

THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF BIBLE DIFFICULTIES - A REVIEW

Gleason W Archer's Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties (two editions considered in this work) is one of the books at the forefront of religious systems that allege that there is no error in the Bible for it is the word of God.

The book says, Evangelicals do not try to prove that the Bible has no mistakes so that they can be sure the Bible is the Word of God. One might prove that a newspaper article is free from all mistakes, but that would not prove that the newspaper article is the Word of God. Christians hold the Bible to be the Word of God (and inerrant) because they are convinced that Jesus, the Lord of the church, believed it and taught His disciples to believe it. And ultimately their conviction of its truth rests on the witness of the Holy Spirit. Likewise evangelicals do not hold that inerrant inspiration eliminates the human element in the production of the Bible. True, evangelicals have stressed the divine authorship of Scripture because this is most frequently denied and it is this that gives Scripture its unique importance. But informed evangelicals have always insisted on a truly human authorship of Scripture. Even those who were willing to use the word dictation (as did Calvin and the Tridentine Council of the Roman Catholic church) always made very clear that they were not referring to the model of a boss dictating to a stenographer. Rather, they meant to stress the divine (as well as human) responsibility for the words of Scripture.

Comment: I agree that without God being the chooser of the words of scripture as much as man is the idea of a divine and infallible Bible is not sustainable. Verbal inspiration is the correct Christian position. Or it is the position that the religion needs to take for anything else shouts, "Another man-made religion!"

The logic of the book is very off. Let us look at it. Pages 21,25 are right to observe that if you want to trust Jesus you have to believe in Adam and Eve as historical beings and accept the historicity of the flood story in Genesis and the manna in the desert and the episode where Jonah was swallowed by a fish and lived to tell the tale. Jesus taught that these people and events were pure history. Jesus could not have been a true prophet when he could not be right about the past for prophets are supposed to be able to accurately foretell future events which is harder than psychically gazing into the past for the past existed and the future does not exist yet. There is no reason to think that Jesus might have known the real facts for nobody did in those days.

The unfair thing about the Encyclopedia is that it ignores Bible stories and teachings that controversially and obviously cast God and Bible devotees who know about them in a very bad light. This reflects the Christian tendency to hope that nobody notices that they are being selective in what they deal with and then they have the nerve to lie saying the Bible is entirely wholesome.

Page 153 says that God was right to kill children in the Bible with the intention of punishing their parents. It even dares to say that if the children had lived they would have been as bad as their parents and so God was right to get rid of them. And we are told that only God knows the potential of each soul. This is putting the God you can't see before the children you can see and that is callous and many Atheists find it disgusting.

Page 160 states that when Joshua built an altar in disobedience to Deuteronomy 12 which specified that only the altar in the tabernacle was to be used he did right for Exodus 20 says that God said that wherever the people are God will come to them and bless them. Archer is lying through his teeth. The Exodus verse does not support what Joshua did. And Joshua claimed to have had God's blessing on his altar and Joshua was a prophet so he must have been a false prophet. Moses falls with Joshua for he was the one who made him prophet and leader. False prophets make false prophets.

God enticed Samson to wed Delilah (Judges 14:4) despite the fact that God regarded this marriage as immoral for she was of a pagan persuasion (page 166). Archer says that God did not approve of the marriage but made Samson attracted to her so that he would marry her and God could take advantage of the sin. This is highly immoral. And Catholics say that Judges only means that God used Satan to fulfil his plan but since nobody believed in the Devil then when Judges says it was God it was God.

Religion teaches that we cannot understand God and our description of him and his ways is more like a parable than a description for we don't understand what we are saying. The Hebrews had no concept of the this idea that language about God was univocal or symbolic or just to express roughly an idea that was so far beyond anybody's understanding that it only needed to be said avoid saying nothing at all. Catholics say that they call God love but they do not know what this means so calling him love is univocal language. Yet this later philosophical idea is used as an excuse to cover up the blunders in such verses as 1 Samuel 15:11 which has God saying he is sorry he ever made Saul king of Israel though it could not have been meant univocally. Archer tries something different (page 174). He says God did say he regretted it but

then contradicts himself and says it does not mean he did not know beforehand what Saul would turn out like! The way the word for regret fits into the context shows that he cannot pretend it means something different from regret.

Page 181 says that the true account of Saul's death is in 1 Samuel 31 and the account that contradicts it is in 2 Samuel 1 and that the latter can contradict it for it is only an inspired record of what an Amalekite man who may not have been reliable reported about Saul's death. But would the man's testimony be in the book if it were not accepted? This Encyclopaedia speculates that it might not be even though that is what books that pretend to be history like 2 Samuel or are history need – history is an interpretation and evaluation of testimony.

Several times the Encyclopaedia "solves" contradictions by blaming the errors of copyists – errors for which there is no evidence. See page 169, which admits that 50,000 in Bethshemesh in 1 Samuel 6:19 is too many and blames this on a copyist's mistake. But what right has anybody to say the Bible is infallible in all it says when these contradictions could have been in the originals?

Page 184. This says that when 2 Samuel 14:27 says Absalom was a father of three sons and one daughter and 2 Samuel 18:18 says he had none there is no conflict for the children probably died in infancy though the Bible does not tell us if they did die. But one would expect the book to tell us that for writers avoid seeming contradictions like that. It is unlikely that four royal children could die young. Absalom died in a manner similar to that described in Psalm 22 though Archer wants to pretend that this psalm described the death of Jesus before it happened for a God who knows the future wrote it.

Page 205. Elisha is defended against the accusation that he lied to the army of Syria and misled them when they were looking for him in 2 Kings 6. Elisha told the army that he would lead them to Elisha thus meaning that he was not Elisha and that Elisha was not in the area though he was yet Archer pretends that he was not lying but telling the truth for he never said he was not Elisha and he was right to tell them they would not find Elisha in the city for they were all outside the city. But Elisha said more than just that Elisha was not in the city but that they were on the wrong track meaning he was nowhere near the city though he was. Also, when the army were that easily misled and by one man the story is doubtful. No army would be that dumb. No army would have expected Elisha to stay in any town when they were coming for they were numerous and he would have had time to get away. The army would have used spies to apprehend him so there was no need for them threatening any towns. Elisha asked God to disguise him so that he could talk to the men instead of asking God to let him escape and making the men receive a message based on understanding that Elisha was somewhere else. Thus Elisha did wrong for he wanted the stage set for his lies to be told. Even if it were not lies but just using the truth to make the guys mislead themselves he still did wrong for the Church says that this is wrong except in cases of extreme necessity. Elisha should have just left by the back of the town.

Page 242. Here, on the basis of Psalm 5:5 and 11:5 the view that God loves sinners but hates their sins is rejected. Good King Jehoshaphat was condemned by the Lord through a prophet for being kind to sinful King Ahab though what help he gave was entirely harmless (2 Chronicles 19:2). We are told that God hates sinners as sinners but loves them only in the sense that he tries to change them. Really it means he does not love them but just wants to change them so that he will love them. We all wish our enemies could make us happy by changing. We hate them because we want to change them. This is disturbing stuff and implies that Christians should only love one another in the real sense and disparage everyone else. The Bible must teach this when Gleason W Archer believes it for if anybody would know it would be him.

If people really believed in love the sinner and hate the sin they would see the sin as something like an infection that is not part of the person. At most you see sin as external to a person or even as a mistake. Why are we not talking about mistakes? Because we don't see sin as a mistake but as a sign of what a person is - bad and deliberately dangerous in some area.

Page 271. Though it cannot be proved that the bits in Isaiah which name King Cyrus allegedly before he became king and before he was even born and got involved in Israel's affairs were really written before the events it is claimed that he was indeed named and foreseen. That is credulity.

Page 293. The fact that Daniel predicts things that show it has a knowledge of what happened during the 160's BC meaning that was when it was written or edited for the final time is rejected for Daniel prophesied some things accurately after that time and things that did not happen for centuries after Christ. But the prophecies that fit the period of composition are more detailed than the future ones which have been variously interpreted and can even be fitted to predicting the coming of the papacy as antichrist.

Page 275. This says that if Jeremiah had ever prophesied wrongly he would not have got into the Jewish Canon of scripture. This is used to argue that his dubious prediction of an unlikely invasion of Egypt by Babylon must have been fulfilled. But lots of books with errors are considered canonical all over the world. Look at the blunders of the Book of Mormon for instance.

Page 404 makes out that when Paul altered Psalm 68:18 for his Ephesians letter it was not dishonesty for it was an

interpretative translation. Archer would not say that if it were not the Bible. The psalm gave no proof that it was messianic and Paul altered to make it refer to Jesus and Archer says this was not dishonest! If Paul had said that it was only his version I would not care but he did not.

Can't you see that the solutions the Christians offer could be used to resolve any contradiction in any scripture and then they turn around and maintain that the lack of contradiction in the Bible means it has to be God's word?

CONCLUSION

All attempts to prove that the Bible is the word of God fail because the Bible contradicts itself and attempts to hide this are stupid, irresponsible and are fabricated. Disgusting is the only way to describe such determined efforts to defend and promote and use for worship such a twisted volume as if the blood splatters on it do not count.