

Alleged Discrepancies in the Bible

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Some critics of the Bible say there are discrepancies in the numbers found in the Bible, therefore the Bible is unreliable and not accurate. I propose that such alleged discrepancies in the numbers reported in the Bible can be resolved with diligent study and illumination by the Holy Spirit.

Here are ten examples of alleged numeric discrepancies and their resolutions that prove this hypothesis:

1. How many soldiers did Joshua send to ambush Ai? 30,000 or 5,000?
 - a. He sent 30,000 men the night before the battle, Joshua 8:3-9.
 - b. The next morning he sent another 5,000 reinforcements to conceal themselves in the immediate precincts of the town, 8:10-13
2. How much did Solomon pay the King of Tyre for materials and labor that Hiram provided for the temple at Jerusalem?
 - a. 1 Kings 5:8-11(NASB) is Solomon's payment to Hiram's royal household.
 - b. Ezra, in 2 Chronicles 2:10, records the amount Solomon paid Hiram's servants who did the actual work.
3. How many men did Adino the Eznite slay? 2 Samuel 23:8; 1 Chronicles 11:11.
 - a. 2 Samuel may well be referring to a different person and/or a different event than that noted in 1 Chronicles. Read both texts carefully.
 - b. If both books should refer to the same person, Adino could have slain 800 on one occasion and 300 on another.
4. How much did David actually pay Araunah for his threshing floor/temple site?
 - a. In obedience to God's Word through the prophet Gad, David bought the threshing floor and oxen (paying 50 shekels of silver) in order to offer a propitiatory sacrifice to stay a devastating plague – 2 Samuel 24:18-25
 - b. In the second instance (1 Chronicles 21:18-22:6), Ezra combines the first purchase of the oxen and threshing floor for 50 shekels of silver with David's later purchase of the entire site (for an additional 600

shekels of gold) as a place to build the temple (See 1 Chronicles 21:25 and 1 Chronicles 22:1ff).

5. How many males, twenty years old and upward, were in the tribe of Simeon?
 - a. At the first census they numbered 59,300 (Numbers 1:23)
 - b. At the second census, about 40 years later, there were 22,200 (Numbers 26:14)

Answer: In his prophecy concerning each of the twelve tribes, Jacob had foretold that Simeon would not prevail but would be scattered in Israel (Genesis 49:5-7). Then just prior to the second census, God sent a plague upon Israel, destroying twenty-four thousand men because of their immorality and idolatry with the daughters of Moab (Numbers 25:1 – 26:1). Because Zimri, a prince of Simeon (25:14), was a main participant in this rebellion against the Most High, we probably should conclude that the majority of the rebels slain in the plague were Simeonites. Because of these factors the tribe of Simeon declined in numbers over the forty-year span, whereas the other tribes maintained a relatively stable population.

6. How many people did the Lord strike down in the small town of Beth-shemesh? “[God} struck down some of the men of Beth-shemesh because they had looked into the ark of the Lord. He struck down of all the people 50,070 men, and the people mourned because the Lord had struck the people with a great slaughter” (1 Samuel 6:19, NASB. Cf. NIV).
 - a. According to the Hebrew, “He struck down of all the people, 70 men [and] fifty $\text{šw}^{\dagger}\text{à}^{\dagger}$ (aleph) men.
 - b. $\text{šw}^{\dagger}\text{à}^{\dagger}$ (aleph) is hard to translate in some contexts because it has several different meanings. It does not always mean 1,000 (10 x 100). It may mean:
 - (1) Cattle (herd), Deuteronomy 28:4, 18, 51, etc. (à is the Hebrew letter “A,” taken from the pictogram of a steer’s face and horns). Perhaps, since most of Israel’s cattle were domesticated, $\text{se}^{\dagger}\text{T}$ (a form of $\text{šw}^{\dagger}\text{à}^{\dagger}$) was used to designate a docile, gentle lamb, (Jeremiah 11:19), a close friend, (Psalm 55:13), or a woman’s husband, (Proverbs 2:17)
 - (2) $\text{se}^{\dagger}\text{T}$ also designated the chief of a clan, (1 Chronicles 1:51). Apparently since $\text{šw}^{\dagger}\text{à}^{\dagger}$ can mean “herd (unit) of cattle” then $\text{óe}^{\dagger}\text{à}^{\dagger}$ “chief” is the head of a group (unit) of people.

- (3) Family, clan, unit, group. In 1 Samuel 10:19 “thousands” (the plural form of סִיּוֹת) in the KJV is translated “clans” in the NIV and NASB because the context clearly defines “thousands” (v. 19, KJV) as “clans [extended families]” (v. 21). Also, In Numbers 1:16; 10:4; Joshua 22:21,30; 1 Samuel 23:23; Micah 5:2, the KJV has “thousands” where the other major versions have “clans, families.” Further, in Judges 6:15 “My family” in the KJV is literally “My thousand” (עֵשֶׂת אַלְפֵי) in the original. But in Numbers 10:36 the major versions rightly have “thousands.”

Conclusion: 1 Samuel 6:19 might mean that God struck down at Beth-shemesh seventy men and fifty of their cattle, which would have been “a great slaughter” for a small town. This view is probably the correct one because: (1) Beth-shemesh was just a small town. (2) If 50,070 referred only to people, the round number of 50,000 would likely have been used. (Cf. 2 Samuel 10:18 and 1 Chronicles 19:18 below, and many other references, where very large numbers are usually round numbers). (3) “The 70 stands before the 50,000, which is very unusual,” K-D, Vol. V, p.68. Like English, the Hebrew language, when combining two numbers, normally puts the larger number first. This usual order would hold true if the meaning is “70 men and 50 of their cattle,” but not for 70 men and 50,000 men. (4) The footnote in the New King James Version, dated 1990, states, “6:19a Or ‘He struck seventy men of the people and fifty oxen of a man.’”

7. How many charioteers, horsemen, and foot soldiers were slain in David’s battle with the Syrians?
- a. “700 charioteers . . . and 40,000 horsemen,” (2 Samuel 10:18)
“7,000 charioteers and 40,000 foot soldiers,” (1 Chronicles 19:18)
 - b. As shown above in 6-b (3), aleph, the Hebrew word for thousand, also has the meaning of unit: i.e., family, tribe, clan, cattle, etc. (Cf. Judges 6:15; 1 Samuel 10:19-21; Deuteronomy 28:4,18,51, etc.).
 - (1) 2 Samuel records 700 charioteers slain, whereas 1 Chronicles records that 7 סִיּוֹת (units) of charioteers were slain. That is, 2 Samuel 10:18 defines the charioteers as being seven hundred in number, whereas 1 Chronicles 19:18 defines them as being seven units in number. This interpretation is reasonable, because when writing the Hebrew text, the scribe would be unlikely to confuse the number 100 (עֶשְׂרִים) with the number 1,000 (אֶלְפֵי).
 - (2) Of the 40,000 slain part were horsemen and part were foot soldiers, with each author setting forth a different part of the whole. (Cf., Matthew, Mark, and Luke’s history of Jesus’

ministry, where each writer often gives only part of the whole). Also, cf. the biblical use elsewhere of a part for the whole (synecdoche, e.g., Philippians 2:10-11) and the whole for a part (e.g., Mark 1:5).

8. Some alleged discrepancies are simply the Scripture's way of stating the statistic as a round number.
 - a. Genesis 15:13 states that Israel would sojourn in Egypt four hundred years. Later revelation in Exodus 12:40 gives the exact time as four hundred and thirty years.
 - b. Numbers 25:7-9 gives the number of those who died of the plague as 24,000. 1 Corinthians 10:8 gives the total as 23,000. The actual number could have been between 23,000 and 24,000 slain.
 - c. 1 Kings 7:26 says the Sea (holding water to cleanse both priests and burnt offerings) held two thousand baths. 2 Chronicles 4:5 says the Sea held three thousand baths. The Sea probably held around 2,500 baths.
 - d. Compare: "Then all Jerusalem was going out to [hear] him (i.e., John Baptist), and all Judea, and all the district around the Jordan," (Matthew 3:5).
9. How many sons did Abraham have? "By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice . . . his one and only son," (Hebrews 11:17, NIV).
 - a. Abraham had many sons, Genesis 25:1-6.
 - b. Genesis 22:2, "Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac." The Hebrew word for "only" (אֶחָד) also has the meaning of "beloved, favored, precious," (Psalm 35:17, (NIV), Proverbs 22:20, etc).

Conclusion: Abraham gave gifts to his other sons and sent them away from Isaac (Genesis 25:6). "Only" son shows that Isaac was first in rank, or first in importance to God's Messianic program. See Victor P. Hamilton, *Genesis*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament, II, 122, Note 10, "Isaac was Abraham's uniquely precious son, but not his only begotten." F. F. Bruce, *Hebrews*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, 311, "Isaac was unique and irreplaceable."

10. Saul's regnal age and length of reign in 1 Samuel 13:1.

a. I`Åø^NÀP IKÇ jIÇîÈ äðÈLÈ ézÅLŠŠŠŠe BèIšî~aş IeàL~ äð^L^ ïa-. See the various translations.

b. Literal translation: "Saul was the 'son of a year' (äðÈL^ ïá-) when he began his reign, and he reigned two years over Israel," 13:1a.

(1) When the Bible speaks of a one-year reign, or one-year span of time, the Hebrew reads úç-à- äðÿL^ (one year), as in 2 Kings 8:26; 2 Chronicles 22:2 (also compare Exodus 23:29; 30:10, 2 Chronicles 9:13; Ezra 1:1; 5:13; 6:3, etc).

(2) The dozens of times äð~L~ ïá- (son of a year) occurs elsewhere than in 1 Samuel 13:1 it always refers to a mature, yearling animal, as in Exodus 12:5; Numbers 7:15ff, and etc.

(a) A yearling is an animal between one and two years old.

(b) "If it was already a yearling (NEB), then it was fully grown as well," Alan Cole, *Exodus*, TOTC, 106.

(c) "A year old, because it was not till then that it reached the full, fresh vigor of its life," Keil and Delitzsch, II, 11.

(3) The Passover Lamb typified Christ (1 Corinthians 5:7).

(a) Who began His ministry when He was fully grown (Luke 3:23; Exodus 12:5).

(b) Slain by the people, not by the priest (Exodus 12:6).

(c) His blood gave redemption to the people (Exodus 12:7, 13).

(d) Was without defect (Exodus 12:5; cf. 1 Peter 1:18-19).

(e) When partaking of Him, we are to set our heart on leaving the world (Exodus 12:11).

Conclusion: "Saul was a fully mature man when he began to reign," (i.e., somewhere between thirty and forty years old, 1 Samuel 13:1a. See NIV, its footnote, and NASB translations on 13:1a).

(1) Immediately after Saul's reign began, He was sufficiently powerful to rescue the city of Jabesh Gilead from Nahash (11:1-11).

- (2) "Then Saul reigned two more years," (13:1b) in order to solidify his kingship before taking on the much more powerful Philistines. (Cf. 13:2 with 13:5-7). Also, He had enemies among his own people the Jews (1 Samuel 10:27) whom he wished to win over as allies before going to war (11:12-13).
- (3) The Philistine war in 13:2-10 undoubtedly occurred in the early part of Saul's reign. This might imply that 13:1 also refers to the first part of Saul's reign.
- (4) Translation: "Saul was a fully mature man when he became king. Then when he had reigned two years over Israel, Saul choose three thousand men from Israel [to do battle with the Philistines]," 1 Samuel 13:1-2. This translation fits the context and culture, while doing justice to and preserving the integrity of the Hebrew text
- (5) Interestingly, of the major translations, the KJV ("Saul reigned one year; and when he had reigned two years over Israel, Saul choose him three thousand men of Israel [to do battle with the Philistines].") best translates the Hebrew text, although it fails to catch the "fully mature" (yearling) meaning of ben shanah (בן־שָׁנָה, "son of a year").

Conclusion: We are to accept the original text God has preserved for us. Changing the text only results in confusion of the author's intended meaning rather than enlightenment. With some diligent study and the Holy Spirit's illumination, most so-called discrepancies can be easily resolved.

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