



# 9:00 Live Sunday School at FBJ

## Is the Bible Really True? Luke 2:1-20 – Part 1

### I. vv.1-2

A. v.1 – Caesar Augustus – Julius’ nephew – the first Caesar with title from the Roman Senate

- Julius-Augustus: July-August
- The census was for taxes; not military service

B. v.2 – Quirinius was governing Syria – NKJV and CSB

1. Syrian Governors – Roman Empire

- 9-7/6 BC            Gaius Sentius Saturninus
- 7/6-4 BC           Publius Quinctilius Varus
- 4-1 BC             Unknown
- 1 BC-4 AD         Gaius Julius Caesar Vipsanianus
- 4-5                 Lucius Volusius Saturninus
- 6-12                Publius Sulpicius Quirinius

2. Homonadesians and the Taurus Mountains

### II. vv.3-5

A. v.3 – Luke often uses hyperbole because not “all” went – women were not required to go

B. v.4 - Why did Mary go? Did she know Micah 5:2?

C. v.5 - Why would Luke say they were still betrothed instead of married?

- Likely because they had not consummated the marriage but the ceremony had taken place
- Remember Matthew tells us they didn’t have sex until after Jesus was born

### III. vv.6-7 – When was Jesus born? (no one knows for sure)

#### A. I like September 29, 2 BC - Missler, commentaries and history journals

1. Luke 2:8 - shepherds were in the fields which means winter is out – October/November latest
2. Matthew 24:20 - warns against leaving Judea in the winter (tribulation times)

#### B. 4 BC? Comes from Josephus who says Herod died during an eclipse in 4 BC

1. Eclipse also happened in 1 BC and several historical references to Herod's death
  2. Irenaeus says 41 years from beginning of Augustus' rule
  3. That would mean Jesus was born in 6 BC to give time for Magi to arrive (Matthew 2:7; 16)
- Totally throws off John the Baptist's ministry and Jesus' ministry timelines and other dates

#### C. 2 BC?

1. Tertullian (gave us term trinity) says it was 41 years from Augustus' rule which really began with his power/authority 2 years after his "beginning" with defeat of Cassius and Brutus

a. Also 30 years after death of Cleopatra

b. Also says Augustus Caesar died 15 years after Jesus' birth – Augustus died in 14 AD

2. Eusebius, Father of Church History also gives similar info with 2 BC date

3. "Course of Abijah" in 1<sup>st</sup> Chronicles 24:7-19 dates Zechariah's time in the temple with Gabriel Talmud (Jewish laws above the Torah) and Josephus both say temple destroyed on August 5, 70 AD by Titus

- Both say 1<sup>st</sup> Course of priests were ministering when destroyed

4. Working back from there, Zechariah was ministering on July 3, 3 BC

5. Assume 280 days for typical pregnancy then JTB born April 19-20, BC

6. Mary was with Elizabeth in her 6<sup>th</sup> month which would have been 4th week of December 3 BC

7. Assume Mary had typical term for pregnancy that puts Jesus's birth at beginning of Rosh Hashanah – the Jewish New Year - That's September 29, 2 BC

#### D. v.7 – What inn? Likely a caravanserai

#### **IV. Thoughts on Determining the Truth of Scripture (taken from Truth or Tradition website)**

- A. The Bible was written for believers, not skeptics
- B. The Bible is complete – 40 books and that's it
- C. Understand the literary form the verse is in (Poetry? Allegory? Fiction? History?)
- D. You are in one of two camps: 1) The Bible is inerrant or 2) The Bible has errors
- E. Context, context, context
- F. There are no perfect versions. English ain't easy to translate into.
- G. The Bible should always be taken seriously and most often literally. Jesus doesn't want you to pluck out your eyes.

Thoughts? Questions? Comments? [nick@nickwalters.org](mailto:nick@nickwalters.org)

# 22 Principles of Biblical Interpretation: How to Eliminate Apparent Bible Contradictions

[truthortradition.com/articles/22-principles-of-biblical-interpretation](http://truthortradition.com/articles/22-principles-of-biblical-interpretation)

August 2, 2013

Many Christians agree that the Word of God is “the Truth.” Yet from one Bible come thousands of differing interpretations about exactly what “the Truth” is. It was never God’s intention that people read the same document and come away with different ideas about what it is saying. God wants us all to be likeminded about His Word.

## **1 Corinthians 1:10**

I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.

One of the major reasons why people have different ideas concerning what the Bible says is that they use different rules or standards for interpreting it. We believe that the following principles, called “canons of interpretation” are essential to understand and apply if there is to be any hope of Christians getting to the truth when they read the Bible.

### **1. The Bible was written for believers, not for skeptics.**

The Bible was not written for unbelievers, but for those willing to search diligently for the truth. Some of the language of Scripture is written with the specific intent of confounding those who either do not have ears willing to hear or who are unwilling to be diligent in their study (Prov. 2:1-5; 25:2; Matt. 13:10-13). To arrive at the truth, one must have faith in God and trust in the integrity of His Word. It is important to be diligent in study and realize that God does not honor study for study’s sake. God will not open the understanding of those who are merely curious. The Christian must have a heart both to know and act on the knowledge he finds in Scripture. Prayer and faith that God will work in us are necessary for properly understanding the Bible and seeing its awesome precision and harmony.

### **2. The original text was perfect, and the Bible we have today is complete.**

The Bible is the revealed Word of God, perfect in its original writing, including all books of the Old and New Testament, commonly recognized as the true canon of Scripture. Though there were more than 40 “writers,” there is but one “Author,” God. Since the canon of Scripture (the books which are recognized as authentic and authoritative) has been established by men, the possibility remains open that some text or book might have been added or removed from what God originally “breathed.” From our study, we are satisfied that this is not the case. The burden of proof, therefore, is upon those who doubt that the accepted canon of Scripture is indeed authoritative. They would have to show irreconcilable

contradictions with the whole of Scripture. As far as we know, no one has ever done so, and all extra-biblical documents brought forth by critics of the canon as “left out of the original” have within them clear contradictions of the God-breathed text.

### **3. Principles of interpretation vary according to the literary form of the text involved.**

The Bible contains language used for every purpose for which language is designed. There is narration, lists, salutations, conversation, poetry, song, fiction, parable, allegory, history, prayer, etc. Principles of interpretation vary according to which of these literary forms a passage is written in. For example, we would not employ the same rules of interpretation to the content of a parable that we would to a section of narrative.

The Bible is an accurate and inspired record of many events that were not inspired by God, and thus Scripture quotes the words of many men and women who were not speaking for God. The reader must carefully note who is speaking and/or acting. Unless God or Jesus Christ is speaking, or a passage is in narrative form, what is said or done by others may not be directly inspired by God. For example, the Pharisees said Jesus was Beelzebub, but of course that is not true. What they said was not true, but that they said it is true. What is inspired is the biblical witness itself, not necessarily every word and event that it bears witness of.

### **4. The original text was God-breathed and without error or contradiction.**

The Bible, as the Word of God, cannot contradict itself. No teaching can be right if it creates contradictions with the clear teaching of other scriptures. The student must never take the position that there are contradictions or errors in the Word, but, if faced with an apparent contradiction or error, must continue to work until the pieces of the Word of God fit together perfectly like a well cut jigsaw puzzle. Patience, prayer and continued study may be necessary, and the pieces should never be “squeezed into place.” Time is not important—handling the Word honestly is.

### **5. Apparent contradictions or errors are due to transmission errors, mistranslation or misunderstanding.**

Since the original text was perfect, apparent contradictions must be properly noted and attributed to one of the following three causes, and then they can be explained.

- a. Our failure to understand the original meaning of what is written (remedied by #6 below).
- b. An error in translation as translators attempted to reproduce the meanings from one language into another (remedied by #7 below).

c. An error resulting from the transmission of the text, as scribes who copied each manuscript made various mechanical mistakes or theological alterations to the text (remedied by #8 below).

## **6. Properly understanding the context is essential for proper interpretation.**

The Bible must be read carefully, with appropriate attention paid to each detail of the context, because God has a purpose for what is said, who says it, where it is said, when it is said, how it is said, to whom it is said and why it is said. Logic demands that words and verses must not be wrested out of context and made to mean something foreign to the original meaning of the text.

## **7. There is no “perfect version.”**

No version or translation can properly be called “the Word of God” as it was originally given by holy men of God (2 Pet. 1:21 – KJV). Every translation is inherently limited. It is impossible to translate from one language to another and get the sense of the original exactly correct, as any translator of any language will attest. Words in the original can contain figurative meanings or cultural meanings that simply cannot be brought into English, or cannot be brought into English without a lengthy explanation (which is the purpose of a Bible Commentary). Furthermore, the exact understanding of English words may vary from person to person and region to region (which is why different English dictionaries have varying meanings for the same word). If possible, therefore, a wide variety of translations must be consulted, and it is most helpful to develop a familiarity with the original languages.

## **8. No Hebrew, Greek or Aramaic manuscript is “God-breathed.”**

Scholars do not believe that any of the “original autographs,” the texts actually written by Moses, David, John, Paul and others, exist today. Therefore, no one manuscript or Greek, Aramaic or Hebrew text is “God breathed,” as the original was. Furthermore, no text we have ever seen that has been assembled by a textual committee or text editor is “the Word of God.” We believe that the information exists to assemble a text that would be extremely close to the original, and research, especially now that it is being aided by computers, is ongoing to construct a text that is as close to the original as possible. At this time, to build a text resembling the original, alternative readings from a variety of text families must be consulted in search of the reading that is most likely to be the original, integrating that reading with both the context and the whole scope of Scripture.

## **9. It must be recognized that the great subject of the “Old Testament” is Jesus Christ.**

The subject of the Bible from Genesis 3:15 to Revelation 22:21 is Jesus Christ, the Messiah. The “Old Testament (Covenant)” points to his coming and provides many symbols, types and foreshadowings of his life and ministry.

a. “The Old Testament” is a misnomer. The word “Testament” is in itself misleading. We get “testament” from the Latin word *testamentum*, which was the Latin translation of the Greek word *diatheke*. A “testament” is a statement or declaration (often given shortly before death). A covenant, on the other hand, is an agreement between two parties. The Greeks had no covenants and thus had no word for covenant. Any Hebrew reading “the Old Covenant” would immediately think, “Since this is a ‘covenant,’ if I accept it, what am I agreeing to do?” There are many covenants established by God in the course of redemption history. Each must be carefully noted as to whether it was conditional or unconditional, and whether it has been fulfilled in part or in whole. Because “the Old Covenant” actually refers to the Mosaic covenant that was fulfilled when Christ instituted a new covenant at his death, the Four Gospels are actually part of the “the Old Covenant.” Thus, when referring to the Books from Genesis to Malachi, “The Hebrew Scriptures”(or *Tanakh*) is the technically correct term.

b. The Four Gospels actually complete “The Old Testament” and record the inauguration of “The New Testament (Covenant).” Of course, there are a few verses in the Gospels that record events after the death and resurrection of Christ. The New Covenant had been technically instituted, but because the covenant promises had not been fulfilled, the people lived as if they were under the Old Covenant. It is often the case with covenants that there is a period of time between when they are actually instituted and when the promises made come to pass. God made a covenant with Abraham for the land, and it still has not been fully realized. Jonathan made a covenant with David, but died before any of the covenant promises came to pass. Just because the New Covenant was ratified “in Christ’s blood” does not mean that immediate changes went into effect.

c. The “New Testament (Covenant)” is initiated by the shedding of Christ’s blood, is partially enjoyed by the Church and is fulfilled in the Millennial Kingdom when God’s promises to Israel that are now held in abeyance are fulfilled.

## **10. The words in the Word must be carefully studied to determine if they have a unique biblical meaning.**

As the Author of Holy Scripture, God can use words in a unique manner. Therefore, the words of God’s Word may need to be understood according to a unique biblical usage. One must first assume that God uses the words in the Word in their standard usage of the day. After thorough study, it may be determined that God has assigned a special meaning to a word.

a. Almost every word has a semantic range of usage that must be considered in order to determine what meaning (or meanings) is appropriate. When there are several possible meanings of a word, the context must determine the appropriate one.

b. Some words or phrases have more than one meaning that fits in the context, bringing a poetic richness to biblical language. These meanings do not contradict, but layer one truth upon another. This is apparent in modern language in the commonly employed figure of

speech called double entendre.

c. It occasionally happens that a word will be used in two different ways in the same verse.

d. Where the Bible has already defined a term, it need not define it again, and its meaning should be kept consistent in the interpretation of various passages in which it occurs unless the context will not permit it.

### **11. The Bible should be understood literally whenever possible.**

The Bible should be understood to communicate literal and historical fact whenever and wherever possible. If understanding something literally creates a contradiction with a known fact or another scripture, a figure of speech is likely being employed.

a. As used by God in the Bible, figures of speech are usages of words or sentences that emphasize a particular truth. They are used for the purpose of giving additional force to the truth conveyed, emphasis to the statement of it or depth to its meaning.

b. If a word or words are used in a figure of speech, then that figure can be named and described, and the purpose of its use determined. As workmen of the Word, we are bound to diligently examine the figure of speech for the purpose of discovering and learning the truth that is thus emphasized. The study of figures of speech in the Bible is highly technical and quite exact. Calling something “a figure of speech” is never to be the refuge of those who simply do not want to believe the literal truth of a passage of Scripture. Some theological systems employ an allegorical interpretation of the Bible. This is not the proper way to handle God’s Word, and leads to false interpretations.

Figures of speech are identified in three categories: 1) idioms, 2) grammar and 3) syntax. Idioms are words or phrases peculiar to a particular language, often closely related to customs and history of a people. Figures of syntax include illustrative figures, types of rhetoric and changes in meaning. The names are derived from the Greek and Latin systems.

Identification of the figures of speech used in a particular verse can be crucial to its correct interpretation, and the presence and force of figures ought always to be considered by the Bible student.

### **12. The customs and culture of the biblical world must be understood.**

The Bible is written within the culture and thought forms of the Middle East. Its language sparkles with references to the everyday life and customs of the times in which it was written. While these references were well known to those who lived in Bible times, we must become familiar with their manner of life, idioms, customs and culture in order to arrive at the proper understanding of Scripture as it would have been understood in Bible times.

### **13. A knowledge of the structure of a passage can be valuable for interpretation.**

God's Word is the most intricate piece of literature that has ever been written, and scholars have long noticed that much of it has an easily discernible structure that adds beauty, helps with interpretation and testifies to the greatness of the Author, God. The structure of a passage of Scripture can clarify the main ideas, correspondence, parallelisms and contrasting ideas. Structure occurs in two basic forms:

Alternation:

A

B

A

B

Introversion:

A

B

B

A

E. W. Bullinger's Companion Bible and How to Enjoy the Bible are good sources for more structure in Scripture.

#### **14. Identical things must be distinguished from similar things.**

The Bible often repeats the information contained in it. For example, the Four Gospels record many of the same events. Chronicles and Kings often repeat the same records. The Prophets often speak of things also recorded in other places in the Old Testament. Thus, there are many times when the same event is recorded with slightly differing details, or two different events are recorded that may, at first reading, appear to be the same event. The Bible must be carefully analyzed to determine that which is similar, but not identical, and that which may at first seem only similar, but which is in fact identical.

a. Things equal to the same thing are equal to (or identical with) each other.

b. The same individual, place or reality (like the new birth) may be called by different names.

c. Sharing similar attributes does not create identity, only similarity.

e. Sharing the same name does not create identity (e.g., both "Joshua" and "Jesus" = Yeshua).

## **15. God, like any other author, can use “literary license.”**

God is the Author of the Bible, and therefore may employ literary license, changing the chronological order of a narrative or breaking up a narrative into a thematic presentation of events or concepts. “Scripture build-up” or “narrative development” describes the process of putting all the pieces together from various narratives into a complete picture.

- a. 1 & 2 Samuel and 1 & 2 Kings are written from one perspective. 1 & 2 Chronicles covers the same basic events, but is written from another point of view and emphasizes different details.
- b. The Four Gospels break up the entire literary portrait of the Savior into four prophesied perspectives: King, Servant, Man, Son. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are written from each of these perspectives, respectively.
- c. The Church Epistles are written from the perspective of doctrine (right belief and practice), reproof (where not believing or practicing rightly) and correction (where teaching error). Romans (faith), Ephesians (love) and Thessalonians (hope) are doctrinal epistles. 1 & 2 Corinthians and Philippians are reproof epistles. Galatians and Colossians are correction epistles.

## **16. The word “all” can be used in a universal or limited sense.**

The word “all” or “every” is used in the Bible just as it is used in everyday speech and writing, either to mean “all without exception” or “all within a particular category.” The context will determine the meaning.

- a. Sometimes general statements are contradicted by particular experiences or other scriptures. There are many proverbs that indicate that the righteous will prosper, but other verses say that sometimes the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper. The general statement is a “truism,” though not necessarily true in every case.
- b. For example, the statement that “all men are liars” should not be taken to mean that Jesus, as a man, was a liar, or that women are not therefore liars.

## **17. The Bible is full of small words with big meanings.**

Prepositions and conjunctions are especially important for directing the flow of thought in a context, and failure to notice their effect sometimes leads to massive error.

- a. The biblical usage of the noun cases, especially the genitive (“of”) is important to discern properly.
- b. The use of the article “the” must be carefully noted, especially when used with the words “holy spirit.”
- c. The emphasis of the word “also” must be properly placed.

d. The use of “but” and “not” must be recognized for the degree of contrast or negation they signify in a passage.

### **18. Time, and time words, are essential to proper interpretation.**

Time words must be carefully noted in regard to whether an event occurs in the past, the present or the future. Similarly, the use of abstract biblical terms like “sanctification” or “justification” should be identified as to whether they are in the beginning, the middle or the end of a process (or perhaps some combination of the three), and whether the process is ongoing or has been completed in the past.

a. Sometimes two or more events happen simultaneously even if they are recorded at different times or in different books.

b. Sometimes a record is out of chronological order in a particular book, because chronology is of secondary importance in the relating of the narrative. The material may be organized thematically rather than chronologically.

### **19. It is important to understand biblical prophecy.**

Prophecy as foretelling of the future must be distinguished by two criteria: prophecy that is conditional and prophecy that is unconditional. Prophecy must also be examined in light of whether it has been partially or completely fulfilled in the past, partially or completely fulfilled in the present, or is totally reserved for the future. Sometimes prophecy can be fulfilled in more than one way at more than one time.

### **20. It is necessary to distinguish between a believer’s permanent spiritual standing before God and his “walk.”**

The believer’s spiritual standing before God and his experiential “walk” must be distinguished. His standing is the position and relationship he has with God, that which he has obtained by grace because of Christ’s accomplishments on his behalf. His “walk” is his actual life and experience, referring to the attitudes, words and actions that he manifests (Rom. 12:1; Eph. 4:1). For example, a Christian is righteous in the sight of God because of the saving work of Christ, which is why believers are called “saints” (literally “holy ones”). At the same time he may be lacking righteousness in his walk because his actions do not line up with the Word and will of God.

### **21. It is essential that the reader determine “to whom” a particular scripture is addressed.**

Not every verse in the Bible is to be applied to every person in every age. For example, we do not sacrifice animals today because the verses commanding that are not addressed to us. As Christians, we must be careful to note those scriptures that are addressed to us and

distinguish them from those not to us. Even though we can learn from the entire Bible, we are not necessarily supposed to obey every command in it.

a. Administrations (sometimes called “Dispensations”) must be divided accurately, and basic changes in God’s dealings with man discerned. These changes affect God’s commandments and what is and is not sin, such as in regard to dietary restrictions, the regulations of civil government, the mode of worship, financial giving, Church leadership, etc. [For further study read our booklet *Defending Dispensationalism: Standing Fast in the Liberty.*]

b. Because of differing expectations, commandments, etc., interpretation and application of Scripture must be determined in light of to whom each section of Scripture is addressed, whether it be Jews, Gentiles or the Church of God (1 Cor. 10:32).

c. To whom a particular book is addressed must be noted; sometimes this can change even in the middle of a particular passage (e.g., Rom. 11:13).

## **22. Difficult verses must be interpreted in light of clear verses.**

The Bible contains many verses on many subjects, and some of them are easy to understand, while others are more difficult. Usually, it is the case that there are many more clear verses on a subject than difficult verses. Proper exegesis requires that difficult verses must be interpreted in the light of the many clear verses on the same subject. The scope of the entire Bible must be the final judge of what constitutes truth and error.