

# **Dealing with “Contradictions” and Clashes in the Bible**

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# 5 Bible Clashes

## **1. When the Bible Clashes With Itself**

Abiathar the high priest (Mark 2:26 v 1 Sam 21)

## **2. When the Bible Clashes with Logic**

Jesus' genealogies (Matthew 1 v Luke 3)

## **3. When the Bible Clashes with History**

Quirinius' Census (Luke 2:2)

## **4. When the Bible Clashes with Science**

the Sun standing still (Joshua 10)

## **5. When the Bible Clashes with Ethics**

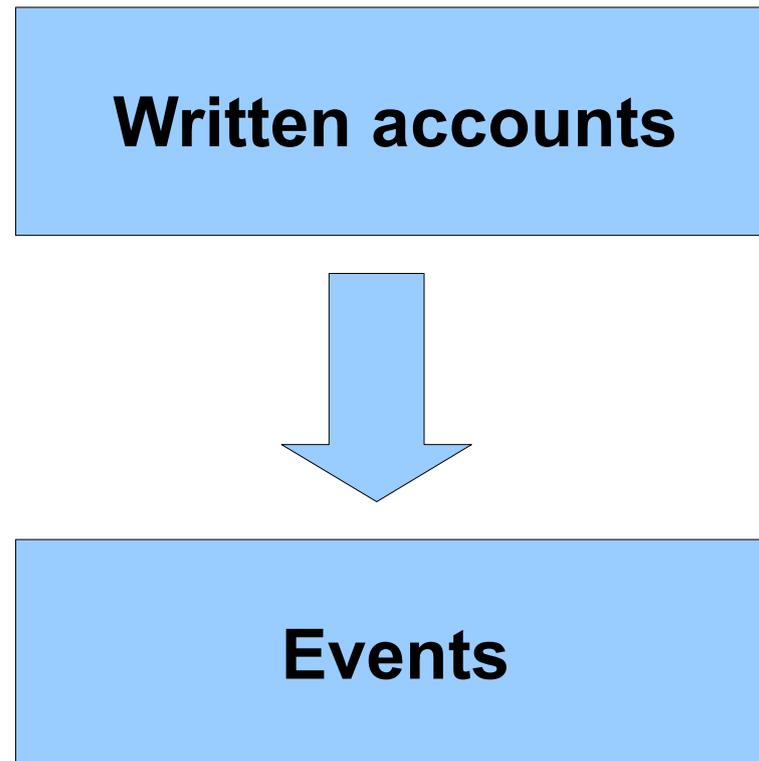
the Amalekite Genocide (1 Samuel 15)

But first...

*Tip 1: Remember that "history" has a point.*

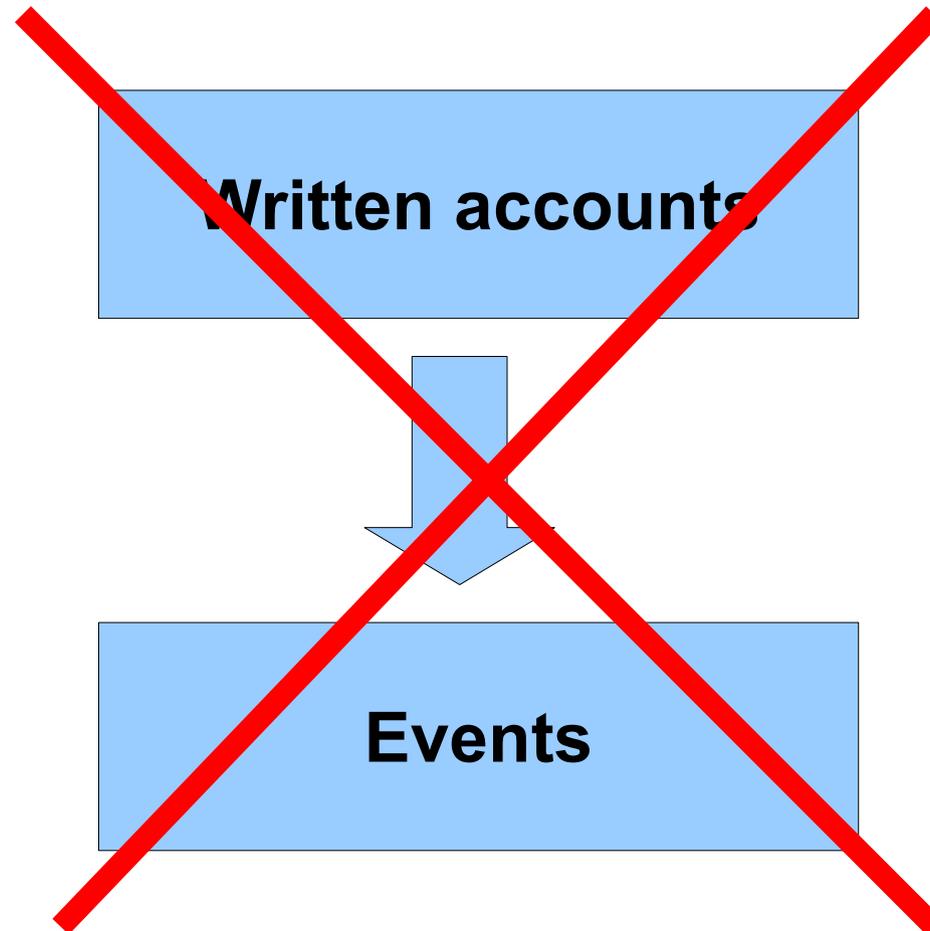
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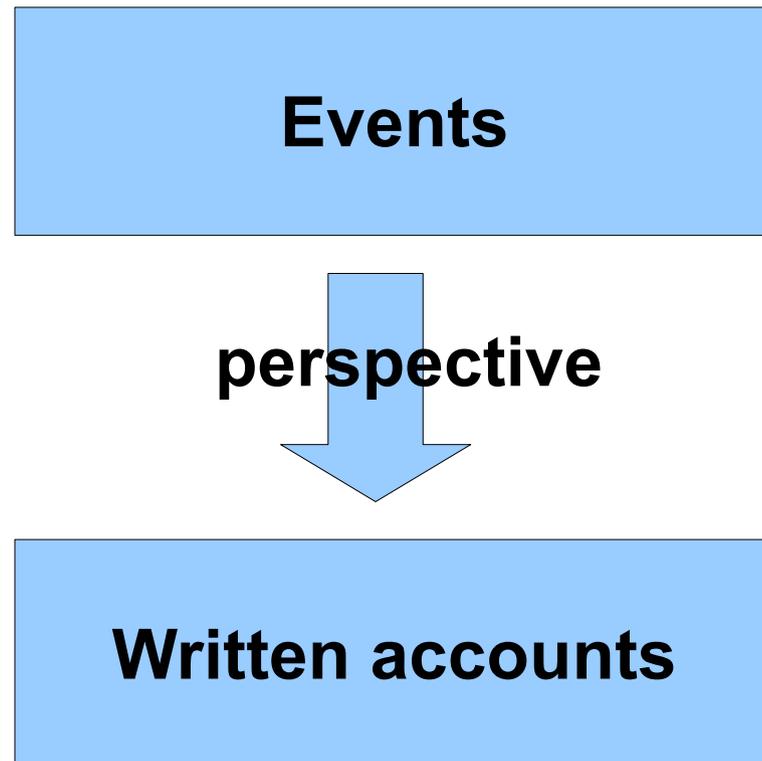
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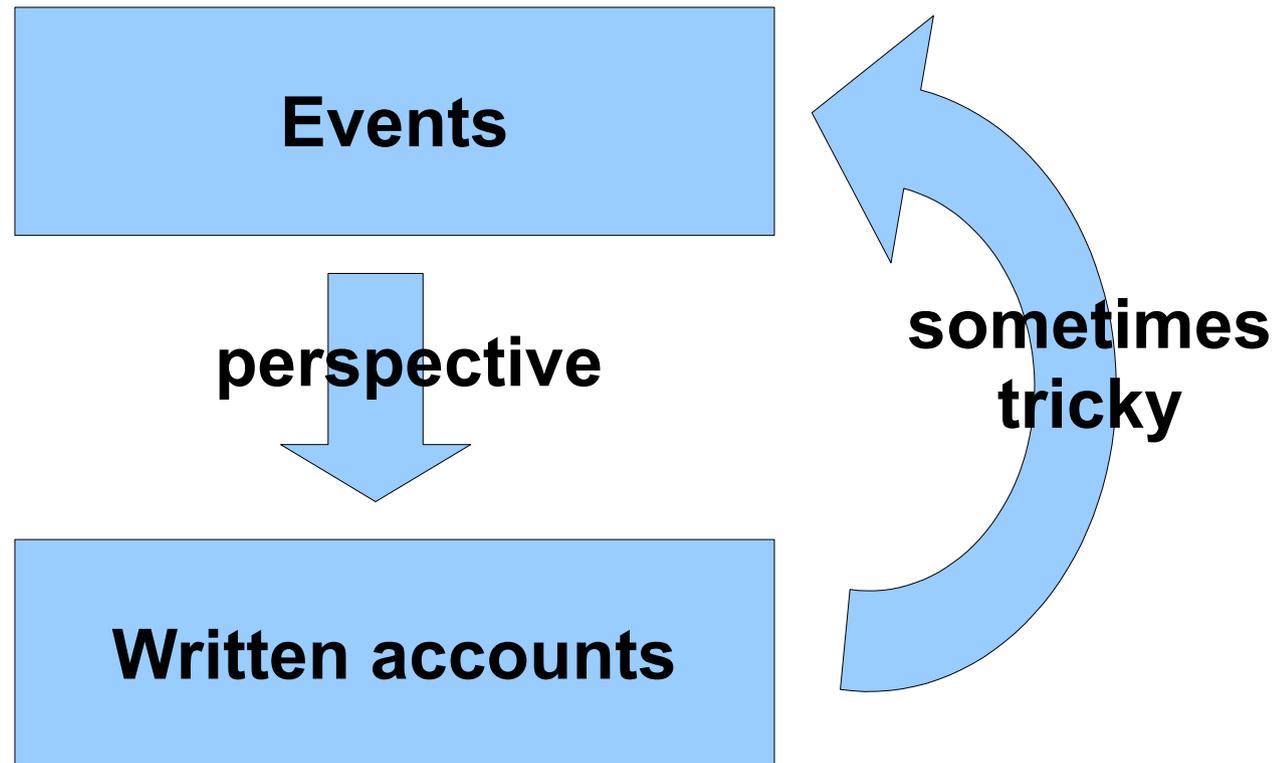
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**Answer: Jereboam II (2 Kings 14:28)**

# 1. When the Bible Clashes with Itself

Jesus answered, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions. *(Mark 2:25-26, NIV)*

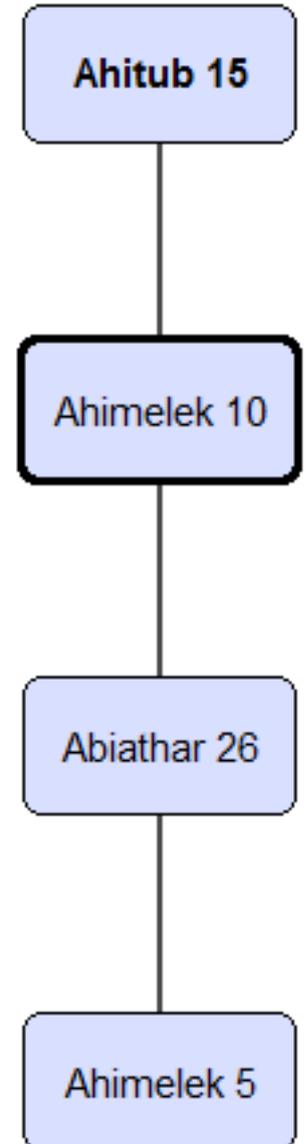
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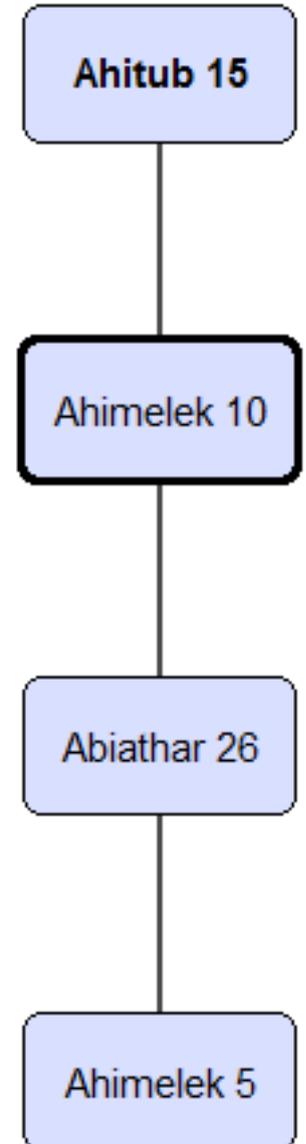
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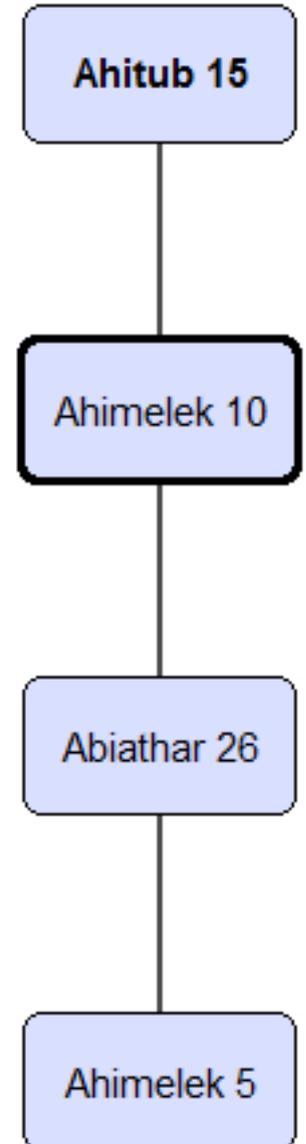
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- *1 Sam 21:1-9 David visits Ahimelek*
- *1 Sam 21:10-22:5 David on the run*
- *1 Sam 22:6-19 Saul attacks Ahimelek*



# 1. When the Bible Clashes with Itself

But one son of Ahimelek son of Ahitub, named Abiathar, escaped and fled to join David. (*1 Sam 22:20, NIV*)

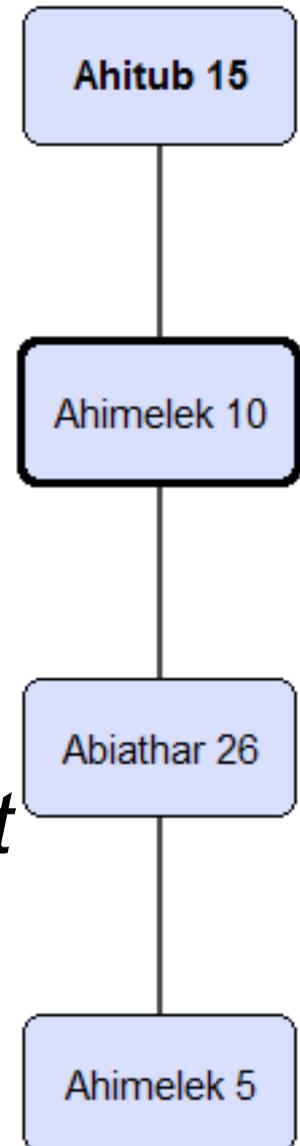


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So:

- *Abiathar was with his father Ahimelek when David visited.*
- *He is far more famous than his father because he was later David's high priest for 40 years.*
- *He became David's high priest shortly after David visited Ahimelek.*



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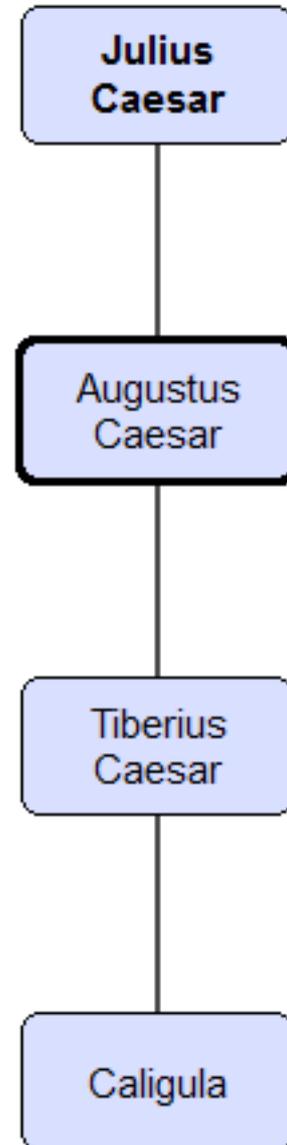
## 2. When the Bible Clashes with Logic

....Matthan the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, and Mary was the mother of Jesus who is called the Messiah. (*Matthew 1:15-16, NIV*)

He was the son, so it was thought, of Joseph, the son of Heli, the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, ...  
(*Luke 3:23-24, NIV*)

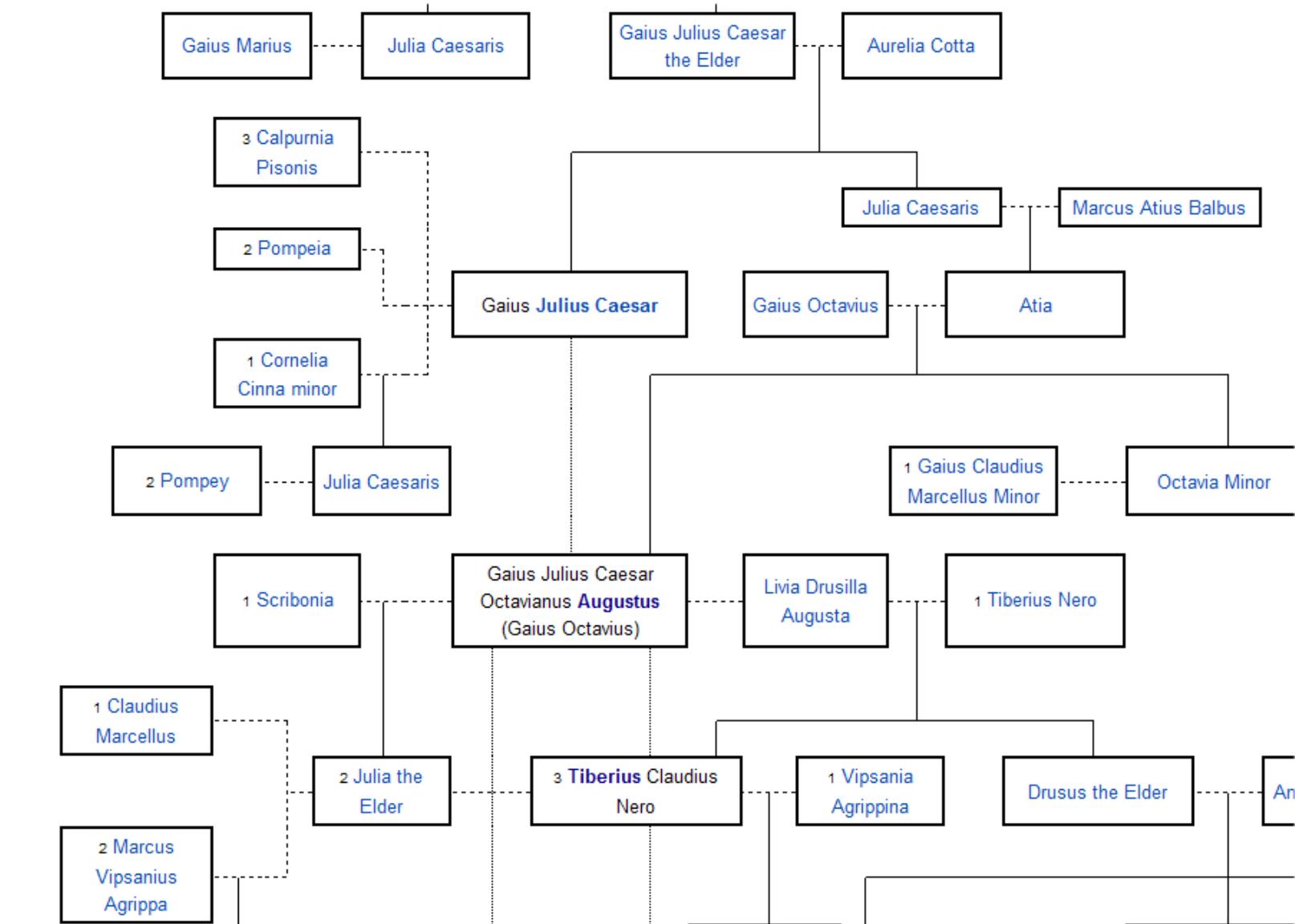
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Adoption was very common practice in Roman families – the head of the family would adopt (usually) a relative to succeed him as the head of the family.

- c.f. Ben Hur, The Godfather 3
- Augustus Caesar was called both *Gaius Octavianus* and *Gaius Julius Caesar Octavianus Augustus*
- His father was Gaius Octavius. His father was also Julius Caesar. They were not the same person.

## 2. When the Bible Clashes with Logic

*Tip 2: Check the big picture*

What were genealogies used for?

- establishing identity (Ezra 2:61-62) – good Jews kept their genealogies!
- establishing land ownership – genealogy was **the** basis of land ownership in Israel (e.g. Numbers 26-27)

## 2. When the Bible Clashes with Logic

*Tip 2: Check the big picture*

What can mess up genealogies?

- adoption (as binding in Jewish as Roman society)
- someone dies without children
- Levirate marriages
- Women inheriting (e.g. Numbers 36)
- gaps (e.g. Matt 1:8)
- loose meaning of “son of”

## 2. When the Bible Clashes with Logic

*Tip 4: Ask "What if...?"*

What if Joseph owned two plots of ancestral land?

- Doesn't seem that unlikely.
- Would mean he had two genealogies, one to go with each plot.
- One plot could have been passed down some of the royal line, which suited Matthew's purpose.
- One plot could have been still owned by Mary, which suited Luke's sources.

### 3. When the Bible Clashes with History

*In those days, Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria. And everyone went to their own town to be registered.*

*(Luke 2:1-3, NIV)*

# 3. When the Bible Clashes with History

So what's the problem?

- (a) There was no known empire-wide census under Augustus
- (b) No Roman census would have required Joseph to go to Bethlehem to register
- (c) Israel under Herod wasn't part of the Roman Empire
- (d) Josephus wrote that the first Roman census was under Quirinius in AD6, and that caused a revolt
- (e) Quirinius wasn't governor of Syria until 10 years after Herod died.

# 3. When the Bible Clashes with History

*Tip 3: Check the history...*

36BC Herod the Great becomes King of Israel, with Roman support

4BC Herod the Great dies. Israel is split up into Roman provinces.

AD6 Quirinius becomes governor of Syria after Herod's son, Archaelus, is sacked by Rome.

AD6 Large census in Judea leads to rioting.

AD525 Dionysius Exiguus invents the AD/BC dating system. He guesses when Jesus was born based on dates of Roman Emperors.

# 3. When the Bible Clashes with History

## *Tip 3: Check the history...*

- The Romans liked doing censuses because they liked taxing people. We know there was ongoing census activity across the Roman Empire at the time of Herod, so that deals with (a).
- Even though Israel wasn't part of the Roman Empire, we know Herod was a vassal of the Romans, and vassals did censuses too when Rome told them to. In the census of AD6, tax allocations change, which means there must have been Roman tax (and therefore censuses) before that... c) is therefore not a problem.

# 3. When the Bible Clashes with History

## *Tip 4: Ask "What if...?"*

- What if Herod did a census for the Romans?
  - Herod was more sensitive to the Jews than the Romans were. It's likely he would have done a lower-key census than the one of AD6.
  - He might well have done it Jewish-style rather than Roman-style, like getting people to go to their ancestral towns to register.
  - The only historical record we have of the AD6 census is from Josephus, who is writing to explain how the Roman / Jewish war started. So why should he mention a peaceful census?

# 3. When the Bible Clashes with History

## *Tip 4: Ask "What if...?"*

- What if Joseph owned land in Bethlehem?
  - It would explain how Joseph knew he was a descendant of David – remember that land is held by genealogy and David was from Bethlehem.
  - It would explain why Joseph had to go to Bethlehem to register.
  - (And that's unlikely to happen after 4BC anyway because after then Nazareth and Bethlehem were in different provinces from each other – Judea and Galilee).

### 3. When the Bible Clashes with History

*Tip 5: We don't always have enough evidence*

- Luke is generally a very reliable historian – it would be odd if he had got this wrong.
- He knows about the AD6 census and the rebellion too (Acts 5:37). This is another one.
- It is plausible that Herod did a census for the Romans. It is plausible that Joseph owned land in Bethlehem (and explains the genealogy). We don't have any other evidence that confirms or denies this...
- But what about Quirinius?

### 3. When the Bible Clashes with History

*Tip 6: Check the original language*

Luke 2:2 *This was the first census that took place while<sup>a</sup> Quirinius was governor of Syria. (NIV)*

Footnote - *“Or this census took place before...”*

The word in question is πρωτος - dictionaries define it as “first, before, greatest”. So it could be talking about the census BEFORE the one where Quirinius was governor of Syria (the one in AD6 which caused all the trouble).

### 3. When the Bible Clashes with History

*Tip 6: Check the original language*

Alternatively, the verse literally reads

*“this was the first census of Quirinius, governor of Syria.”*

Q may well have been asked to administer the census by Herod, even though he wasn't governor of Syria yet, in the same way we might talk about “President George W Bush” for something he did as a young man

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# 4. When the Bible Clashes with Science

At that time Joshua spoke to the LORD in the day when the LORD gave the Amorites over to the sons of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel, "Sun, stand still at Gibeon, and moon, in the Valley of Aijalon." And the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, until the nation took vengeance on their enemies. Is this not written in the Book of Jashar? The sun stopped in the midst of heaven and did not hurry to set for about a whole day. There has been no day like it before or since, when the LORD heeded the voice of a man, for the LORD fought for Israel.

*(Joshua 10:12-14, ESV)*

# 4. When the Bible Clashes with Science

What's the problem?

- (a) The sun already stands pretty still – it's the Earth that needs to stop rotating.
- (b) Even if it does mean the Earth stopped rotating, that's impossible.
- (c) Even if the Earth did stop rotating, it would cause all sorts of problems, earthquakes, floods, people flying off, etc. And ditto when it restarted.

## 4. When the Bible Clashes with Science

### *Tip 7: Remember Accommodation!*

Sometimes it's very useful to remember why that passage was written, and who it was written to.

This was written to the Ancient Israelites to remind them about the victories God had brought about under Joshua. It wasn't written as a physics textbook.

*“The Bible was written to tell us how to go to heaven, not how the heavens go.” Galileo*

“The sun rose – hanging blood-red in the sky like a hideous reminder of what had happened in the barn.”

## 4. When the Bible Clashes with Science

*Tip 8: Remember the power of God*

Could the God who created the whole universe just by speaking stop the Earth from spinning for a day?

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Could the God who created the whole universe just by speaking stop the Earth from spinning for a day?

Could he even do it and “turn off” the forces which would otherwise cause earthquakes and stuff, while “turning on” forces to stop North America from flooding?

## 4. When the Bible Clashes with Science

*Tip 9: Don't overhype the argument*

See [snopes.com/religion/lostday.asp](http://snopes.com/religion/lostday.asp)

“If the sun once really did stand still for a day, the best evidence we'd have for proving it would be the accounts of people who saw it happen. That is what the Bible is said to offer. Some people accept that as sufficient proof, and others don't.”

# 4. When the Bible Clashes with Science

*Tip 10: Ask for help!*

David Instone-Brewer, *Christianity Magazine*  
(September 2011)

- Joshua 10:13 is a quotation from the book of Jashar, hence doesn't need to be literally true.
- Huge hailstones in v11 – means very tall clouds
- Evening appeared to start early because the Sun went behind the clouds
- But with a gap at the bottom, the clouds would also keep it light long after the Sun had set – what happened was a very long evening.

# 4. When the Bible Clashes with Science

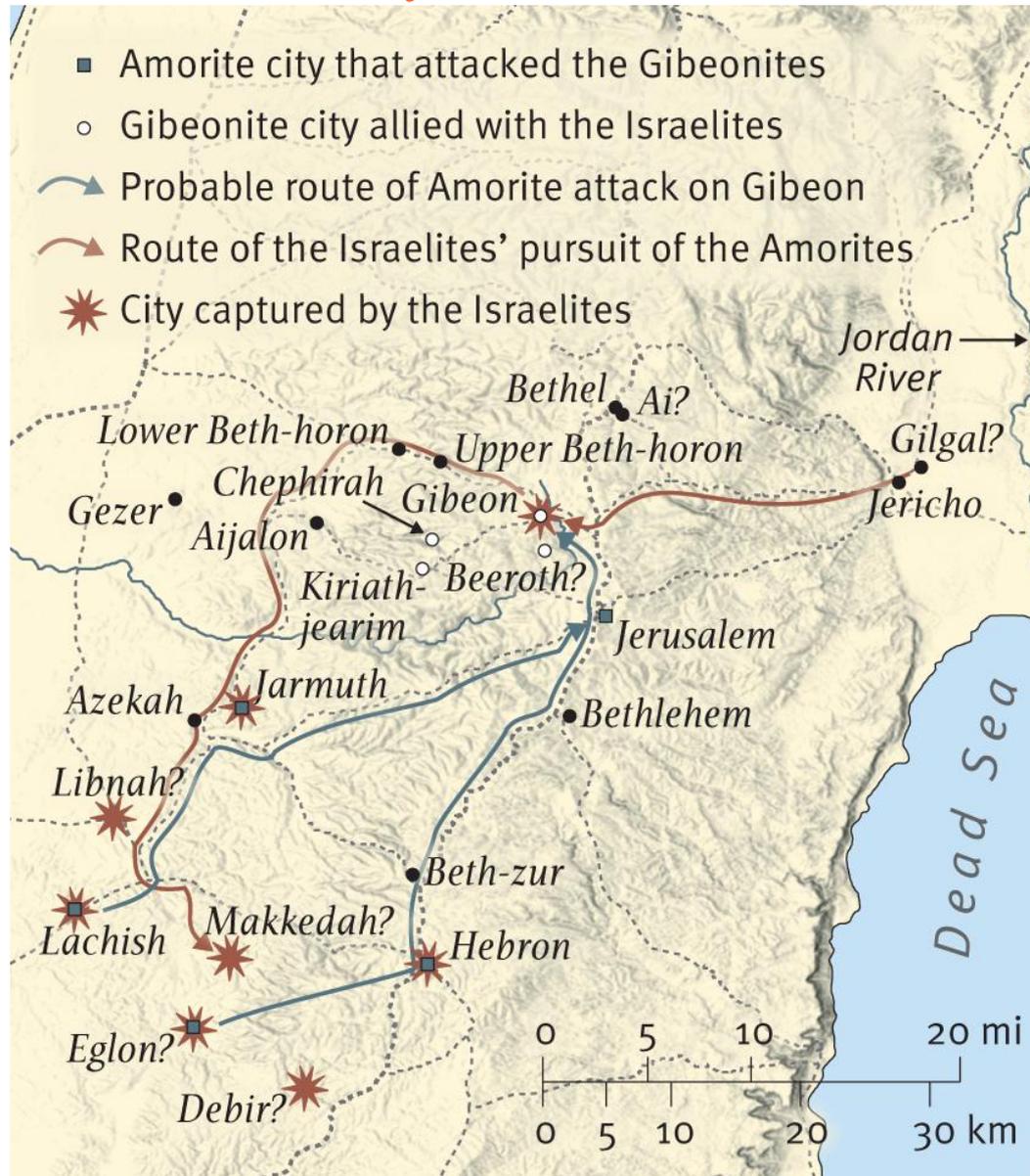
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Dale Ralph Davis, *Joshua*, Christian Focus (2000)

- The battle starts with a pre-dawn attack (v9)
- Joshua asks for the Sun to **stop** at Gibeon (v12)
- Gibeon seems to have been East of the battlefield, hence the prayer was in the morning.
- God's answer includes a massive storm with hailstones (v11)
- So what if Joshua was asking for darkness, which God answered with a huge storm?

# 4. When the Bible Clashes with Science

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## 5. When the Bible Clashes with Ethics

And Samuel said to Saul, "The LORD sent me to anoint you king over his people Israel; now therefore listen to the words of the LORD. Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'I have noted what Amalek did to Israel in opposing them on the way when they came up out of Egypt. Now go and strike Amalek and devote to destruction all that they have. Do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.'"

*(1 Samuel 15:1-3, ESV)*

# 5. When the Bible Clashes with Ethics

*Tip 2: Check the big picture...*

Who were the Amalekites?

- Descendants of Amalek, grandson of Esau (Ge 36:12-16)
- Not Canaanites – Israel was not a threat to them.
- They attacked Israel even before Sinai (Exodus 17:8)
- They attacked Israel again in the wilderness (Num 14:45)
- They joined the Moabites in attacking Israel (Judges 3:13)
- They joined the Midianites in attacking Israel several times and were fought off by Gideon (Judges 6-7)

## 5. When the Bible Clashes with Ethics

*Tip 2: Check the big picture...*

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered and make sure that Joshua hears it, because I will completely blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven."

Moses built an altar and called it The LORD is my Banner. He said, "For hands were lifted up to the throne of the LORD. The LORD will be at war against the Amalekites from generation to generation."

*(Exodus 17:14-16, NIV)*

## 5. When the Bible Clashes with Ethics

*Tip 2: Check the big picture...*

When Haman [the Agagite] saw that Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor, he was enraged. Yet having learned who Mordecai's people were, he scorned the idea of killing only Mordecai. Instead Haman looked for a way to destroy all Mordecai's people, the Jews, throughout the whole kingdom of Xerxes. (*Esther 3:1-6, NIV*)

## 5. When the Bible Clashes with Ethics

*Tip 2: Check the big picture...*

The Amalekites weren't just any old people. They were the nation who more than any other tried to destroy Israel. They had been trying to eradicate and plunder Israel from the very birth of Israel, 200-400 years before the command in 1 Samuel 15, and they would continue for another 600 years.

But isn't this just God taking sides in a conflict?

# 5. When the Bible Clashes with Ethics

*Tip 2: Check the big picture...*

Who were the Israelites?

What does it mean for them to be God's chosen people?

# 5. When the Bible Clashes with Ethics

The Amalekites and the Kenites:

Then Saul said to the Kenites, "Go, depart; go down from among the Amalekites, lest I destroy you with them. For you showed kindness to all the people of Israel when they came up out of Egypt." So the Kenites departed from among the Amalekites.

*(1 Samuel 15:6, ESV)*

## 5. When the Bible Clashes with Ethics

When you draw near to a city to fight against it, offer terms of peace to it. And if it responds to you peaceably and it opens to you, then all the people who are found in it shall do forced labour for you and shall serve you. But if it makes no peace with you, but makes war against you, then you shall besiege it. And when the LORD your God gives it into your hand, you shall put all its males to the sword...

*Deuteronomy 20:10-13, ESV*

## 5. When the Bible Clashes with Ethics

Hadad was from the royal family of Edom, and here is how the LORD made him Solomon's enemy: Some time earlier, when David conquered the nation of Edom, Joab his army commander went there to bury those who had died in battle. Joab and his soldiers stayed in Edom six months, and during that time they killed every man and boy who lived there. Hadad was a boy at the time, but he escaped to Midian with some of his father's officials...

*1 Kings 11:14-17, CEV*

# 5. When the Bible Clashes with Ethics

So is it a genocide?

- Nothing to stop them becoming Kenites
- Nothing to stop them running away
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So is it a genocide?

- Nothing to stop them becoming Kenites
- Nothing to stop them running away
- Nothing to stop them surrendering
- All that had to die was **their identity as Amalekites**, and that because it was implacably opposed to God's plan to bless the world through Israel.