

Q&A: Are There Contradictions in the Bible?

by Lenny Esposito

Skeptics say the Bible contains contradictions. If true, this would suggest it is not inspired by God since God is all knowing. However, close examination reveals that the Bible doesn't contain actual contradictions.

A writer is guilty of contradiction when two facts are affirmed that can't both possibly be true at the same time and in the same manner. But it is not always easy to establish that a writer is guilty of this. For example, it would seemingly be a contradiction to say, "The apple is red, and the apple is not red." But what if the author was referring to two different apples? Or perhaps he was referring to the skin first and then the pulp. Or maybe he described the apple over a span of time, from when it was ripe and red to when it was rotted and brown.

We need sufficient information before we can conclude that an actual contradiction is present, and writers sometimes don't supply more than bare details. We should presume innocence until guilt is proven. Those who claim the Bible contains contradictions must prove the statements in question could not be resolved by additional information. Here's a list of common Bible phenomena that are *not* contradictions or errors:

Different individuals reported at a location: Matthew reports only *one* angel at Jesus's tomb (Mt 28:2-7), while Luke reports two (Lk 24:4). But this is no more a contradiction than telling one friend, "I saw a movie last night," giving the impression that you went alone, while telling another, "My family and I went to the movies together," which indicates that you were not alone.

Applying modern definitions to ancient texts: Critics highlight apparent mistakes in science in Scripture as a way of showing that the Bible contains errors (e.g., rabbits chewing cud, Dt 14:7), but it is only natural that ancient writers used terms and descriptions that were accepted in their era.

Misunderstanding popular idioms: Idioms shouldn't be taken literally. For example, Jesus foretold that he'd be in the tomb three days (Mk 8:31). Technically, Friday at sundown to Sunday morning is not three whole days, but Jesus did not mean three days in the literal sense. Rather, he used a Hebrew idiom that counts any part of a day as the whole.

Differences in perspective: The creation accounts in Genesis 1 and 2 are markedly different. Rather than indicating a contradiction, scholars note that Genesis 1 gives a broad overview of creation, while Genesis 2 focuses on the creation of humans during the sixth day.

Copying mistakes by a scribe: In 2 Chronicles 9:25 we read that Solomon had four thousand horses, while 1 Kings 4:26 reports forty thousand. This is merely a copyist's error, not an original contradiction.

Different vantage points or details of the same event: The accounts of Jesus's resurrection vary in theme and detail. Far from counting as contradictions that undermine confidence in Scripture, the differences indicate that the accounts are drawn from eyewitnesses who recounted the events they experienced.