seeds. One claim is that Jesus accommodated His message to the people of the day, that the mustard seed was the smallest that the eye could see.

It is several times larger than a poppy seed though smaller than many other seeds.

*“…Although the mustard seed is not really the smallest of seeds, yet Jesus referred to it as such…*

*Surely God and Jesus subserved the interests of truth more by accommodating themselves to the people’s understanding of botany than they would have being as careful to be inerrant in this non-revelational matter as they were in revelational ones.” – Daniel Fuller*

**Our response:** How do we answer this predicament? Was Jesus wrong? Consider the following:

 1) Jesus’ use of “mustard seed” is found in parables and other passages. Jesus never intended for this to be a scientific statement. Jesus is making the point regarding the growth of the Lord’s kingdom. A Jew would understand how a small mustard seed grows to a decent size and Jesus uses that fact to explain the expansion of God’s kingdom on earth.

 2) Jesus was referring to the first century Palestinian farmer. We have to keep in mind the context of what we read. **Mt. 13:31 and Mk. 4:31** tells us that it was planted in the field. The hearers of this story would have known that the mustard seed was the smallest seed planted by farmers in the first century from what we can gather.

 3) Jesus is drawing a comparison. This small seed grows into a shrub at least three feet high, but also up to ten-fifteen feet in height (a small tree) with branches strong enough to be the homes of small birds. We are not talking about an eagle’s nest here. The Lord is showing how from a small seed a large bush or tree would grow. From a small beginning, the Kingdom of God to what it is today.

 4) The word for “smallest” means “small” or “little” in size. Orchid seeds are smaller but were unknown in that part of the world.

**Gleason Archer** in his **“New International Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties”** writes,

*“But it is highly questionable whether Jesus was discussing all plant life on planet Earth when He made this statement. No one yet has proved that ancient Palestinians planted anything that bore a smaller seed than that of the black mustard, and that was the framework within which Jesus was speaking. There is no record of the orchid ever being cultivated in Palestine.”*

**3) Jephthah’s vow – did he actually sacrifice the life of his daughter?**

**What critics say:** The claim is that Jephthah, in **Judges 11:30**, made a vow to God that if the Lord helped him defeat the Ammonites he would sacrifice as a burnt offering whatever would come out of his house to meet him after the battle. His daughter appeared when he returned home. How could God allow this man to take her life?

From **Alisa Childers** and **Tim Barnett’s** book, **“The Deconstruction of Christianity: What It Is, Why It’s Destructive And How To Respond”** is the following quote from a deconstructionist which shows how some who leave the faith struggle with what the Bible says,

*“One example he gave was Judges 11, in which Jephthah made a vow that if God gave the opposing army into his hand, he would take the first thing that came out the front door of his house and present it as a burnt offering. The deconstructionist wrote, “God makes passionately, faithful man murder his own child because of a technicality in the wording of his prayer. (Judges 11).”*

**Our response:** How do we answer this predicament? Did this man put his daughter to death as a completion of his vow? As we shall see, I do not believe he did. There is a debate among Christians as to what happened here.

 1) There is obvious misunderstanding regarding this vow. God would never have allowed him to do this. It was strictly forbidden to put people to death on an altar **(Lev. 18:21; Lev. 20:2-5; Deut. 12:31-32; Deut. 18:10)**. Some may argue that God would have not intervened to show this man how foolish he was or to show how choices have consequences. But this would have called into question the integrity of God if He helped Jephthah win the battle and then allowed him to offer his daughter as a sacrifice.

 2) His statement about whatever met him when he returned from battle, and would be given as an offering, is never used as a phrase that speaks of animals coming out of the house to meet someone. Jephthah would never expect a sheep to come running out. The word for “burnt offering” can also mean to “ascend,” or “steps” as seen in **Eze. 40:26**. It does not in every use mean a literal burnt offering.

 3) Jephthah goes and defeats the Ammonites and is met by his only child, a daughter, upon his return **(Judg. 11:32-34)**.

 4) In **vs. 35**, Jephthah tears his clothes and is in great distress because he has made a vow to God that he claims he cannot take back.

 5) Note what happens next. Remember, this is his only child. In **vs. 36** she tells him to fulfill his vow since God gave him victory over the Ammonites. She may not have known what his vow was but I think, based on what we are about to read, she did.

 6) In **vs. 37** she is not mourning her “upcoming” death, but the fact that she would not have children. Why would she be mourning her “virginity” and not her upcoming demise? The reason was she was not put on an altar. Instead, she would not marry but would serve the Lord as a single person the rest of her life. The line of Jephthah ended with him because she was his only child.

 7) The arguments put forth for him actually sacrificing her, even by Christians, include: (1) he was beyond the Jordan, away from any godly influence; (2) he was far from the tabernacle (to me this does not matter, for I believe he would have known God’s law); (3) a hypocrite in religious devotion; (4) familiar with human sacrifices among the nations (the Jews would know if they heard any reading of the law that it was forbidden for this to occur); (5) influenced by superstition; (6) wanting victory so badly he offered most likely a burnt offering. I believe these are weak arguments “for” the vow.

 8) There is no record here that she was actually put to death. The word for “lament” in **vs. 40** can mean “to celebrate,” as well as having the idea of mourning.

 9) As far as Israelites being involved in this ungodly practice of sacrificing children, there is no record of it happening among the people of Israel from what we can gather until a couple of ungodly kings ruled such as Manasseh **(2 Kings 21:6)**.

**4) Elisha and the mocking children**

**What critics say:** How could God allow forty-two children to be killed by bears simply because they mocked Elisha for being bald? This story speaks of an angry, jealous God Who has no concern for whomever He allows to be killed. The story is found in **2 Kings 2:23-25**.

**Our response:** Did Elisha call for the bears to come out of the woods and kill these children? Were they actually young kids or older? Did the bears actually take their lives and if they did, if God is God, He can allow that. Again, we must look at the context.

 1) The word for “small” can mean “youth.” It can also mean “lesser, insignificant” but, yes, can refer to one young in age being around 8-12 years old or similar. But not always does it mean that.

 2) The word for “boys” is important. It can describe an age range from an infant to twenty-year old’s. We know infants are not in mind here. I believe these are young men, teens to twenties. One of the words used here for these young men is found in **Gen. 22:12** and speaks of Isaac, who no doubt was in his twenties. See also **1 Sam. 16:11-12** where it refers to David, obviously old enough to fight lions and watch over sheep.

 3) The word “jeered” means “to mock, scoff, deride, to make fun of.” This was not just some simple razzing. These guys had intent in what they were doing. Imagine how we would have felt to have over forty young adults meeting us on a road who begin to verbally harass us.

 4) We cannot say for sure, but there is a very good possibility that this was not an isolated incident. These young men may have treated others this way, intimidating and attempting to scare them. Think of what it must have been like in Bethel to have these guys running around. And there is a thought they may have been young false prophets of Baal.

 5) The phrase “go on up, go on up” **(vs. 23)** was a way of mocking Elijah and Elisha. They were telling this prophet to leave, to get out of there. Plus, they did not believe in what had happened to Elijah. The whole situation bears that out. They are actually speaking out against God by making fun of these two individuals.

 6) Some would argue that Elisha was an older man who overreacted. If someone brings this up, we can ask how they would have felt in that situation or if they have ever been in a situation that someone was trying to intimidate them. Not only that, but Elisha would live another sixty years or so after this event. He was probably in his twenties when this occurred. So, his was not some short-tempered, impatient response.

 7) The phrase “baldhead” was used at times as a term of scorn and ridicule. They were mocking him. For example, it may have been used to accuse someone of having leprosy, even if they did not have it, as a way of putting them down.

 8) The word “cursed” in **vs. 24** does not mean that Elisha “cussed” at them. He was calling down judgment upon them. Or it could be that he said something to them because the word can mean “to despise.” He could have told them they were “despicable” and “vile” but I think he asked for God to intervene but again, he would have left it with the Lord to do what He chose when it came to judging them or not.

 9) It is wrong to assume that the young men were killed by the bears. The word “tore” in **2 Kings 2:24** does not have to mean “death.” They could have been severely wounded by the bears but even if they died, God could have used this for judgment upon these individuals who were in the big picture, as noted, mocking God, not Elisha. Plus, God often warned Israel through smaller judgments to turn from their sin and could have used this to challenge people of the area to do the same.

**5) Is the God of the Old Testament different than the God of the New Testament?**

**What critics say:** Critics of the Bible claim that the God of the Old Testament is a warring, unkind, bloodthirsty, jealous, bullying God while the God of the New Testament is more kind, compassionate, gracious.

**Our response:** The answer depends on understanding God’s attributes, people’s response to Him, and His Sovereign plan. We know that critics will not accept our answer but we can give information that will make them think.

 1) Throughout the Old Testament, God is seen as a God of compassion and love **(**[**Ex. 34:6**](https://www.bibleref.com/Exodus/34/Exodus-34-6.html)**;**[**Num. 14:18**](https://www.bibleref.com/Numbers/14/Numbers-14-18.html)**;**[**Deut. 4:31**](https://www.bibleref.com/Deuteronomy/4/Deuteronomy-4-31.html)**;**[**Neh. 9:17**](https://www.bibleref.com/Nehemiah/9/Nehemiah-9-17.html)**;**[**Psalm 86:5**](https://www.bibleref.com/Psalms/86/Psalm-86-5.html)**,**[**15**](https://www.bibleref.com/Psalms/86/Psalm-86-15.html)**;**[**108:4**](https://www.bibleref.com/Psalms/108/Psalm-108-4.html)**;**[**145:8**](https://www.bibleref.com/Psalms/145/Psalm-145-8.html)**;**[**Joel 2:13**](https://www.bibleref.com/Joel/2/Joel-2-13.html)**)**. When people read about the flood, or the driving out of the people of Canaan (which is our next discussion point), they make assumptions about God without considering the context of the Bible as a whole book.

 2) In the New Testament, God’s love is clearly seen in the sending of His Son to die for our sins **(Jn. 3:16; 1 Jn. 4:9-11)**. So, both the Old and New Testaments speak of God’s kindness, compassion, and care for people.

 3) God is gracious and loving, but He is also holy and just. For example, in the story of the flood in **Gen. 6**, the people were living in sin and it was affecting the entire creation **(see Gen. 6:5)**. God gave folks 120 years to repent while Noah built the Ark. Noah also preached about God’s grace and offer of hope to the people **(2 Peter 2:5)**.

The people of Nineveh in the **Book of Jonah** confessed their sin and God spared them. They were an incredibly wicked people, yet God, in His compassion and righteousness, gave them a reprieve.

 4) **Jn. 3:18-19**, following on the passage talking about Christ giving His life for our sins, notes that those who reject Him are already under God’s judgment. We are removed from that when we respond by faith to the offer of salvation. See also **Rom. 1:18-32**.

 5) When God’s people would fall into idolatry and terrible sins, God sent prophets. He gave them ample opportunity to change their ways before He brought judgment. He did that with other nations as well as we just noted from **Jonah**. If He was a simply a judgmental God, He would not have been patient and constantly reaching out to people as He does in the Old and New Testament.

 6) The revelation of God’s mercy and grace is seen in the OT, but comes to ultimate fulfillment in the NT with the Incarnation of Christ **(Jn. 1:1,14,17)**. God did show love and compassion as we have already noted but the coming of Christ to earth was the fulfillment of prophecy and in Christ we saw both the judgment of sin and God’s love.

 7) God is unchanging in His nature **(Mal. 3:6; Jam. 1:17)**, whether noted in the Old or New Testament. What changes is how man lives, responds, and reacts to what God has said. God does judge sin, but He also shows mercy and grace. The God of the OT is not different than the God of the NT. We have to challenge people to consider all the facts about God and His dealings with people. Yes, He judges sin, but He shows mercy and grace as well.

**6) The Destruction of the Canaanites in the Book of Joshua.**

**What critics say:** If God is loving and kind, how could He both promote and allow the destruction of people, including men, women and children, in the land of Canaan. How could God give the “okay” to drive people from their homes and to even allow them to be killed. Opponents of the Bible see this as genocide.

Because of this accusation that God committed “genocide,” we must define what it is. **Dictionary.com** defines “genocide” as,

*“the deliberate and systematic extermination of a national, racial, political, or cultural group.”*

“*Other definitions include the destruction of people on account of religion. In any case, genocide defined in this way is the intentional destruction of a people group*because of*their race, politics, culture, or religion.”* – **TableTalk** website

\*\* As we shall see, God did not commit genocide in Canaan.

**Our response:** The Bible does teach that God did indeed order the Israelites to enter the Promised Land and to drive the people out. The answer revolves around several factors that must be considered.

 1) God had made a promise to Israel many years before regarding the Promised Land. This is seen in **Gen. 15:16-20**. If God is Who the Bible says He is, remember that He also makes promises to us in His Word, and at times those promises include our interaction with people and events that take place that are used to fulfill His promises.

 2) In the New Testament, God’s love is clearly seen in the sending of His Son to die for our sins **(Jn. 3:16; 1 Jn. 4:9-11)**. God’s love was extended to anyone in the Old Testament as well. One of the main things Israel was to do was to be a light for God to the nations, something they often failed at.

 3) God is gracious and loving, but He is also holy and just. We discussed this in our previous point. In addition, these Canaanite cities had for centuries been deeply rooted in idolatry and sin.

 4) **Lev. 18** gives us the reason behind the cleansing of the land of Canaan. It was because of their sinful, horrible practices as a people and the things they did would infect everyone around them unless they changed their ways.

 4) **Joshua 6:21**, where we read of the destruction of the city of Jericho, with the exception of Rahab **(Joshua 2)**, we must keep in mind that the people of the city had heard about the God of Israel. At any time, the Canaanites could have turned from their idolatrous worship, which included child sacrifice, immorality, false gods, and chosen to follow the true God. See **Deut. 20:16-18**. They had centuries to do so.

 5) The word for “devoted” in **Josh. 6:21** is a word that is at times used to consecrate something to the priests but often it had to do with giving something over for destruction **(Num. 21:2-3; Deut. 2:34; Josh. 8:26)**. **Josh. 7:21-22** says that because of the sin of Achan (stealing from Jericho) Israel was “devoted to the ban.” God judged His own people because of this sin. Foreign nations devoted things to destruction **(2 Kings 19:11)**. There is no getting around what the word means, that of being “devoted to destruction.” But this is just one piece to the puzzle.

 6) From what we gather from history, the people of Canaan were very depraved, including the children who had learned from their parents and others. Rituals at their temples, the sins they did as a people, their brutality, etc., would not have ended if they continued on as nations. **Gen. 15:16** tells us that the Amorites, one of the people of the lands, had not reached, at the time of Abraham, the wickedness to which it would grow to but at a certain time they would be judged for their sins.

 7) Though the command was given to destroy all the people, there is a good chance that very few women and children were actually killed. It is known that at times cities and armies would send their families away to safety and they would stay and fight. This cannot be proven, but something to be considered. God’s point was to drive the people out of the land, and those who opposed Israel were to be killed.

 8) Though difficult at times reconcile, remember that these people in the land were so wicked that they would have infected God’s people with their idolatry and lifestyles, and God had to clean house before His people could settle the land. In fact, passages such as **Judg. 2:1-3** show how by not driving out all the people groups of Canaan, Israel paid a price.

 9) Keep in mind that one nation, the Amalekites, who were not from the land of Canaan but forged alliances with them, when Israel was on their wilderness journey, would pick off and kill the weak, the sick, and the stragglers. See **Deut. 25:17-18**.

 10) The battles and the dealings with the people of Canaan were limited to a specific time frame and geographical location. Not all battles and wars were the same in the OT. This was not genocide. Israel fought against walled cities and many of the battles they did fight were defensive in nature **(Josh. 10:4)**.

 11) People who use this against God and the Bible overlook the times of grace and mercy that is seen in Scripture that God shows to the world.

And one final thought from **“gotquestions.org,”** on this discussion,

*“The most difficult part of the command of*[*Deuteronomy 20:16–17*](https://www.bibleref.com/Deuteronomy/20/Deuteronomy-20-16.html)*is that, when the Canaanites were exterminated, women and children were not spared. Why would God order the death of noncombatants and innocent children? Here are some things to remember:*

*⁍ No one is “innocent” in the sense of being sinless (*[*Psalm 51:5*](https://www.bibleref.com/Psalms/51/Psalm-51-5.html)*;*[*58:3*](https://www.bibleref.com/Psalms/58/Psalm-58-3.html)*).
⁍ These women were participants in the degrading sins of Canaan, and the children would have grown up sympathetic to the evil religions and practices of their parents.
⁍ These women and, eventually, the children would naturally have been resentful of the Israelites and later sought to avenge the “unjust” treatment the Canaanite men had received.*

*In the end, God is sovereign over all of life, and He can take it whenever and however He sees fit. God alone can give life, and God alone has the right to take it. God is under no obligation to extend anyone’s life for even another day. How and when we die is completely up to Him. In the case of the Canaanites, their end came after a time of tolerance and patient grace. But Judgment Day finally comes to all, and it came to the Canaanites via the Hebrew people.”*

**7) Does the Bible condone slavery?**

**What critics say:** According to critics, the Bible supports the idea of slavery. Many slaveowners used the Bible to support this horrible practice. Thus, people were treated differently, though we are told that we should not do so **(Jam. 2:1-13)**. And usually without exception the finger is pointed at white Christians when it comes to this problem of slavery.

**Our response:** There are many historical, theological, and moral issues that we must give in response to this criticism. The Bible nowhere condones slavery as we know it to be, even today in our world where it is still occurring. Millions of people today are in forced marriages, forced labor, exploited. The numbers have been estimated at anywhere between 25-40 million people. This includes human trafficking, forced child marriages, children and others forced to work for someone else’s gain.

 1) What we read regarding slavery in the Bible is not the same as what took place in 18th and 19th century America and Europe. We have to see the Scriptures in their context to understand what it says about this topic. The words used for “slave” or “servant” in the NT have nothing to do with what we think regarding the horrible practice of slavery that has happened and still happens. Slaves or servants actually at times had a social and legal status in the ancient world.

 2) In the world in which we know, such as civil war slavery and before, blacks sold blacks into slavery. Whites sold whites. All races were involved. God did not approve of any of this.

 3) In the NT, Paul never condones slavery but he admits to the reality of it. There were, by all accounts, more slaves (or servants) in the Roman Empire than there were free citizens. You could be enslaved for many reasons – to pay off a debt; being conquered by Rome. These were just two ways that made you a slave. It was not a question of race or social standing. The reasons varied.

 4) We can read of Paul’s disdain of slavery in **1 Tim. 1:9-11**. The word for “enslavers” refers to a “slave-dealer,” and as **Joseph Thayer** puts it, *“one who unjustly reduces free men to slavery, as one who steals the slaves of others and sells them.”* It is kidnapping and selling someone to another person.

 5) In the ancient world, some slaves, or servants, worked in households and were paid. It is true that Roman law offered very little protection for servants but many were treated kindly. Paul knew that the world as it was he was not going to change. He had no power to sway Rome. The emperor and senate ruled. It was not a republic or democracy.

 6) The Gospel is what changes lives and many who came to Christ, when this occurred, the master-bondservant relationship changed. They were more of a worker-management situation and in some, if not many cases, slaves were given their freedom.

 7) **Ex. 21:1-11** discusses how Hebrew slaves were to be treated. A fellow Jew could sell themselves into servitude because of poverty or debt **(Lev. 25:39-41; Deut. 15:12)**. But the person could not be indebted to another for more than six years and when let go, the one to whom the person had been sold into slavery or servitude to, was required to provide for them **(Deut. 15:13-14)**. Note also **Ex. 21:16; Ex. 21:20; Ex. 21:26-27**. The bondservant was to be treated with respect as they worked for the individual.

 8) If a male servant wanted to remain in permanent servitude he had to have his request validated by the judges and then one of his ears was to be pierced with an awl, to symbolize willing service **(Ps. 40:6)**. A female servant could do the same **(Deut. 15:17)**. This usually was because they knew by staying in the situation they would be better off financially and socially than if they were back on their own.

 9) **Ex. 21:2-6 and** **Lev. 25:44-46** seem to “condone” slavery.

\*\* Explaining **Ex. 21:2-16**:

* **Vs. 2** speaks of a Hebrew buying a Hebrew slave. Whether it was someone owing a debt or being hired to do work, or you stole something and had to pay back the value of the item, the passage in **Ex. 21** safeguards anyone who is in this situation and it is not to be thought of as “buying” a slave. It was a decision by an individual to serve another.
* When an Israelite became indebted to someone to get financially free over time, they also learned how to work, how to live within a family structure, and hopefully, if needed, learn some life lessons (e.g., how to stay out of debt).
* The social and economic times in the ancient world are different than today. We equate slavery as we know it through the lens of Western history. In the ancient world it was different. God protected people who were servants of others and made sure they were treated well.
* Involuntary slavery was condemned by God **(Ex. 21:16)**. This is a contrast to **Ex. 21:2-6** where the person chooses to be brought into servanthood. **Ex. 21:16** rules out and forbids slavery that was and is practiced in Africa or the West, or anywhere in the world, for that matter. The situation in Israel, as we see, was different from what we think of as “slavery.”
* **Ex. 21:7-11** was written to protect a woman who, because of a family’s financial situation or some other misfortune, goes to work for someone else, and even becomes the bride of the person they are working for. They are protected. Again, this is within the Jewish nation.

\*\* **Philip Ryken**, noting this passage **(Ex. 21:2-6)**, explained the situation of the ancient world in the following way,

*“In Israel servitude was voluntary (at least for Israelites). People hired themselves into the service of others. Usually this was because they were poor, and they recognized that the best way to meet their needs while at the same time paying off their debts was to become someone’s servant. Servant is the proper word for it. They were not slaves, as we usually think of the term, but something more like apprentices, hired hands, or indentured laborers. They lived in their master’s home, where they worked hard in exchange for room, board, and an honest wage.”*

\*\* Explaining **Lev. 25:44-46**:

* The foreigners mentioned here could have been those who were prisoners of war. They were not to be abused or mistreated. Or, as some think, they came to the Jewish people seeking a better way of life and would work for them.
* Plus, foreigners who came to Israel could not own land. At times they had to work for an Israelite. They were not “slaves” as we think of slaves.
* Land was passed on from generation to generation in Israel, and so foreigners and their families would stay with the Israelite family for years. It was possible for

a sojourner (foreigner) to get rich through working **(Lev. 25:47-55)** and would have at times someone in debt come to work for them so they could become debt free and there were rules governing this as well. We cannot stop the discussion at **Lev. 25:46**.

* God did not condone these things. It was a real issue in the world and so He regulated how it was practiced. This passage allows for certain things regarding servanthood but nowhere is God giving a “thumbs up” to “slavery.” **Ex. 21:16** helps us balance this text. Even “sojourners” or “foreigners” were to be treated properly.
* God judged those who did not follow what He put in His Word regarding the treatment of others. And often God reminded Israel of their time in Egypt and used that as a way of helping the Jewish people see the need to treat others differently than they were when in captivity.

 10) As we have mentioned, slavery was a reality in the Roman Empire. Paul never said it was God’s will. He did have things to say to both slaves and those who were masters or the boss of these individuals. Note the following verses – **1 Cor. 7:21-24; Eph. 6:5-9; Col. 3:22-4:1; Book of Philemon (where Philemon, I believe, is encouraged to release Onesimus from his servanthood)**; **1 Peter 2:18-19**.

 11) The early church fathers recognized slavery as a reality of the times. They did not support it. In fact, they taught that the slave and his or her master were equal before God, which is exactly what **Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11** tells us.

 12) Ancient cultures practiced slavery. This has been a problem for a few millenniums. The Code of Hammurabi (around 1755-1750 B.C.) notes the practice. From Babylon back to Egypt, as examples, people were enslaved. The Jews were held under the thumb of Egypt and forced to do labor for the Pharaoh. See **Ex. 1:8-14**. But nowhere did God approve of this.

 13) In the eighth century, the “black” moors enslaved “white” people during their conquering of Spain and Portugal. The point is, slavery has been a social issue since the beginning of time. Man’s sin has created the problem.

 14) As **Trent Horn** has said, *“Just because the Bible regulates it, doesn’t mean it recommends it.”*

 15) Note the following regarding the Greek-Roman world when it came to slavery,

*“The Greeks and Romans both employed a system in which slaves could own property, earn money, and buy their freedom. This system was probably implemented to keep slaves submissive.*

*Slavery provided labor for large portions of agriculture and handicraft. Those who wanted skilled workers often used slaves rather than free men. Thus, many slaves were more economically secure than many free wage-laborers.”*

**8) John 14:28 – Is the Father “greater” than the Son? What does that mean?**

**What critics say:** Christians believe in One God, but that three Persons make up what is known as the Godhead. If the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all God, thus equal, how could the Father be “greater” than the Son. Does this mean Jesus is less than God, a created being, or subservient to God the Father?

**Our response:** The answer to this revolves around the word “greater” and how John speaks about Christ in other passages in His Gospel.

 1) In **John 1:1-2,14** we read that the “Word” (Jesus) is God. The Greek and English clearly bring this out. When it comes to “essence” or “nature” Jesus is equal to the Father and Holy Spirit. They all are God.

 2) In **John 5:1-18** Christ heals a man at the pool of Bethesda on the Sabbath, enraging the Jewish religious leaders. In **vs. 17** Christ notes that *“My Father is working until now, and I am working.”* **Vs. 18** tells us that the Jews wanted to kill Him because he was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God. The phrase “My Father” indicates a relationship that Jesus had with God that the Jews did not. They may have said, “My Father, Who is in heaven.” What Jesus said no Jew would say.

 3) In **John 8:48-59** Jesus states that before Abraham was born, “I Am” **(vs. 58)**. The Jews wanted to kill Him. The phrase “I Am” describes God as the “Self-existent One, no beginning and no end.” It is the name of God in **Ex. 3:13-15**. The Jews knew what Jesus was saying. He is eternal God. He was around before Abraham was even born.

 4) We also know that Christ submitted to doing the will of the Father, which was His will as well **(Jn. 5:19)**. Jesus was letting the people know that He was doing the will of the God the Jews claimed to worship. But He never let go of His Divine nature when He was on earth. But He walked in dependence upon His Father **(Jn. 5:19-30)** but their relationship did not lessen His equality as God. So, we have Jesus’ Deity and dependence on the Father seen in the Gospel of John

 5) In **Jn. 14:28** we must look at the context of the passage when defining what Jesus meant when He said the Father was greater than He.

* Jesus tells the disciples to keep His commandments that He has taught them **(vs. 15)**. He says that the Father will give them another Helper **(vs. 16)**, the Holy Spirit. In **vs. 26** He again talks about the Holy Spirit and His ministry to the disciples. In **vs. 27** He says that He will give peace to His followers.
* In **vs. 28** Jesus tells the disciples that they should be rejoicing that He is returning to the Father. As **Jn. 17** tells us, He prayed to the Father in **vs. 5** to return to His glorified state that He had with the Father before coming to earth. Jesus did not lay aside His Deity when He came to earth. He laid aside His glory.
* The idea of “greater” has nothing to do with essence. It has to do with roles. Jesus came to serve. He was the Servant Savior. The Father, meanwhile, was in heaven. Jesus came to do the will of God, and all three Members of the Trinity are working to do what they had planned from eternity past.
* An example would be a father and a son. Both are equal as humans, but have different roles. When Jesus returned to heaven, He returned to His position of glory like that of the Father’s. On earth, He was the Son, in heaven He is back in His rightful place, we could say, and His disciples should be glad for that because then the Holy Spirit would be sent.

**9) The words written on the sign placed above the head of Christ on the cross**

**What critics say:** The Gospels note different inscriptions that were written on the board located above our Lord on the cross. They are contradictory; thus, this shows that the writers got wrong what was said, or at least a couple of them did.

**Our response:** We must look at the phrases that are noted. When we do this, we discover that the Gospel writers are not contradicting each other but, in fact, are saying the same thing, with a different focus.

 1) Let us see what each of the Gospels has as the inscription on the cross:

* **Mt. 27:37**, “This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.”
* **Mk. 15:26**, “The King of the Jews.”
* **Lk. 23:38**, “This is the King of the Jews.”
* **Jn. 19:19**, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.”

 2) All four inscriptions include the phrase, “the King of the Jews.” This was the charge leveled against Christ thus that is what is emphasized in all four Gospels. The Inscription was written in three different languages – Aramaic, Latin, and Greek **(Jn. 19:20)**.

 3) Aramaic, or Hebrew, would not be Pilate’s or whoever wrote the inscription for him, their primary language. But the writing was in the Jewish dialect of Aramaic. The Hebrew-Aramaic language at the time of Christ was not the exact same as the OT Hebrew that was spoken in that day but the people knew OT Hebrew. They read the Scriptures. But the spoken language differed some from what it was years before.

 4) No doubt the individual who wrote the inscription wrote what they understood in the various languages. It makes sense that the Greek or Latin would be the most complete since Romans would have known it well.

 5) As far as the Aramaic version, we see Aramaic words translated into Greek in a few other passages. For example, in **Jn. 5:2** a word is translated from the Jewish Aramaic into the Greek when referring to the pool of Bethesda. The same may have happened regarding the inscription on the cross.

 6) I believe that John, noting that the writing was in the three languages, the Greek inscription was probably the most complete statement because the majority of the world knew Greek. John emphasizes what Pilate stated to all. The other Gospels focus on Jesus as “the King of the Jews.” This is not an error. Authors can write about the same thing but emphasize different aspects of the same event. This does not change the facts.

 7) Matthew’s Gospel, according to some, was written originally in Aramaic, which most Jews would speak. Thus, the phrase Matthew notes was most likely the Aramaic inscription based on his readership.

 8) John seemed to minister to mostly Greek speaking people regardless of race or culture and so the Greek inscription makes sense. The Jewish people knew Who Jesus was. In the Greek speaking world, not so much.

 9) There are scholars who differ on who used the Latin inscription, or the Greek and Hebrew one. Some believe Luke used the Greek, for example. The point to note is that nothing is different in the statement. Jesus was from Nazareth, and was accused of being “King of the Jews.”

 10) It is interesting that only non-Jews used the title “King of the Jews” to refer to Jesus, a fulfillment of **Jn. 1:11** were we read that He came to His own (Jewish people) but they did not receive Him. There were exceptions to this. One is found in **Mk. 15:32** where people were mocking Christ while He was hanging on the cross for our sins. Another is **Lk. 19:38** where, as Jesus traveled towards Jerusalem, the crowd said, “Blessed is the King…”

\*\* **Creation Ministries International** makes a case for what we read in the Gospels,

*“Latin was the official language of the Roman Empire; it represented human government, power, and conquest. Greek was the international language of culture; it represented human wisdom, art, and commerce. Hebrew was the religious language of the Jews; it represented the Covenant Race, the Law of God, and the means by which God made Himself known to man. In the providence of God, all of these human and divine institutions were addressed when Jesus was crucified. How did this come about?*

*The most probable scenario is that the Roman governor, Pilate, dictated the title in Latin and the centurion in charge of the execution implemented the edict and its translation into the other languages. The words ‘King of the Jews’ were a public sneer at the Jews by Pilate, and this was compounded by his additional taunt that their ‘king’ came from Nazareth, i.e. that he was a despised Galilean.”*

**10) Jonah 3 and his travels around the city of Nineveh**

**What critics say:** The charge against the story of Jonah is that **Jonah 3:3** states that it would take three days to go through the city. Critics claim that Nineveh was not that large and that Jonah is mistaken, thus the Bible is wrong on this geographical point.

**Our response:** We must consider the events that took place when Jonah arrived and began walking through the city. It may have taken him three days to finish his preaching to the people. Note **Jonah 3:3-5**.

 1) The circumference of ancient Nineveh, according to archaeology, was less than eight miles, thus the city was probably two-three square miles. One thought to consider is that when noting Nineveh (the main city in the area protected by high walls), it would include the towns and cities that depended upon this important city. They would be like suburbs **(Gen. 10:10-11)** which is seen in the Genesis passage. So, there was probably more than just Nineveh that he went to, but if not, see point #4.

 2) **Jonah 4:11** tells us that there were 120,000 people in the city. That may have included Nineveh proper or included the cities immediately surrounding the main center of Nineveh. It was large for a city in the ancient world. One estimate is that it covered over 1,800 acres.

 3) **Jonah 3:2** tells us it was a three day’s journey to go through the city. It is said in the ancient world that people walked from 15-20 miles a day in open territory so this statement in **vs. 2** seems faulty. But it is not upon closer examination.

 4) The three day’s journey makes sense if Jonah was doing what God told him to. He was calling the city to repent. So, he would travel a little bit, stop and share God’s Words with the people. So, for him to cover the city, to make sure that the message was getting out, with the stops and starts of speaking and interacting with people, does not make the three days that difficult to grasp.

 5) **Jonah 3:4** says that he went a day’s journey in the city and preached. He then could have spent two more days doing the same thing as noted in point #4.

 6) The people of Nineveh believed the message God had sent by Jonah and repented **(Jonah 3:5)**. Skeptics say that could not have happened but they do not consider the work of the Holy Spirit. This is a side note because even when sharing this with people who question the story, they are not going to accept what God can do in a person’s life.

**11) Discrepancies between 2 Sam. 10:18 and 1 Chron. 19:18**

**What critics say:** The claim is that there is a major error found in these verses which are both telling the same story. **2 Samuel 10:18** mentions 700 chariots and 40,000 horsemen. **1 Chron. 19:18** notes 7,000 chariots but 40,000 foot soldiers. Which is it – horsemen or foot soldiers? Critics will use this to question the accuracy of the Bible.

**Our response:** The skeptics say that the Chronicler embellished the numbers to make David look better but we can answer by looking at the history itself found in both books.

 1) Some copies of the Septuagint have in **2 Samuel 10:18** the number of chariots at 7,000. A copyist may have left out a 0 in **2 Samuel 10:18** or added a 0 in **1 Chron. 19:18** in some of the Hebrew manuscripts but this is not an “error.” This does not affect our theology. Just try hand copying a three-page letter given to you by someone and see, despite our meticulous effort, to see if we do not make a “mistake” in copying. But it is not an intentional error.

 2) When horsemen or foot soldiers are used, that could include both groups of soldiers. **2 Samuel and 1 Chron.** are not contradicting themselves just because one writer uses a different term than the other to note the battlefield personnel.

 3) Hebrew letters were used for numerals (there were no numbers in Hebrew) and it would be easy to miscopy or leave out a letter or add a letter, but not doing so on purpose to deceive anyone reading the text.

 4) **Keil and Delitzsch** point out, when looking at **2 Samuel 10**, **1 Chron. 19** and **1 Cron. 18** that the opponents of Israel included foot soldiers,

*“It is evident that in both engagements the Syrians fought with all three (infantry, cavalry, and chariots), so that in both of them David smote chariots, horsemen, and foot soldiers.”*

\*\* Another way to look at this is noted from **Apologetics Press**, quoting **William Arndt’s** book, **“Does the Bible Contradict Itself,”** which notes,

*“With respect to the other divergence between the two passages, the one saying David slew 40,000 horsemen, the other that he slew 40,000 footmen in this battle, a simple solution presents itself. These warriors could fight both as cavalry and as infantry, just as the occasion required. Their status was similar to that of the dragoons a century or two ago. We can then very well harmonize the apparent discrepancies which we meet here (p. 34).”*

**12) Old Testament quotes found in the New Testament that seem inaccurate**

**What critics say:** There is a quote found in **Mt. 27:9-10** which is taken from **Zech.11:13** and **Jer.** **19:2,11**. Matthew claims to have quoted the prophet Jeremiah but the quote is found in **Zech. 11:13**. This is an obvious error. Matthew gave credit to the wrong source.

**Our response:** We must look closely at the passages to determine what Matthew was trying to convey by his use of Zechariah and then look at what Jeremiah had to say regarding the work of a potter and the purchase of a field. Again, understanding the history behind what was written is important.

 1) In **Zech. 11:13** the thirty pieces are thrown into the Lord’s house for the potter’s pay. The potter’s, as the **Nelson Study Bible** says, *“may have connected to the temple because of the continual need for sacred vessels (Lev. 6:28).”* In **Mt. 27:4-7**, Judas returns to the chief priests and the elders, guilt ridden over betraying Christ, and throws the silver on the floor of the temple. The religious leaders use it to buy a potter’s field.

 2) The thirty pieces of silver are the key, not the entire statement from Zechariah. The quote is accurate regarding the amount of silver. No field is found in the Zechariah prophecy, but that does not mean Matthew was wrong. His emphasis in quoting Zechariah had to do with the amount of silver.

 3) **Jeremiah 18:1-4; 19:1-13; Jer. 32:6-15** speak of the work of a potter and **Jer. 32** notes the purchase of a field but for a different price. The quote in Matthew lines up more with Zechariah but there are other reasons for Jeremiah being mentioned in addition to the fact that the work of a potter is noted.

 4) In the **Babylonian Talmud**, Jeremiah was placed first in the list of prophets, and he may have represented all of the other prophetic books. He was also considered by some in OT times to be the collector of some of the prophet’s writings and so he may have been noted instead of the author themselves.

 5) Some quotes from OT books are not focused on the entire passage itself, but do make a point that the NT writer is focused on. That is why some passages are prophetic in nature in the OT, but in the NT, they may not be completely stated for they have a double fulfillment and can be speaking to more than just one point.

 6) The end of **Mt. 27:10** would line up with **Jer. 13:5** where the Lord directed Jeremiah to do something with an item he had purchased.

 7) The Hebrew Bible was divided as “The Law, The Writings, and The Prophets,” and Jeremiah would be the first prophet listed. So, at times, to note Jeremiah was also to speak of all the prophets. The books were usually in scrolls, and the Prophet’s portion would usually begin with Jeremiah, thus the other prophetic books were under that portion so at times any quote was attributed to Jeremiah since he was the first book of “The Prophets.” See also **Lk. 24:44** where Jesus referred to the OT as the “Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms.” Not every book of Moses is mentioned, neither is every book that fits under the “Prophets” heading (Jeremiah-Malachi).

 8) In Rabbinical teachings it was known that they would take passages and combine them to make a point. That very easily could have been done here.

 9) A similar passage is sound in **Mk. 1:2-3**, which quotes from **Malachi 3:1** and **Isa. 40:3** but Mark does not mention Malachi. The more well-known of the two, Isaiah, is the one noted.

\*\* In **“Hard Sayings In The Bible,”** a following explanation is given that may help clear things up,

*“What we have, then, is Matthew pulling together at least two texts in Jeremiah with one text in Zechariah to show that there was a type of biblical prefiguring of Judas’s actions, down to the amount of blood money and the fact that it was given to a potter and was used for the purchase of a field. While the logic of this type of exegesis is strange to the modern Western way of thinking, it would have been viewed as quite normal in Matthew’s time. Likewise it was normal for Matthew to cite the more important prophet, Jeremiah, despite the fact that most of his material came from Zechariah. Thus judged by first-century standards, Matthew is quite accurate and acceptable in what he does.”*

**13) David is told to take a census, does so, and then is judged for it**

**What critics say:** In **2 Sam. 24:1-2** God tells David, because He (God) is angry with Israel, to go and take a census of the people. David does so, as told to do, but in **2 Sam. 24:10-17**, the people of Israel suffer because of David’s “sin.” He did what he was commanded to do and then Israel was punished. God is inconsistent.

But there is more. In **1 Chron. 21:1** it tells us that Satan incited David to number the people. Same story, same situation. This is an obvious error when it comes to who actually led David to number the people. Also, there is a discrepancy in some of the numbers. Just compare **1 Chron. 21:5** with **2 Samuel 24:9**.

**Our response:** These are not contradictions. There are certain historical and theological reasons that must be considered when interpreting the texts. We must never isolate a couple of passages without looking at the overall theology of the Bible.

God is Sovereign (in control) but allows us many freedoms. His “will” or “plan” will be completed, but we have the freedom to make choices, some good, some bad. The enemy is also given some leeway by God in this world, including wanting to ruin God’s children **(1 Peter 5:8)**. With this as a backdrop, it helps us to understand the two passages we are considering.

 1) Let us first deal with the numerical differences regarding the soldiers that were numbered for war. **2 Samuel 24:9** mentions “valiant” (mighty men of valor, power, strength) men, seasoned fighters, at 800,000 while **1 Chron. 21:5** simply mentions the total of soldiers. The writer of Samuel may have been identifying a certain group of warriors by the use of the word “valiant.”

 2) **1 Chronicles 21:6** also tells us that Joab did not number the Levites or the Benjamites, for he disagreed with what David did and quit finalizing the census when David came under conviction for what he was doing. **2 Samuel** does not mention this detail, thus the 30,000 men difference found in **1 Chron. 21:6** (470,000) and in **2 Samuel 24:9** (500,000) quite possibly included Simeon and Benjamin’s soldiers.

\*\* In the book, **“Hard Sayings Of The Bible,”** we read the following as a proposed solution to the number “problem” found before us,

*“The solution proposed by J. Barton Payne seems best. He proposed that 2 Samuel 24:9 refers simply to “Israel” (that is, the northern ten tribes), but that 1 Chronicles 21:5 covers “all Israel,” including the regular army of 288,000 (1 Chron 27:1–15), a figure when rounded out comes to 300,000.*

*The difference between 470,000 of Chronicles and 500,000 of 2 Samuel can be explained much the same way: it is a rounding off of the numbers.”*

 3) Now we turn to the question of who influenced David to take the census – God or our spiritual enemy. Could both statements found in **2 Samuel 24:1-2** and **1 Chron. 21:1** be true? Consider that this census probably took place several years before the end of David’s reign as king. This leads us to our next point.

 4) Without definitively knowing David’s heart and attitude, it has been suggested that possibly because of his accomplishments, militarily and economically, that pride had crept into David’s life. In his younger years he had depended on God, now possibly more so on his military might. The taking of a census in the ancient world had as one of its reasons to discover who was of military age. For all his faults, even the head of the army, Joab, questioned this action **(2 Sam. 24:3)**.

 5) Taking a census, in and of itself, was not necessarily wrong **(Ex. 30:12; Num. 1:1-2; Num. 26:2)**.

 6) David’s pride led God to teach Him a lesson and the Lord allowed, just as we see with Job, the devil to be the instrument to push David to do what he did **(1 Chron. 21:1)**. The enemy is always under God’s rule and God allows him certain freedoms and parameters. God’s concern for Israel is never questioned in either text. A similar idea of how God allows or permits our enemy some freedom with people is seen in **1 Cor. 5**.

 7) There is another point to be made. It has been pointed out, and worth considering, that **1 Chron. 21:1**, though Satan is mentioned, it could have been one of David’s counselors (cabinet members), used by the enemy, to get him to do this, whether that individual knowingly or unknowingly was used to do so.

 8) It is important to point out that God cannot tempt us to sin because He is never tempted to sin **(Jam. 1:13-15)**. He allows trials in our life and sometimes in His chastisement of us as His people **(Heb. 12)** He allows for difficulties, but never does God do anything to get us to sin. See also **1 Jn. 1:5**.

 9) Notice that God was unhappy with Israel but the reasons are not stated. Obviously, a sinful situation or decision had happened and the people and the king needed to be brought back in line. We must not forget that David was responsible for the census.

 10) Though God knows the decisions we will make, that does not make Him responsible for sinful decisions. Whatever sin Israel had committed was bad enough that God wanted them to learn a major lesson – that He would fight their battles and be there for them. They had a responsibility in war, but He was there to help them.

 11) David’s response in **2 Sam. 24:10** shows that he realized what he did was wrong. And since God cannot make us sin nor tempt us to do so, David, by his own choosing, had taken this census and recognized that it was sinful and repented of it.

 12) There are five other places in Scripture where God and our spiritual enemy are involved in trials and testing’s, both with different motives. Those texts include **John 13:27; Lk. 22:31-32; 1 Peter 4:13-14; 1 Peter 5:8; Book of Job**.

\*\* **Gleason Archer’s “New Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties”**, in dealing with “who” moved David to take the census, makes the following observation,

*“The situation here somewhat resembles the first and second chapters of Job, in which it was really a challenge to Satan from God that led to Job’s calamities. God’s purpose was to purify Job’s faith and ennoble his character through the discipline of adversity. Satan’s purpose was purely malicious; he wished to do Job as much harm as he possibly could, and if possible drive him to curse God for his misfortunes. Thus it came about that both God and Satan were involved in Job’s downfall and disaster.*

*Similarly we find both God and Satan involved in the sufferings of persecuted Christians according to 1 Peter 4:19 and 5:8. God’s purpose is to strengthen their faith and to enable them to share in the sufferings of Christ in this life, that they may rejoice with Him in the glories of heaven to come (1 Peter 4:13–14). But Satan’s purpose is to “devour” them (1 Peter 5:8), that is, to draw them into bitterness or self-pity, and thus drag them down to his level and his baneful destiny.”*

\*\* The **Bible Knowledge Commentary** explains it as follows,

*“In 1 Chronicles 21:1 this motivation is attributed to (lit.) “a Satan” (or adversary). This is no contradiction for the Lord had simply allowed Satan to prompt David to an improper course of action in order that Israel might be punished and that David might be instructed. This is similar to the Lord’s permitting Satan to trouble Job (Job 1:12; 2:6) and His allowing an evil spirit to torment Saul (1 Sam. 16:14; see comments there). In any case, the Lord Himself did not incite David to do evil for “God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He tempt anyone” (James 1:13).”*

\*\* **Walter Kaiser’s “Hard Sayings of the Bible,”** explains our dilemma in the following way,

*“The thought that God instigates or impels sinners to do evil is incorrect. In no sense could God author what he disapproves of and makes his whole kingdom stand against. How then shall we understand 2 Samuel 24:1, where God seems to instigate something which he will immediately label as sin?*

*God may and does occasionally impel sinners to reveal the wickedness of their hearts in deeds. God merely presents the opportunity and occasion for letting the evil desires of the heart manifest themselves outwardly. In this manner, sinners may see more quickly the evil which lies dormant in their hearts and motivates them to act counter to God’s will.*

*It is also true, according to Hebrew thinking, that whatever God permits he commits. By allowing this census-taking, God is viewed as having brought about the act. The Hebrews were not very concerned with determining secondary causes and properly attributing them to the exact cause. Under the idea of divine providence everything ultimately was attributed to God; why not say he did it in the first place?”*

**14) If God is good, why is there evil in the world?**

**What critics say:** Critics question how a good God could allow suffering and pain and all the evil happening in our world today. Obviously, God is not good or either He is unable and not powerful enough to stem the tide of evil that we see around us.

**Our response:** God is good and evil is the result of the choices people make. Just because God has not intervened in every circumstance of suffering and such in the world does not mean He will not do so. In addition, we can point out that God gets blamed for all that is wrong in the world while getting very little to no credit when things are going well for individuals. This is a fallacy of thinking on the critic’s part.

 1) We begin by asking what constitutes “evil.” Whose standard determines what is bad and good? If someone says that if God were good, He would deal with evil, whose “good” and “evil” definitions are to be used to determine if God is good or not.

 2) If there is no objective good, we have nothing to judge evil by. Thus, if there is good, either society, our laws, or a Higher Being (God), sets the standard for what is good. And two of these are subjective and at times “feelings” driven and open to change (society and laws).

 3) God’s idea of good (as truth seen in His Word) is unchanging, but “good” as defined by the world is constantly moving. We must challenge people to define what they mean by “good.” Usually in their definition they actually at times point unknowingly to God.

 4) Some of the things that critics say regarding what good is, attributes such as being ethical, kind, and helping others, are found in the character of God.

 5) Keep in mind that we cannot say something is evil unless there is good. Again, we come back to where the line of good is drawn. Is there objective good? Christians say yes, and the Bible spells out things that are good – do not lie, be faithful to your spouse, love God and others. Pray for your enemies.

 **A. The issue of freewill (the ability to choose) and the problem of evil**

 1) There are those who say that freewill, as given to us when we were created in the image of God **(Gen. 1:26-27)** does not answer the problem because if it is so important why doesn’t God have freewill and why won’t we have it in heaven?

 2) God does have freewill, but His freewill is controlled and used according to His attributes. Thus, the choices He makes are always perfect and right. That does not take away from His ability to make decisions. His decisions happen to be untainted by sin.

 3) Our freewill in heaven is determined by our choice here on earth to follow Christ. In other words, we will be given a glorified body and a renewed mind that will desire only what is right. After death, a believer’s will focuses on God and honoring Him.

 4) Every individual has this life to choose what they will do with God **(Heb. 9:27)**. After death, their conscience, whether an unbeliever or Christ follower, does not cease to exist, but the sphere of existence is different.

 5) The Christian’s will is fully in line with God because of our new body and all that entails our heavenly lives, while the unbeliever will still have memories, regrets, etc., but will have sealed their fate while alive.

 6) Everyone enjoys freedom. We love the ability to choose who we marry, where we live, hobbies we enjoy, etc.

 7) The issue is that freedom to be defined accurately requires the possibility of wrong choices. Choice is not real unless it includes the possibility of a good or bad decision. If we were wired to only make good choices, we would be robots with no mind or ability of our own.

 8) To say that God was wrong to give us this ability to choose goes contrary to how people think about freewill. Most people like it except when it comes to seeing people make destructive, hurtful choices, and then God gets blamed for not making us only able to make right choices.

 9) Think about this. Love is not love without the ability to choose. If our spouse was just a robot, programmed to “love” us, that is not love. Love is tied to choice. Again, freewill is something people enjoy except when bad things happen. It is when terrible things happen that choice becomes an issue and God is blamed for not “doing” something and fixing the situation made by someone’s choice.

 10) Humanity was and is given the ability to choose. Unless he had that, he was nothing more than a puppet. No one likes control freaks and that is what God would be if we had no ability to make choices. We would have no freedom.

 11) As **Rom. 1:18-32** shows us, man chose to ignore God and make evil decisions, which come from a sinful heart.

 12) God understands evil. Jesus came into the world and suffered pain and the cross and identified with man for He alone can fix the problem of evil and did so through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

 13) Eventually God will make a new heaven and a new earth where there will be no more sin. Evil will once and for all be dealt with **(Rev. 21:1-8)**.

 14) At times, God allows suffering and pain for judgment and punishment. This is not always the case but could be a reason. Also, it is possible that God uses these things for character development for His children and usually those going through those tough times know the reasons. Not always, but often **(Heb. 12)**.

**Paul Little**, in his **“Know Why You Believe,”** quotes **J.B. Phillips** regarding evil and freewill. **Phillips** writes,

*“Evil is inherent in the risky gift of free will. God could have made us machines but to do so would have robbed us of our precious freedom of choice, and we would have ceased to be human. Exercise of free choice in the direction of evil in what we call the “fall” of man [Adam’s sin in the garden of Eden] is the basic reason for evil and suffering in the world. It is man’s responsibility, not God’s. He could stop it, but in so doing would destroy us all. It is worth noting that the whole point of real Christianity lies not in interference with the human power to choose, but in producing a willing consent to choose good rather than evil.”*