

## THE MYTH OF “FACTUAL” BIBLE CONTRADICTIONS

Eric Lyons, M.Min.

**H**is preacher described the young man as a “solid Christian.” He was a devout follower of Christ who was enthusiastic about living for Jesus. From the time he was a young boy, his grandmother had taken him to worship God on the first day of every week. After becoming a Christian, he had, according to his preacher, “attended every service of the church.” He grew in the faith, and began taking part in leading the congregation in prayer. Later, he personally taught the congregation by occasionally standing before the church and reading the Bible to them aloud, at times even delivering short talks. Before departing for the university (about an hour away from his hometown), the young 18-year-old from West Virginia was considered by those who knew him best as a dedicated Christian with impressive potential—one whose shield of faith would stand strong when worldliness attacked, and whose foundation would remain firm when shaken by the devil’s doctrines.

Sadly, only a short time passed before this young man lost his faith. He went to college as a believer in the God of the Bible, and came home an “enlightened” skeptic. One of the first classes he took at the university was an elective course on world religions. Initially, he thought he could handle whatever questions came his way about Christianity. He had memorized numerous verses in the Bible. He knew all about the uniqueness of the church. He even could tell people what to do in order to have their sins forgiven. It took, however, little time for **one** teacher in **one** class in **one** university to turn this “solid Christian” into an unbeliever.

What led to the demise of this young man’s belief in God, and the Bible as His Word? Why did this young Christian’s faith crumble so easily? It all began with his inability to handle the “factual discrepancies” that his newly found friends had convinced him were in the Bible. When asked to explain to his teacher and fellow classmates how hundreds of “Bible contradictions” are not contradictions at all, but simply misunderstandings on man’s part, he would not...**because he could not.** After being bombarded with hundreds of questions that he was incapable of answering, eventually he began denying the truths he once believed. Not long after this young man’s “transformation,” he gave one of his childhood mentors (the preacher of the church where he was reared) a document titled “Factual Discrepancies.” That document (of which I have a copy) contains nearly seventy alleged “factual” contradictions that supposedly are found within the Bible. Because this frustrated young man from West Virginia (who had been taught the Bible his whole life) was unable to answer these allegations, he gave up on the God of the Bible. His faith in the inerrant, inspired Word of God was replaced with the vacuousness of a skeptic’s uncertainty—all because he was unable to defend the Truth against the vicious, frequent attacks leveled against it by infidelity.

I wonder how many times this true story could be rehearsed by mothers and fathers all over the world? How many grandmothers (like the one mentioned above) have seen their “work” (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:12-15) destroyed at the hands of infidels? How many young college students leave home as “solid” Christians, and return four years later as “enlightened” skeptics?

This issue of *Reason & Revelation* is dedicated to answering six of the list of seventy alleged “factual” Bible contradictions the young West Virginian was presented at the university. It is my hope that you will see how easily these allegations can be answered—logically and truthfully. [The numbers of each “contradiction” match those on the list given to the young man. Our responses to most of the others can be found on the “Alleged Discrepancies” section of the Apologetics Press Web site.]

### “FACTUAL” CONTRADICTION #2

#### Animals or Man Created First?

**A**fter reading the first two chapters of the Bible, some skeptics, in an attempt to disprove the Bible’s inerrancy, have accused the writer of Genesis of erring in regard to the record of events occurring on day six of creation. While Genesis 1:24-27 plainly indicates that man was created **after** the animals, critics claim that Genesis 2:18-19 teaches that man was created **before** animals. Skeptics assert that such language by the author of Genesis proves that the Bible is not divinely inspired.

Some Bible students resolve this alleged contradiction by explaining that the Hebrew verb translated “formed” could have been translated “had formed.” In his *Exposition of Genesis*, H.C. Leupold wrote:

Without any emphasis on the sequence of acts, the account here records the making of the various creatures and the bringing of them to man. That in reality they had been made prior to the creation of man is so entirely apparent from chapter one as not to require explanation. But the reminder that God

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had “molded” them makes obvious His power to bring them to man and so is quite appropriately mentioned here. **It would not, in our estimation, be wrong to translate *yatsar* as a pluperfect in this instance: “He had molded.”** The insistence of the critics upon a plain past is partly the result of the attempt to make chapters one and two clash at as many points as possible (1942, p. 130, emp. added).

Hebrew scholar Victor Hamilton agreed with Leupold’s assessment of Genesis 2:19, as he also recognized that “it is possible to translate formed as ‘had formed’ ” (1990, p. 176). Keil and Delitzsch stated in the first volume of their Old Testament commentary that “our modern style for expressing the same thought [which the Holy Spirit via Moses intended to communicate—EL] would be simply this: ‘God brought to Adam the beasts which He **had formed**’ ” (1996, emp. added). Adding even more credence to this interpretation is the fact that the New International Version renders the verb in verse 19, not as simple past tense, but rather as a pluperfect: “Now the Lord God **had formed** out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air” (emp. added). Although Genesis chapters 1 and 2 agree even when *yatsar* is translated simply “formed,” it is important to note that the four Hebrew scholars mentioned above, and the translators of the NIV, all believe that it **could** (or should) be rendered “had formed.” And, as Leupold acknowledged, those who deny this possibility do so (at least partly) because of their insistence on making the two chapters disagree.

The main reason that skeptics do not see harmony in the events recorded in the first two chapters of the Bible (especially regarding the order of God’s creation—whether vegetation, birds, land animals, man, etc.) is because they fail to realize the fact that **Genesis 1 and 2 serve different purposes**. Chapter one (including 2:1-4) focuses on the **order** of the creation events; chapter two (actually 2:5-25) simply provides more detailed information about some of the events mentioned in chapter one. Chapter two never was meant to be a regurgitation of chapter one, but instead serves its own unique purpose—to develop in detail the more important features of the creation account, especially the creation of man and his surroundings. As Kenneth Kitchen noted in his book, *Ancient Orient and Old Testament*:

Genesis 1 mentions the creation of man as the last of a series, and without any details, whereas in Genesis 2 man is the center of interest and more specific details are given about him and

his setting. Failure to recognize the complementary nature of the subject-distinction between a skeleton outline of all creation on the one hand, and the concentration in detail on man and his immediate environment on the other, borders on obscurantism (1966, p. 117).

Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe summarized some of the differences in Genesis 1-2 in the following chart (1992, p. 35).

| Genesis 1           | Genesis 2      |
|---------------------|----------------|
| Chronological order | Topical order  |
| Outline             | Details        |
| Creating animals    | Naming animals |

The fact is,

Genesis 2 does not present a creation account at all but presupposes the completion of God’s work of creation as set forth in chapter 1.... [C]hapter 2 is built on the foundation of chapter 1 and represents no different tradition than the first chapter or discrepant account of the order of creation (Archer, 1982, pp. 68-69).

In short, Genesis chapters 1 and 2 are harmonious in every way. What may seem as a contradiction at first glance is essentially a more detailed account. The text of Genesis 2:19 says nothing about the relative origins of man and beast in terms of chronology, but merely suggests that the animals were formed before being brought to man in order to be named.

If one still rejects both the possibility of *yatsar* being translated “had formed,” and the explanation of the two chapters being worded differently because of the purposes they serve, a final response to the skeptic’s allegations is that the text never says that there were no animals created on the sixth day of creation **after** Adam. Although in my judgment it is **very unlikely** that God created a special group of animals to be named by Adam (after creating all others before the creation of man—Genesis 1:20-27), some commentators do hold this view. After his comments concerning the translation of *yatsar*, Victor Hamilton indicated that the creatures mentioned in 2:19 refer “to the creation of a **special group** of animals brought before Adam for naming” (1990, p. 176, emp. added). Hamilton believes that most all the animals on the Earth were created before Adam; however, those mentioned in 2:19 were created on day six after Adam, for the purpose of being named. In U. Cassuto’s comments on Genesis 2 regarding the time Adam named the animals, he stated: “Of all the species of



beasts and flying creatures that had been created and had spread over the face of the earth and the firmament of the heavens, the Lord God **now** formed particular specimens for the purpose of presenting them all before man in the midst of the Garden” (1961, p. 129, emp. added). Both of these long-time Bible students recognize that the text never says there were no animals created after Adam, but that all animals were created either on day five or day six (before and possibly even after Adam’s creation). However unorthodox (or unlikely) this particular position might be, it does serve as another reason why skeptics have no foundation upon which to stand when they assert that a contradiction exists between Genesis 1:24-27 and 2:19.

## “FACTUAL” CONTRADICTION #7

### A Slip of the Mind?

In 1 Corinthians 10:7-10, the apostle Paul gave four “examples” of how God’s chosen people in the Old Testament had sinned by lusting “after evil things.” At one time or another, the Israelites had been guilty of worshipping false gods (v. 7), committing sexual immorality (v. 8), as well as tempting God and complaining against the Almighty (vss. 9-10). It is the second example Paul gives in this list (involving the Israelites’ sexual immorality) that has been the brunt of much criticism. Allegedly, this verse is in direct opposition with what Moses recorded in the Pentateuch. Whereas Paul stated, “[I]n one day twenty-three thousand [Israelites—EL] fell” as a result of their sexual immorality (1 Corinthians 10:8), Moses recorded that “those who died in the plague were twenty-four thousand” (Numbers 25:9).

Some apologists (Archer, 1982, p. 401; Geisler and Howe, 1992, pp. 458-459) have attempted to resolve this infamous case of “the missing thousand” by claiming that the Old Testament event to which Paul alluded was the plague Jehovah sent upon the people after they made a golden calf (Exodus 32:35), and not the plague recorded in Numbers 25:9. The problem with this explanation is that Exodus 32 focuses on idolatry, not sexual immorality. Although idolatry sometimes included sexual immorality, most likely Paul was not referring to the events that took place after Moses’ descent from Mount Sinai (Exodus 32).

So how can we explain Paul’s statement in light of the information given in Numbers 25:9 (the probable “sister” passage to 1 Corinthians 10:8)? The answer lies in the fact that Paul stated that 23,000 fell “**in one day**,” while in Numbers 25 Moses wrote that the **total number** of those who died in the plague was 24,000. Moses never indicated how long it took for the 24,000 to die, but only stated that this was the number “who died in the plague.” Thus, the record in 1 Corinthians simply supplies us with more knowledge about what occurred in Numbers 25—23,000 of the 24,000 who died in the plague died “**in one day**.”

It is troubling to see how one particular apologist attempts to explain this alleged contradiction. In the popular book, *Hard Sayings of the Bible*, Walter Manfred Brauch made the following comments regarding “the missing thousand” in 1 Corinthians 10:8:

It is possible that Paul, citing the Old Testament from memory as he wrote to the Corinthians, referred to the incident in Numbers 25:9, but **his mind slipped** a chapter later in picking up the number.... [W]e cannot rule out the possibility that there was some reference to 23 or 23,000 in his local environment as he was writing and that caused a **slip in his mind**.

Paul was not attempting to instruct people on Old Testament history and certainly not on the details of Old Testament history.

Thus here we have a case in which **Paul apparently makes a slip of the mind** for some reason (unless he has special revelation he does not inform us about), but the mental error does not affect the teaching. How often have we heard preachers with written Bibles before them make similar errors of details that in no way affected their message? If we notice it (and few usually do), we (hopefully) simply smile and focus on the real point being made. As noted above, Paul probably did not have a written Bible to check (although at

times he apparently had access to scrolls of the Old Testament), but in the full swing of dictation **he cited an example from memory and got a detail wrong** (pp. 598-599, parenthetical comments in orig., emp. added).

Supposedly, Paul just made a mistake. He messed up, just like when a preacher today mistakenly misquotes a passage of Scripture. According to Brauch’s testimony, Paul merely had “a slip of the mind” (thereby experiencing what some today might call a “senior moment”), and our reaction (as well as that of the skeptics’) should be to “simply smile and focus on the real point being made.”

Unbelievable! These men pen an 800-page book in an attempt to answer numerous alleged Bible contradictions and to defend the integrity of the Bible, and they have the audacity to say that the apostle Paul “cited an example from memory and got a detail wrong.” Why in the world did Brauch spend so much time (and space) answering various questions that skeptics frequently raise, and then conclude that the man who penned almost half of the New Testament books made mistakes in his writings?! He has concluded exactly what the infidels teach—Bible writers made mistakes. Furthermore, if Paul made one mistake in his writings, he easily could have blundered elsewhere. And if Paul made mistakes in other writings, how can we say that Peter, John, Isaiah, and others did not “slip up” occasionally? The fact is, if Paul, or any of these men, made mistakes in their writings, then they were not inspired by God (cf. 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21), because God does not make mistakes (cf. Titus 1:2; Psalm 139:1-6). And if the Scriptures were not “given by inspiration of God,” then the Bible is not from God. And if the Bible is not from God, then the skeptic is right. But as we noted above, the skeptic is not right! First Corinthians 10:8 can be explained logically without assuming Paul’s writings are inaccurate.

Sadly, Brauch totally dismisses the numerous places where Paul claims his writings are from God. When Paul wrote to the churches of Galatia, he told them that his teachings came to him “through revelation of Jesus Christ” (1:12). In his first letter to the Thessalonian Christians, he claimed the words he wrote were “by the word of the Lord” (4:15). To the church at Ephesus, Paul wrote that God’s message was “revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets” (3:5). In 2 Peter 3:16, Peter put Paul’s letters on a par with the Old Testament Scriptures when he compared them to “the

## “FACTUAL” CONTRADICTION #21

### Motives Matter

In roughly 841 B.C., the commander of Israel’s army, Jehu the son of Jehoshaphat, was anointed king over the northern kingdom and was commanded by the Lord to “strike down the house of Ahab” and “cut off from Ahab all the males in Israel, both bond and free” (2 Kings 9:6-10). After receiving this command from the Lord via one of “the sons of the prophets,” Jehu began his assassination of Ahab’s family. He started by slaying Ahab’s son, Joram (also known as Jehoram), who was ruling Israel at the time Jehu was anointed king. He then proceeded to kill Ahaziah (the king of Judah and grandson of Jezebel—9:27-29) and forty-two of Ahaziah’s brothers (10:12-14). Later, he slew (or had others slay) Jezebel (the mother of Joram and former wife of the deceased Ahab—9:30-37), all seventy sons of Ahab who were living in Samaria and “all who remained to Ahab in Samaria” (10:1-10,17), and “all who remained of the house of Ahab in Jezreel,” including “all his great men and his close acquaintances, and his priests” (10:11). Jehu’s final stop was at the temple of Baal where, upon gathering all the Baal-worshipping leaders of Israel into the temple, he locked them up and had them massacred (10:18-27).

After Jehu had carried out his orders to obliterate all males from the house of Ahab, the Lord said to him:

Because you have done well in doing what is right in My sight, and have done to the house of Ahab all that was in My heart, your sons shall sit on the throne of Israel to the fourth generation (10:30).

Jehu had taken the most thorough means of suppressing the idolatry in Israel, and thus was granted protection on his throne, along with his sons after him, unto “the fourth generation.” The following chapters of 2 Kings indicate that the Lord was true to His word (as always; cf. Titus 1:2). Although the reigns of Jehu’s sons were described as kings who “did evil in the sight of Yahweh,” the Lord allowed them to reign to the fourth generation in order to fulfill His promise to Jehu.

Several years after the above events took place, the prophet Hosea expressed words that many skeptics have claimed are in opposition to what is stated in 2 Kings 9-10. When Gomer, Hosea’s wife, bore a son, Hosea declared that the Lord said, “Call his name Jezreel, for in a little while I will avenge the bloodshed of Jezreel on the house of Jehu, and bring an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel” (1:4). Those trying

rest of the Scriptures.” And in the same epistle where Brauch claims that Paul “made a slip of the mind,” Paul said, “the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord” (1 Corinthians 14:37).

Paul did not “invent” facts about Old Testament stories. Neither did he have to rely on his own cognizance to remember particular numbers or names. The Holy Spirit revealed the Truth to him—all of it (cf. John 14:26; John 16:13). Just like the writers of the Old Testament, Paul was fully inspired by the Holy Spirit (cf. 2 Samuel 23:2; Acts 1:16; 2 Peter 1:20-21; 3:15-16; 2 Timothy 3:16-17).

## “FACTUAL” CONTRADICTION #14

### A Coin Called “Doric”

Before Solomon began building the “holy house” of God, his father David challenged the Israelites to consecrate themselves by bringing an offering to the Lord that would be used in the Temple’s construction (1 Chronicles 29:3-5). The text indicates that “the leaders of the fathers’ houses, leaders of the tribes of Israel, the captains of thousands and of hundreds, with the officers over the king’s work, offered willingly” (29:6). They gave 5,000 talents of gold, 10,000 talents of silver, 18,000 talents of bronze, and 100,000 talents of iron. First Chronicles 29:7 also indicates that these Israelites gave 10,000 darics of gold.

The use of currency known as darics in a narrative that predated the invention of the currency by 500 years has led some to believe the author of Chronicles lacked divine guidance. These critics correctly assert that the daric was a coin of the Persian Empire (probably derived from Darius the Mede). Furthermore, **it is true** that even though the chronicler used the daric to evaluate a Temple offering that took place around 970 B.C., this coinage was unknown to David (*Wycliffe*, 1962). It was not minted before 515 B.C. (Dillard and Longman, 1994, p. 171), and probably was not known in Palestine until the fifth century B.C. (when the book of Chronicles likely was written). So why does this **not** invalidate the inerrancy of the Scriptures? After all, a narrative that has things (like money) in it that obviously did not exist when the narrative took place is nothing but a fairy tale, right?

Actually, the use of the term “daric” by the writer of Chronicles in the fifth century B.C. does not mean that he believed (or wanted his readers to believe) that the Israelites in David’s time possessed darics. The chronicler merely expressed—in lan-

guage that would be intelligible to his readers—the sum of the gold donated by the Israelites, without intending to assume that there were darics in use in the time of David (Keil and Delitzsch, 1996). He simply used a term that was popular in his own day to help his readers better understand the sacrifice of those who gave the gold (cf. Ezra 2:69; 8:27; Nehemiah 7:70-72).

The chronicler used a figure of speech known as “prolepsis” (the assignment of something, such as an event or name, to a time that precedes it). People often use prolepsis for the sake of convenience, or so that the reader or audience can better understand what is being communicated. For example, I might say, “My wife and I dated two years before we got married,” when actually she was not my wife when we were dating, but a very dear friend. We may see a special on television about when President Ronald Reagan was a boy, but the fact is, Ronald Reagan was not president of the United States when he was a boy. From time to time, even the Bible uses this kind



Darics courtesy of ancient-coin-forum.com

of accommodative language. In John 11, the Bible speaks of a woman named Mary who “anointed the Lord with ointment” (11:1-2), yet this anointing actually did not occur for about three months. John merely spoke about it as having already happened because when he wrote his gospel account, this event generally was known. Another example of prolepsis is found in Genesis 13:3 where we read that Abraham “went on his journey from the South as far as Bethel.” This area actually did not wear the name Bethel until years later when Jacob gave it that name (Genesis 28:19). However, when Moses wrote of this name hundreds of years later, he was free to use it even when writing about a time before the name actually was given. Likewise, the chronicler used accommodative language when explaining the free-will offerings given to help in constructing the Temple of God.

Admittedly, the writer of Chronicles used measures of his period familiar to modern readers even when writing about events that took place 500 years beforehand. However, converting measures does not destroy the inerrancy of Scripture!

to discredit the Bible's integrity argue that Hosea put himself into **obvious disagreement** with the inspired writer of 2 Kings, who thought that Jehu had done "all" that was in God's heart. Skeptics claim that the author of 2 Kings heaped praise on Jehu for the Jezreel massacre, but Hosea contradicted him when he said that the Lord would avenge the blood of Jezreel, and bring to an end the reign of the house of Jehu in Israel. What can be said about this "obvious disagreement"? Are these two passages harmonious, or is this a legitimate contradiction that should cause Bible believers like the young man from West Virginia to reject the book that has been tried and tested for hundreds of years?

First, we cannot be 100% certain that Hosea 1:4 is referring to the events recorded in 2 Kings 9-10. Although nearly all skeptics (and Bible commentators) link the two passages together, it must be understood that just because 2 Kings 9-10 is the only place in the Old Testament that describes suitable events located at Jezreel, it does not mean that Hosea must have been referring to those events. The honest student of God's Word has to admit that Hosea could have been referring to Jehu's sons who reigned after him. Perhaps his sons performed serious atrocities in Jezreel that are not recorded in 2 Kings. One cannot be certain that Hosea was indeed referring to the events recorded in 2 Kings 10. Having made such a disclaimer, it is my position that these two

passages **should** be linked, and thus the alleged contradiction raised by skeptics deserves an adequate explanation: How could God tell Jehu to destroy the house of Ahab, and then later condemn him (his house) via the words of Hosea for having done so?

The answer really is quite simple. As Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe observed: "God praised Jehu for obeying Him in destroying the house of Ahab, but condemned Jehu for his sinful motive in shedding their blood" (1992, p. 194). Skeptics are fond of citing 2 Kings 10:30 to support their position, but they often conveniently overlook verses 29 and 31, which state:

Jehu did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who had made Israel sin, that is, from the golden calves that were at Bethel and Dan.... Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of the Lord God of Israel with all his heart; for he did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam, who had made Israel sin.

Jehu obeyed God's command to "strike down the house of Ahab" and utterly exterminate his descendants (2 Kings 9:7-8; 10:30), but he did not obey God in **all** that he did (cf. Genesis 6:22). The passage in 2 Kings 10:29-31 indicates that even though Jehu had done what God commanded, "he did so out of a carnal zeal that was tainted with protective self-interest" (Archer, 1982, p. 208). It seems obvious that since Jehu followed in the footsteps of Israel's first wicked king by worshipping false gods and

not walking according to God's law, he did not destroy Ahab's descendants out of any devotion to the Lord. Furthermore, in commenting on Jehu's actions, biblical scholar Gleason Archer noted:

The important principle set forth in Hosea 1:4 was that when blood is shed, even in the service of God and in obedience to His command, blood-guiltiness attaches to God's agent himself if his motive was tainted with carnal self-interest rather than by a sincere concern for the purity of the faith and the preservation of God's truth (such as, for example, animated Elijah when he had the 450 prophets of Baal put to death after the contest with them on Mount Carmel) [1982, p. 209, parenthetical item in orig.].

Considering Jehu's actions by examining the motives behind those actions solves the alleged contradiction. Jehu's failure to obey God's commands and depart from the sins of Jeroboam revealed that he would have equally disobeyed the other commands as well, had it been contrary to his own desires. The story of Jehu's conquest teaches a great lesson, which Albert Barnes acknowledged in his commentary on Hosea: "[I]f we do what is the will of God for any end of our own, for anything except God, we do, in fact, our own will, not God's" (1997). Indeed, just as the apostle Paul taught in his discourse on love—**motives matter** (1 Corinthians 13:1-3)!

### "FACTUAL" CONTRADICTION #48

#### In What Order Did Satan Tempt Jesus?

If you have ever compared Matthew's account of Satan tempting Jesus in the wilderness with Luke's account, you likely noticed that there was a difference in the sequence of the recorded events (Matthew 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13). Both Matthew and Luke agree that Satan first tested Jesus by challenging Him to turn stones to bread. However, while the two disciples of Jesus agree on the content of the next two tests, the second and third temptations recorded by Matthew are "flip-flopped" in Luke's account. Matthew recorded that Satan's second temptation involved him trying to persuade Jesus to throw Himself down from the pinnacle of the Temple. The third temptation listed by Matthew was Satan's attempt to get Jesus to worship him. Even though Luke wrote about the same two events, he listed them in reverse order—Satan first desired adoration from Jesus, and then challenged Him to throw Himself down off the pinnacle of the Temple. Based upon this difference, skeptics claim we have a clear-cut "factual discrepancy."



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The problem with this allegation is that it is based upon an assumption. Those who claim that the “disorder” of temptations is a contradiction, presuppose that history always is written (or spoken) chronologically. However, common sense tells us otherwise. Open almost any world history textbook, and you will notice that even though most events are recorded chronologically, some are arranged topically. For example, in one chapter you may read about the European civilization in the late Middle Ages (A.D. 1000-1300). Yet, in the very next chapter you might learn about Medieval India (150 B.C.-A.D. 1400). Authors arrange textbooks thematically in order to reduce the confusion that would arise if every major event in those textbooks were arranged chronologically. Even when we rehearse life experiences to friends and family, oftentimes we speak climactically rather than chronologically. A teenager may return home from an amusement park, and tell his father about all of the roller coasters he rode at Six Flags. Likely, rather than mentioning all of them in the order he rode them, he will start with the most exciting ones, and end with the boring ones (if there is indeed such a thing as a “boring” roller coaster).

Had Matthew and Luke claimed to arrange the temptations of Jesus chronologically, then the skeptics would have a legitimate case. But, the fact of the matter is, neither Matthew nor Luke ever made any such claim. Either one of the two gospel writers recorded these events in the exact order in which they occurred, or both of them wrote topically. Most biblical scholars believe that it is very likely that Matthew was concerned more with the order of events in this story because of his use of words like “then” (4:5, Greek *tote*) and “again” (4:8, Greek *palin*). These two specific adverbs seem to indicate a more **sequential order** of the temptations. Luke simply links the events by using the Greek words *kai* and *de* (4:2,5-6, translated “and”). [The NKJV’s translation of *kai* as “then” in Luke 4:5 is incorrect. It should be translated simply “and” (cf. ASV, KJV, NASV, and RSV).] Similar to the English word “and” not having specific chronological implications, neither do the Greek words *kai* and *de* (Richards, 1993, p. 230). In short, Luke’s account of the temptations of Jesus is arranged topically (or possibly climactically), whereas Matthew’s account seems to be arranged chronologically.

### “FACTUAL” CONTRADICTION #56

#### Cock-a-doodle-do... Twice?

Perhaps the most famous alleged Bible contradiction centers on Peter’s triple denial of Jesus and the crowing of a rooster.

For years, skeptics have charged that Mark’s account of this event blatantly contradicts the other gospel accounts, thus supposedly “proving” the imperfection of the Scriptures. Even Bible believers have questioned the differences surrounding this event, yet relatively few have taken the time to understand them. Whenever people ask us about Peter’s denials and the differences within the gospel accounts, we often fail to give an adequate answer to their questions (see 1 Peter 3:15). This lack of understanding, and poor defense of God’s Word, has led skeptics to become more confident in their position (i.e., that the Bible is not God’s Word), and has caused some Bible believers (like the young West Virginia man I mentioned earlier) to abandon their position on the infallibility of the Scriptures.

The passages in question are found in Matthew 26, Mark 14, Luke 22, and John 13. Matthew, Luke, and John all quoted Jesus as saying that Peter would deny Him three times before the **rooster crowed**.

Jesus said to him, “Assuredly, I say to you that this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times” (Matthew 26:34).

Then He said, “I tell you, Peter, the rooster shall not crow this day before you will deny three times that you know Me” (Luke 22:34).

Jesus answered him... “Most assuredly, I say to you, the rooster shall not crow till you have denied Me three times” (John 13:38).

After the third denial actually took place, these three writers recorded that Jesus’ prophecy was fulfilled exactly the way He said it would be.

And immediately a rooster crowed. And Peter remembered the word of Jesus who had said to him, “Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times” (Matthew 26:74b-75).

Immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said to him, “Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times” (Luke 22:60-61).

Peter then denied again [for the third time—EL]; and immediately a rooster crowed (John 18:27).

Matthew, Luke, and John all indicated that Peter denied Jesus three times before the rooster crowed. Mark’s account, however, says otherwise. He recorded Jesus’ prophecy as follows: “Assuredly, I say to you that today, even this night, before the rooster crows **twice**, you will deny Me three times” (Mark 14:30, emp.

added). Following Peter’s first denial of Jesus, we learn that he “went out on the porch, and a rooster crowed” (Mark 14:68). After Peter’s third denial of Jesus, the rooster crowed “a second time.... Then Peter called to mind the word that Jesus had said to him, ‘Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times’ ” (Mark 14:72).

Mark differs from the other writers, in that he specified the rooster crowed once after Peter’s first denial, and again after his third denial. But, do these differences represent a legitimate contradiction? Absolutely not!

Consider the following illustration. A family of three went to a high school football game together for the first time. The father and son had been to several games prior to this one, but the mother never had been fortunate enough to attend a high school game until now. After entering the stadium, Ricky tells his 16-year-old son, Cary, that they will meet him right outside Gate 12 after **the** buzzer sounds. Having filed away the instructions, Cary races to the stands to ensure that he sees the opening kickoff. Ricky’s wife, Vickie, who did not hear the instructions he gave Cary, then asks him when they were going to see Cary again. He responds, “We are going to meet him right outside the gate we just entered after the **fourth** buzzer.” After the fourth buzzer? But he told Cary after **the** buzzer sounded they would meet him. Did Ricky contradict himself? No. At this particular stadium, the time keepers normally sound a buzzer after each quarter. But, when we say “at the buzzer,” or when we speak of “a buzzer beater” (such as in basketball), usually we are referring to the **final** buzzer. Cary was familiar with sports lingo, and thus Ricky told him they would see him “after the buzzer sounds.” Vickie, on the other hand, having never attended a football game in her life, was given different instructions. In a more precise way, Ricky instructed her that Cary would meet them, not after the first, second, or third buzzer,



but after the fourth and final buzzer that marks the end of regulation play. Ricky knew that if he told Vickie, “Cary will meet us after the buzzer sounds,” she would have expected to meet him after the first buzzer sounded. Thus, Ricky simply informed Vickie in a more detailed manner. Surely, no one would claim that Ricky had contradicted himself.

In a similar way, no one should assume that because three of the gospel writers mentioned **one** crowing, while Mark mentioned **two** crowings, that a contradiction exists. Realistically, there were two “rooster crowings.” However, it was the second one (the only one Matthew, Luke, and John mentioned) that was the “main” crowing (like the fourth buzzer was the “main” buzzer at the football game). In the first century, roosters were accustomed to crowing **at least twice** during the night. The first crowing (which only Mark mentioned—14:68) usually occurred between twelve and one o’clock. Relatively few individuals ever heard or acknowledged this crowing (see “cock,” *Fausset’s Bible Dictionary*, 1998). It is likely that Peter never heard it; else surely his slumbering conscience would have awakened.

The second crowing took place not long before daybreak. It was this latter crowing that commonly was called “the cockcrowing.” Why? Because it was at this time of night (just before daybreak) that roosters crowed the loudest, and their “shrill clarion” was useful in summoning laborers to work (see “cock-crowing,” McClintock and Strong, 1968, 2:398). This crowing of the roosters served as an alarm clock to those in the ancient world. Mark recorded earlier in his gospel account that Jesus spoke of this “main” crowing when He said: “Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming—in the evening, at midnight, **at the crowing of the rooster**, or in the morning” (Mark 13:35, emp. added). Interestingly, even when workers were called to their labors via artificial devices (e.g., bugles), this time of the night still was designated by the proverbial phrase, “the cockcrowing” (see “cock-crowing” in McClintock and Strong, 2:398). If you lived in the first century, and your boss said to be ready to work when “the rooster crows,” you would know he meant that work begins just before daybreak. If he said that work begins at the second crowing of the rooster, likewise, you would know he meant the same thing—work begins just before daylight. These are not contradictory statements, but rather two ways of saying the same thing.

When Jesus said, “Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times” (Matthew 26:34), it is obvious that He was using the phrase “the rooster crows” in the more conventional way. Mark, on the other hand, specified that there were two crowings. In the same way that the husband gives his wife more detailed instructions concerning a football game, Mark used greater precision in recording this event. It may be that Mark quoted the exact words of Jesus, while the other writers (under the guidance of the Holy Spirit) saw fit to employ the less definite style to indicate the same time of night (McGarvey, 1875, p. 355). Or, perhaps Jesus made both statements. After Peter declared that he never would deny the Lord, Jesus could have repeated His first comment and added another detail, saying: “[E]ven this night, before the rooster crows **twice**, you will deny Me three times” (Mark 14:30, emp. added). We cannot be certain why Mark’s account is worded differently than the other writers, but by understanding that “the rooster crowing” commonly was used to indicate a time just before daybreak, we can be assured that absolutely no contradiction exists among the gospel writers.

## CONCLUSION

**I**n just over six thousand words, six of the seventy “factual” Bible contradictions given to the young West Virginian who abandoned his faith in the inspired, inerrant Word of God have been radically downgraded from “factual” to “fictitious.” If space permitted, each one of the “factual” contradictions could be refuted rather easily with the proper use of both “reason” and “revelation.”

What would have happened if the young man from West Virginia had taken the time to investigate these matters? Where would he be today, had someone been able to show him how all these “factual” Bible contradictions are anything but factual? Surely, by now you realize that the blows of the critic’s axe need not shake the Christian’s faith. Indeed, after almost 2,000 years of “skeptics’ blows,” God’s forest of inspiration still stands unmarred.

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## IN MEMORIAM

From time to time, “special” people have a significant impact on our lives. They listen to us, encourage us, esteem us, love us, and yes, sometimes even chastise us. They are people we truly admire and respect.

Sadly, on occasion, before we think to tell them how truly special they are, and just how much they are appreciated, they are taken from us in an untimely fashion by death. Once they are gone, we look for a way to commemorate their lives and keep their memories fresh in our minds, and in the minds of others. Then again, happily, sometimes we remember to stop and honor a special friend during his or her lifetime. We think to “stop and smell the roses”—and both we and they are the better for it.

If you would like to memorialize someone after their passing, or if you would like to honor a still-living friend or loved one, we invite you to do so by making a donation to the work of Apologetics Press. What better way to remember, or honor, that “special someone” than by sending a contribution in their name to help us spread and defend the Gospel of Christ?

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## ANNOUNCING A NEW BOOK: THE ANVIL RINGS

The feature article in this month's issue of *Reason & Revelation*—authored by Eric Lyons, the Director of Research at Apologetics Press—is devoted to answering a variety of accusations routinely offered up by atheists, skeptics, and infidels to suggest that the Bible contains all kinds of “factual contradictions.” Eric (and I) felt that our readers needed to see, not just the allegations that are being leveled against God’s Word, but also the Christian’s response to those allegations.

Surely, of all the challenges to a Christian’s faith, one of the most disturbing is the charge that the Bible is filled with discrepancies and contradictions. If true, such a charge certainly would serve to negate the inerrancy and inspiration of the Bible. If even one of the biblical writers made such errors, how, then, could we say that the others did not “slip up” on occasion as well? The fact is, as Eric correctly points out in his article,

if any of these men made errors in their writings, then they were not inspired by God (cf. 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21), because God does not make mistakes (cf. Titus 1:2; Psalm 139:1-6). And if the Scriptures were not “given by inspiration of God,” then the Bible is not from God. And if the Bible is not from God, then the skeptic is right. But...the skeptic is not right!

No, the skeptic is **not** right! As Charlie Brown (of the *Peanuts* comic strip) once said to his sometimes-nemesis, Lucy: “You’re not right; you just **sound** right!”

Admittedly, at times the skeptic “sounds right.” It is a simple matter for an unbeliever to hurl a barrage of alleged discrepancies or contradictions at a believer. It is not always a simple task for the believer to respond. This is the case because many of the alleged discrepancies cannot be answered with merely a “wave of the hand.” Instead, they require many hours of in-depth research and an unwavering commitment to Truth. Sadly, at times, those who are confronted with these so-called errors do not know how to respond, are unwilling to invest the time and effort required to prepare a reasoned response, or already have a faith that is so weak that it crumbles at the first hint of controversy.

In his timely and well-written article, Eric relates the sad-but-true story of a young Christian college student who had received a list of nearly seventy of these alleged contradictions. Such lists are readily available—via books, on the Internet, in university classrooms, and elsewhere. What is **not** readily available is a sourcebook on these issues that can help people who are searching for (and sometimes struggling to find) answers to questions such as those posed by the skeptic.

Now, however, such a sourcebook **is** available. When it comes to seeking out and defending the Truth, Eric has a tireless commitment and a dogged determination (if you knew

him personally—as many of our readers do—you would understand just how committed to Truth he actually is, and just how dogged his determination can be!). Additionally, he has been willing (in fact, more than willing!) to invest countless hours of in-depth research investigating the putative “biblical errors” proffered by the skeptic. [The proof of that fact can be found not only in this book, but also in the many articles Eric has personally authored for the “Alleged Discrepancies” section of our Web site; if you have not taken advantage of the rich repository of his research that is available there, I encourage you to do so. You will be amazed at both the number, and the quality, of the articles that flow from the pen of this incredibly talented young man.]

In *The Anvil Rings* (subtitled “Answers to Alleged Bible Discrepancies”), Eric has selected samples of some of the most difficult alleged Bible discrepancies, and has performed the in-depth research necessary to answer them. This volume answers, in a thorough and sensible way, numerous questions raised by skeptics: Did Jesus rise from the grave **on** the third day or **after** three days?; Was Terah **70** or **130** when Abraham was born?; How long was the Israelites’ Egyptian sojourn?; Are the resurrection narratives contradictory?; and many others. At only \$9.95, this book represents an invaluable resource for those who are seeking answers to difficult questions. [Eric already has begun work on a second volume, which will answer still more of these types of questions.] Call us toll free at 800/234-8558 to order your copy.

**Bert Thompson**

