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Biblical Contradictions: Embracing the Errors of Scripture as our Spiritual Teachers

Henry Craig Hadley
chadley19@georgefox.edu

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

PROJECT PORTFOLIO:

BIBLICAL CONTRADICTIONS

EMBRACING THE ERRORS OF SCRIPTURE AS OUR SPIRITUAL TEACHERS



IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

PORTLAND SEMINARY

BY:

HENRY CRAIG HADLEY

PROJECT FACULTY:

DR. COLLEEN BUTCHER

PORTLAND, OREGON

APRIL 2022



CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

This certifies that the doctoral Project Portfolio of

Henry Craig Hadley

has been approved by
the Evaluation Committee on March 10, 2022
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Semiotics, Church, and Culture.

Evaluation Committee:

Primary Project Faculty: H. Colleen Butcher, DMin

Second Project Faculty: Aaron Friesen, PhD

Lead Mentor: Leonard I. Sweet, PhD

Evaluation Committee Referee: Clifford Berger, DMin

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Dedication

For the wonderful people of Paradox Church, who love to start discussions rather than end them.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to Colleen Butcher for overseeing this project from beginning to end. Thank you to my amazing crew, Jordan Kattenhorn, Brandon Herrmann, Zoe Nixon, and Bobby Stindt, for taking my sketchy ideas and turning them into tangible films. Thank you to Crystal Chavez, Emily Unterseher, Jennifer Halverson, and Leslie Escudero for creating beautiful art. Thank you to all the models in the films who patiently sat through each shooting experience. Thank you to all the research participants for the gift of your time from the beginning to the end of this project. Thank you to Paradox Church for the gift of the best job in the world and for supporting me through this entire journey. Thank you to my wonderful cohort for somehow making class on Monday mornings at 6:00 am an enjoyable experience. Thank you to the Portland Seminary Team: Leonard Sweet, Loren Kerns, Heather Rainey, and Clifford Berger. Thank you to my parents for unconditional love. Thank you to my children, Maya and Bode, for always finding a way to make me laugh when I feel stressed. And thank you, thank you, thank you to my wife, Kimi, for loving me, cheering for me, and inspiring me every day. I love you.

Epigraph

The most ubiquitous symbol of Christianity
exposes the contradictory nature of faith in Jesus Christ:
The cross represents the foundational belief that God dies in this story.

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Research Method

This Project utilized a blended methodology that draws upon bibliographic resources, data derived from stakeholder collaboration, and human-centered design and iteration processes to create a heuristic-based, application-oriented Project.

Abstract

In 2016, Barna Group reported that “Among practicing Protestants, nine out of 10 in every age group say either that the Bible is the actual word of God (should be taken literally, word for word) or that it’s the inspired word of God without error.”¹ This belief system causes Protestant Christians to ignore, gloss over, and explain away all the contradictions they discover in the Bible, rather than participate with the contradictions wholeheartedly. There is an opportunity to help Protestant Christians take part in more dialogue about contradictions, engage in more study of the Bible because of the contradictions, and to embrace the contradictions of scripture as springboards to grow in faith.

After researching and prototyping for two years, we² produced a seven-part film series to inspire face-to-face conversations among Protestant Christians about Biblical contradictions. Once completed, we sent these films to seventy research participants.³

We found that a significant portion of participants desired to study the Bible more because of our content, a drastic change in the way participants viewed contradictions affecting

¹ *The Bible in America: The Changing Landscape of Bible Perceptions and Engagement* (Ventura, CA: Barna Group, 2016), p. 90.

² When I use the pronoun “We,” I am referring to the incredible team of people who helped me make this project: from the faculty and staff at Portland Seminary, to my classmates, to the volunteers who participated in research, to the film crew, all of us made these films together.

³ The actualization of this film series occurred primarily at Paradox Church in Redlands, California. Currently, I serve as the Lead Pastor at Paradox.

the value of scripture, and a notable increase in the number of participants willing to engage in dialogue about contradictions with their friends, families, and members of their church.

Introduction

Three years ago, in September of 2019, I flew up to Portland to begin the Doctor of Ministry program with Portland Seminary. During that initial period, I wanted my project to be focused on preaching¹ with an awareness of one's social location. As I met classmates and faculty from the school, the conversations inevitably shifted toward what our projects might be about. As I shared this idea with faculty and classmates, I found a lot of clarifying questions and confusion about the project. Additionally, I detected skepticism and weariness because it ultimately was a cisgender heterosexual white male leading the discussion, which has been done a plethora of times before with poor results. After our time in Portland ended, I remember looking out the window on the flight home² and metaphorically releasing the idea of the project about social location to the ground below.

When I returned to work at Paradox Church, I stepped back into the pulpit and continued the church's sermon series on Ezra and Nehemiah. I highlighted the racism at the core of Nehemiah's work and theology and discussed how his picture of God blatantly contradicted the picture of God in the book of Ruth. After the worship service, the congregation expressed appreciation for me being willing to address the contradictions in the Bible and shared a desire for me to talk about contradictions even more. Over the next couple of weeks, I scoured the internet to get a sense of the resources available on Biblical contradictions. The overwhelming

¹ I currently serve as the Lead Pastor at Paradox Church in Redlands, California. My job asks me to preach at least 35 times per year. I love this, because preaching is one of my passions in life.

² I live in Redlands, California.

majority of resources on contradictions created a false dichotomy: either you deny the existence of the contradictions in scripture so you can continue to believe, or you acknowledge the contradictions and accept the Bible as an uninspired work. I wanted to create a resource for people who sought a third way of speaking about the contradictions in scripture; a resource that could help one to love the contradictions and view them as teachers about the character of God.

In October of 2019, I presented this idea to my peer group³ and project faculty,⁴ and I received a very different reaction than the previous project. Rather than being met with skepticism, I saw a genuine curiosity and enthusiasm toward what this project about contradictions might become. There were still plenty of questions, but these questions were not rooted in confusion. Rather the questions stood on a foundation of excitement and hope. After that meeting, I knew that Biblical contradictions was the direction I wanted my project to go. Around this time, my project faculty advised me to spend a significant amount of time researching the origins, history, and implementation of the idea that the Bible needs to be inerrant. The definition of inerrant we will be using for the remainder of this project is “incapable of being wrong.”⁵

³ Jamilah Merrick, Jimi Delap, and Andy Stinson.

⁴ Dr. Colleen Butcher.

⁵ *The New Oxford American Dictionary*. Oxford University Press. 2005. Accessed via Apple Computer App.

A few weeks later, we put together a discovery session of stakeholders to brainstorm and discuss the implications of Biblical contradictions. Finding stakeholders to participate in this discussion proved to be relatively easy. Every participant I asked wanted to be in the room talking about Biblical contradictions. The discovery session revealed that these participants, all of which grew up in Protestant Christian traditions, experienced the doctrine of Biblical inerrancy as a weapon, and that the stakeholders witnessed and experienced the emotional weight of that pain firsthand.⁶ The group settled on this NPO statement: “Considering young persons and the marginalized, we’ve discovered a stagnancy of faith and oppression which is caused by a fear of change and perceived loss of power. If solved, it would lead to ‘the courage and vulnerability to search and grow.’”⁷ A few weeks later, after conducting one-on-one interviews with three spiritual leaders and consulting with my peer group and project faculty, I updated the NPO to read, “Considering Christians in America, we’ve discovered that Biblical contradictions threaten spiritual growth which is caused by the doctrine of Biblical inerrancy. If solved, it would mean Christians could swim in the depths of a meaningful faith.”

During the next semester, I spent months researching the history of the doctrine of Biblical inerrancy, and then writing about how that doctrine influenced the way that Protestant Christians in America think about the Bible. The most stunning aspect of this research was the fact that the doctrine of inerrancy is a very recent idea in the Bible’s history. Its origins can be

⁶ The group shared stories of sexism, racism, homophobia, and obtuse self-righteousness. The storytellers all felt that spiritual leaders used inerrancy to justify these sins.

⁷ This quote was attributed by the stakeholder who suggested it to the work of Brené Brown.

traced back to the late 19th century, when a group of professors from Princeton Theological Seminary first articulated and incorporated a doctrine in response to the work of Charles Darwin. Over the next one-hundred years, inerrancy rose in popularity among Protestant Christians until the year 1978, when a large group of Evangelical church leaders gathered in Chicago and produced The Chicago Statement. This statement introduced modern inerrancy,⁸ which is how most Christians think of the doctrine of inerrancy today. The main problem is that most Protestant Christians I interact with today believe the idea of modern inerrancy is millenniums old, when the fact is inerrancy is only a few decades old. I realized that demonstrating the recency of this doctrine needed to be stated up front for the success of this project. This idea would be critical going forward to help engage people in the conversation about contradictions.

During the third semester,⁹ we organized a workshop composed of pastors who are currently in the field and expressed an interest in engaging their congregations in a conversation about Biblical contradictions. In discussion, these pastors settled on three big ideas that get to the heart of the need, the problem, and the opportunity surrounding Biblical contradictions:

1) We are dealing with fragile faith. Churches and pastors frequently tell congregants that if there is just one contradiction in all of scripture, then it can cause all of Christendom to crumble. This breeds fragile faith and is why so many Christians approach the contradictions in scripture with great trepidation.

⁸ “Modern inerrancy” is the term I am using to describe how most Christians understand Biblical inerrancy today. A working definition for modern inerrancy is the belief that the Bible is free of any contradictions or errors.

⁹ Fall of 2020.

2) We are skipping over the human experience in the Bible. Most Christians that we interact with prefer for us to act as though God wrote the Bible. The fact is, human beings wrote the Bible, and the Bible is the word of God through the words of humans. This humanity should be celebrated, rather than ignored.

3) We avoid the contradictions because they are messy. Inerrancy is widely accepted by Protestant Christians, but inerrancy is a recent doctrine in the Bible's history. To begin to pull that doctrine apart and return to the Bible's original intent can be highly divisive, so most churches prefer to avoid the mess.

Over the course of the next semester,¹⁰ I developed two prototypes designed to address the concern of the pastors above and to engage the contradictions in an accessible way. The first prototype was an audio podcast. Using music and spoken word, I walked listeners through a series of contradictions in scripture and discussed how to embrace them as spiritual teachers. The podcast lasted about ten minutes, and it required listeners to have a Bible in front of them.

The second prototype was a video where I delivered a sermon about a Biblical contradiction,¹¹ and used artists and art to illustrate a new way of thinking about the Bible with its many contradictions. The participants in the research absolutely loved the visualization of a tangible way to embrace contradictions. The video scored significantly higher and elicited much richer conversations than the audio podcast. This research provided a clear path forward; the best

¹⁰ Spring of 2021.

¹¹ Deuteronomy 23 condemns anyone with damaged genitals while Mark 8 affirms anyone with damaged genitals.

way to engage people in this conversation would be through a visual medium. The new goal was to create a seven-part film series that walked people through the history of inerrancy, the contradictions of scripture, and toward the inspiration of God.

The penultimate semester¹² was, without a doubt, the hardest semester of my time at Portland Seminary. During this segment, I wrote seven scripts, contacted and hired a cast and crew, scouted and secured a filming location, storyboarded and communicated how the films were going to unfold, performed in all seven films, and then edited all seven films. While the work, at times, was overwhelming, I also look back at this time with a lot of joy in my heart. There was something magical about seeing all the work at Portland Seminary coming together into a tangible project. Not only that, but I was proud of the early returns on the films. The artists in the films blew me away by the beauty they produced on their canvases in a limited time. Additionally, the raw footage that Jordan Kattenhorn¹³ showed me turned out even better than my highest hopes. While most of the people on set were not dedicated professionals in their respective roles,¹⁴ I felt like the quality of work coming out of the warehouse exceeded the work of amateurs.

But as much fun as it is to produce shiny projects, the real test arrived in the last semester.¹⁵ After completing the edits on all seven films, we sent surveys out to seventy-five

¹² Fall of 2021.

¹³ Jordan was the Director of Photography for this film series.

¹⁴ The only people who are professionals in the role they played on set were the artists, and one model who is a professional actor.

¹⁵ Spring 2022.

willing participants, then asked them to watch all seven films, and finally asked them to complete a final survey to see how the films influenced their perspective on Biblical contradictions. I must admit, my heart raced when I pushed “Send” on the email that contained the films. However, the response¹⁶ over the next month¹⁷ was one of the most rewarding experiences of my ministerial career. Participants told me that they could not stop watching these films as soon as they started the first film. They asked if they could share these films with their friends and family,¹⁸ which is the highest compliment they could give me regarding this work. As far as the research, I was excited to find that over two-thirds of participants felt that this film series inspired them to want to study the Bible more. This metric matters. Because when we explicitly talk about the contradictions of scripture, it’s possible to be so discouraging with these conversations that people walk away from the Bible and the faith entirely. But the majority wanted to study the Bible more after viewing these films. Lastly, we set high benchmarks for this project, and we met and surpassed each of those benchmarks.

I consider this project to be successful. And I am proud of the work that the entire team created to address Biblical contradictions. The final NPO statement for this project reads, “The majority of practicing Protestant Christians believe that the Bible is meant to be taken literally or that the Bible is without error. There is an opportunity to help these Christians participate in

¹⁶ We set a goal of getting a minimum of 50 participants to watch all seven films and complete both surveys. Sixty-one people ended up completing the research.

¹⁷ Participants had 25 days to fill out the first survey, watch the films, and then fill out the second survey.

¹⁸ The answer right now is, “Not yet.” We are set to premiere these films at Paradox Church in May and June of 2022.

more dialogue about the contradictions, engage in more study of the Bible because of the contradictions, and to embrace the contradictions of scripture as springboards to grow in faith.”

I am grateful for the people at Portland Seminary who designed the program in this way. They made this project manageable from beginning to end and found a way to ensure both room for creativity and room for academic scholarship. Looking ahead, I cannot wait to share these films with Paradox Church, and then, by extension, other Protestant Christians who search for a conversation about Biblical contradictions on the internet. My hope is that these films may help that person release the false dichotomy of Biblical contradictions, that you either ignore them or leave the faith. Instead, I hope they may see a third way forward, where they learn to embrace the contradictions as spiritual teachers and celebrate the contradictions’ existence. From there, I believe the contradictions of scripture can lead humans deeper into the heart of the Christian tradition, where we can find the unmitigated inspiration of God.

Project

INTRODUCTION

Currently, I serve as the Lead Pastor at Paradox Church in Redlands, California. Throughout my ministerial career, I discovered laypeople frequently hold a low-level anxiety about the trustworthiness of the Bible. There is a real sense that if the Bible contains just one mistake, then the entire Christian faith will collapse as a false narrative. For this reason, I became fascinated with Biblical contradictions. Christians exert a copious amount of effort to avoid or even explain away the contradictions, while others who have left the faith hold up the contradictions as spiritual validation. And yet, the contradictions remain in scripture. My hope is that this project will help ease Christians' anxiety about the inconsistencies of scripture, open the doors of the church wider to those who have left the faith behind, and enrich conversations about the role of scripture in our lives today.

NPO STATEMENT

The majority of practicing Protestant Christians believe that the Bible is meant to be taken literally or that the Bible is without error. There is an opportunity to help these Christians participate in more dialogue about the contradictions, engage in more study of the Bible because of the contradictions, and to embrace the contradictions of scripture as springboards to grow in faith.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

To create a seven-part film series walking people through the history of inerrancy, the contradictions in scripture, and the value of the Bible. These films will be placed on social media and tagged and labeled to be found by anyone who desires a thoughtful discussion about Biblical contradictions.

PROJECT SCOPE

- Produce seven short films, approximately fifteen minutes in length each.
- Films involve a cast and crew. The cast will be four artists and several models, while the crew will be three people at each shoot.
- Approximate budget for this project will be \$5000, mostly devoted to the artists, the crew, and the art supplies (we have most of the equipment purchased already).
- The Bible contains contradictions. My research will be rooted in what do with the contradictions instead of a debate about whether the Bible contains contradictions.
- My work will be constructive rather than destructive. While there some doctrines will be scrutinized, my goal is to be helpful to Christians rather than discouraging to Christians.
- This research and work are limited to the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. Other religious texts, as well as the Apocrypha, will not be examined.

BENCHMARKS

1. That people who view all seven films would give us an average 8 out of 10 (or higher) on the quality of the production of the films (one being home video quality and ten being Hollywood quality).
2. That at least 70% of the participants are more willing to engage in dialogue at their church about Biblical contradictions and the inerrancy of scripture.
3. That at least 50% of the participants are more willing to engage in face-to-face dialogue with family about Biblical contradictions and the inerrancy of scripture.
4. That at least 50% of the participants respond that the material helped them to see value in the Bible even though the Bible contains contradictions.

PRESENTATION/DOCUMENTATION OF PROJECT

Part 1-The Proverbial Contradiction

Proverbs 26:4 and 5

[Click Here to Watch This Video](#)



Part 2-The Crucifixion Contradiction

Matthew 27:37, Mark 15:26, Luke 23:38, and John 19:19

[Click Here to Watch This Video](#)



Part 3-The Gospel Contradiction

Matthew 21, Mark 11, Luke 19, and John 11

[Click Here to Watch This Video](#)



Part 4-The Royal Contradiction

2 Kings 23:28-30 and 2 Chronicles 35:20-27

[Click Here to Watch This Video](#)



Part 5-The Resurrection Contradiction

Matthew 28:1-10, Mark 16:1-8, Luke 24:1-12, and John 20:1-18

[Click Here to Watch This Video](#)



THE RESURRECTION CONTRADICTION
MATTHEW 28:1-10, MARK 16:1-8, LUKE 24:1-12, & JOHN 20:1-18

Part 6-The Creation Contradiction

Genesis 1 and Genesis 2

[Click Here to Watch This Video](#)



Part 7-The Biblical Contradictions

Genesis 1-Revelation 22

[Click Here to Watch This Video](#)



ASSESSMENT

To measure the effectiveness of this film series, I invited seventy-five people to fill out a survey, watch all seven films, and then fill out a second survey to measure any kind of change. While I hoped for a minimum of fifty people to watch the entire series and complete both surveys, sixty-one participants fulfilled the requirements.

The first benchmark that my team and I set was in the quality of the films. On the second survey participants rated our films on a scale of one to ten, with one being home video quality and ten being Hollywood quality. Our goal was to average a score of eight on this scale, and we met that goal by averaging a score of 8.4. We achieved this rating by getting talented people

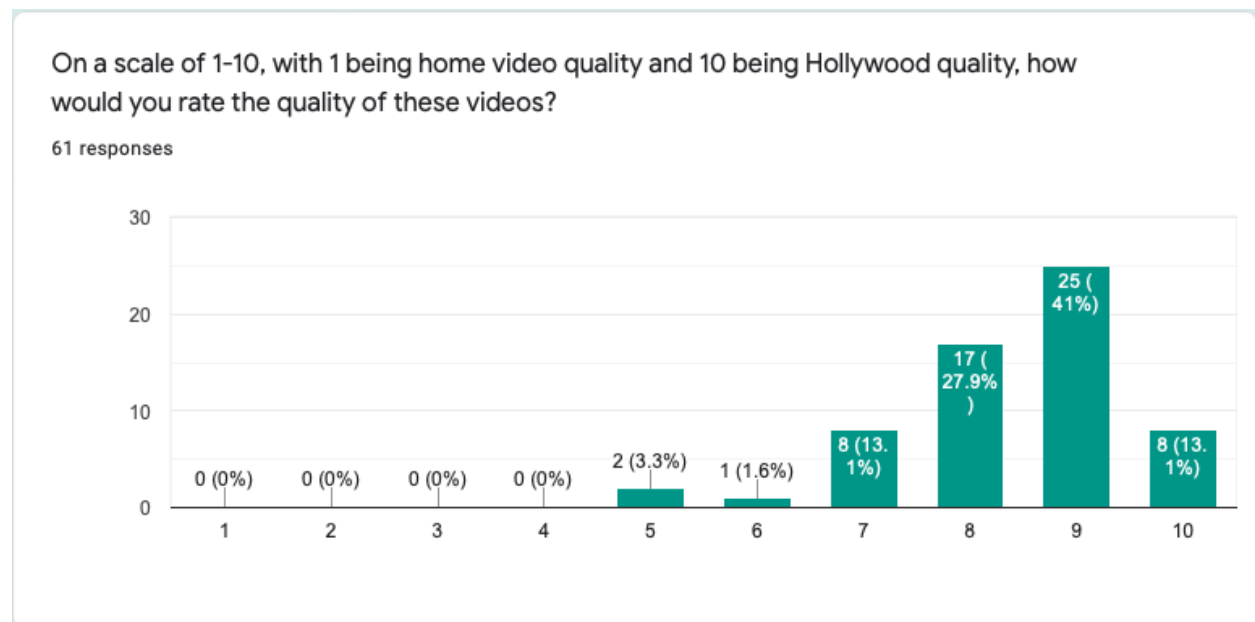


Figure 1-Survey Results on the Quality of the Films

involved on the project. While Jordan Kattenhorn and Brandon Herrmann are not professionals in the film industry, they are both talented in the way they produce and record images and sounds (respectively). After they agreed to lend their skills to this project, I felt achieving a score of 8

was entirely possible from the standpoint of production quality. The last piece of the puzzle fell into place when I heard the musical duo WEARETHEGOOD. Their music brought an edginess that our films needed, and we licensed their music through Artlist. I believe the total efforts of all these talented people are what pushed us over our benchmark.

As far as how people reacted to the content of the films, one of the benchmarks we set was for people to feel that they were more willing to engage in dialogue at church after seeing these films. For that reason, we asked participants after they watched the film series, “Are you more willing now to discuss the contradictions of the Bible in face-to-face conversations at your church or social community?” The benchmark we hoped to achieve was 70% of participants to respond with an affirmative to that question. We exceeded that number, and 83% of participants responded with “Yes” they now felt more willing to engage in dialogue

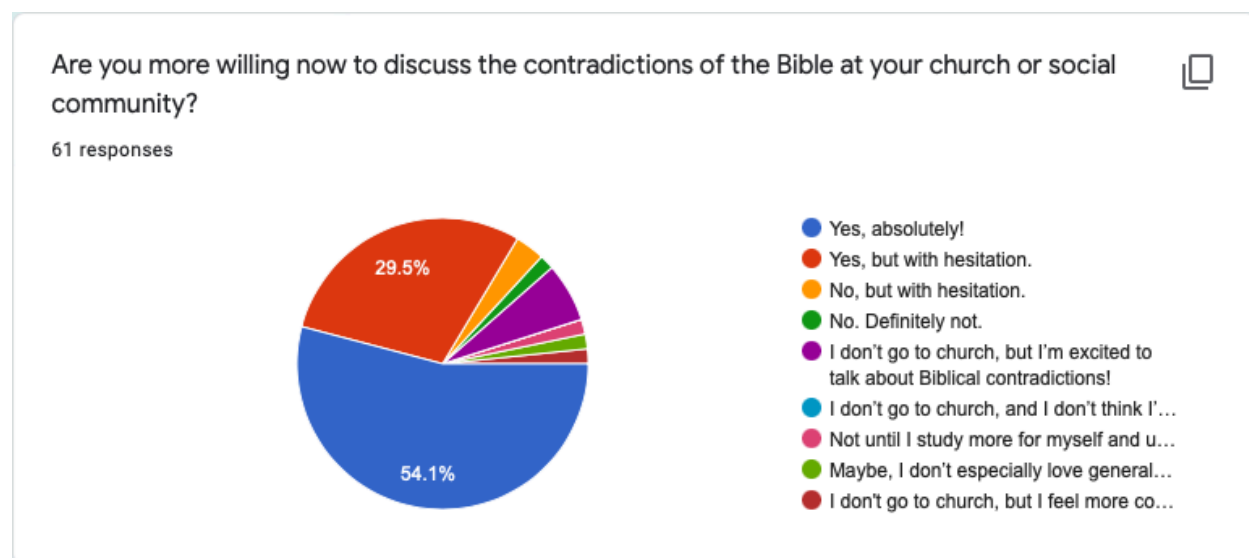


Figure 2-Survey Results on Willingness to Discuss Contradictions at Church

about contradictions at their church. I believe the reason for this is because we rooted the discussion about Biblical contradictions in the tradition of Protestant Christian history, rather

than a new-age paradigm that pulled Christians further away from the tradition. In writing these scripts, I hoped that people would be able to feel like they were more in line with the Christian tradition for embracing the contradictions.

What surprised me in this research is that participants were more willing to discuss Biblical contradictions with their friends and family than they were to discuss those same contradictions at church. For that reason, we lowered the benchmark to 50% for participants to be more willing to engage in dialogue with their social circles. However, we found participants express a stronger desire to discuss contradictions with friends and family about these ideas instead of discussing them at church.

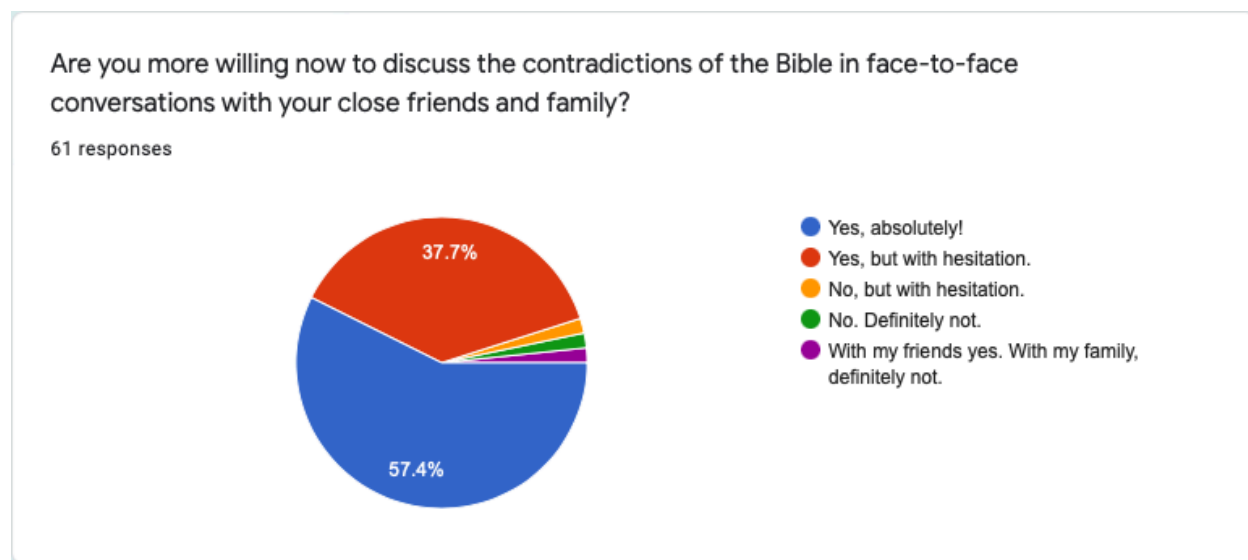


Figure 3-Survey Results on Willingness to Discuss Contradictions with Family

Over 95% of participants said they were more willing to discuss contradictions face-to-face with friends and family. In my pastoral experience, I have found that the reason people are more willing to talk to their friends and family about faith is usually tied to them being informed and educated on the topics they are discussing. More people are willing to engage in conversations, I

believe, because we attempted to educate them on the origin of the doctrine of inerrancy, and demonstrated how the Bible can function in real, tangible ways with an embrace of the imperfections of scripture.

Our last benchmark was set with the hope that people who viewed the film series would not walk away from the Bible because of the contradictions, but instead would accept and love reading the Bible more because of the contradictions highlighted in the film series. Our desire was that 50% of the participants would find the Bible to still be valuable even after we set out to point out and highlight the contradictions. We set this up by asking the following question in the first survey, before any of the participants in the research watched the films.

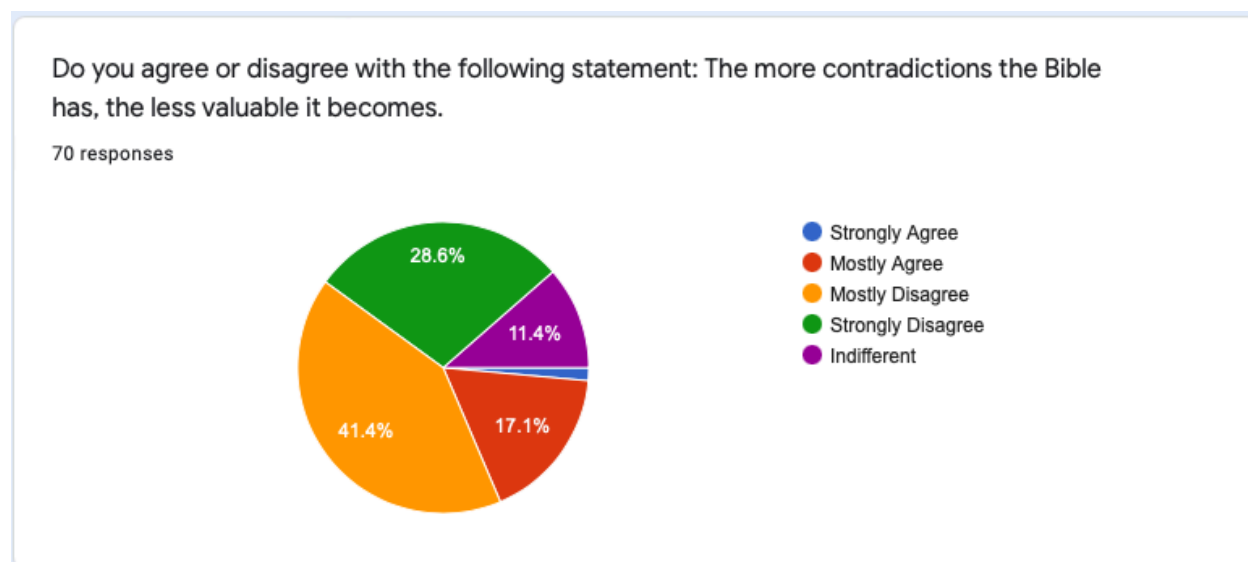


Figure 4-Initial Survey Results on the Value of Scripture

While 28.6% of the participants strongly disagreed with this statement before viewing the film series, that number shifted dramatically to 54.1% after viewing the series. Overall, the people who strongly or mostly disagreed with the contradictions being tied to value of the Bible moved from 70% to 87%

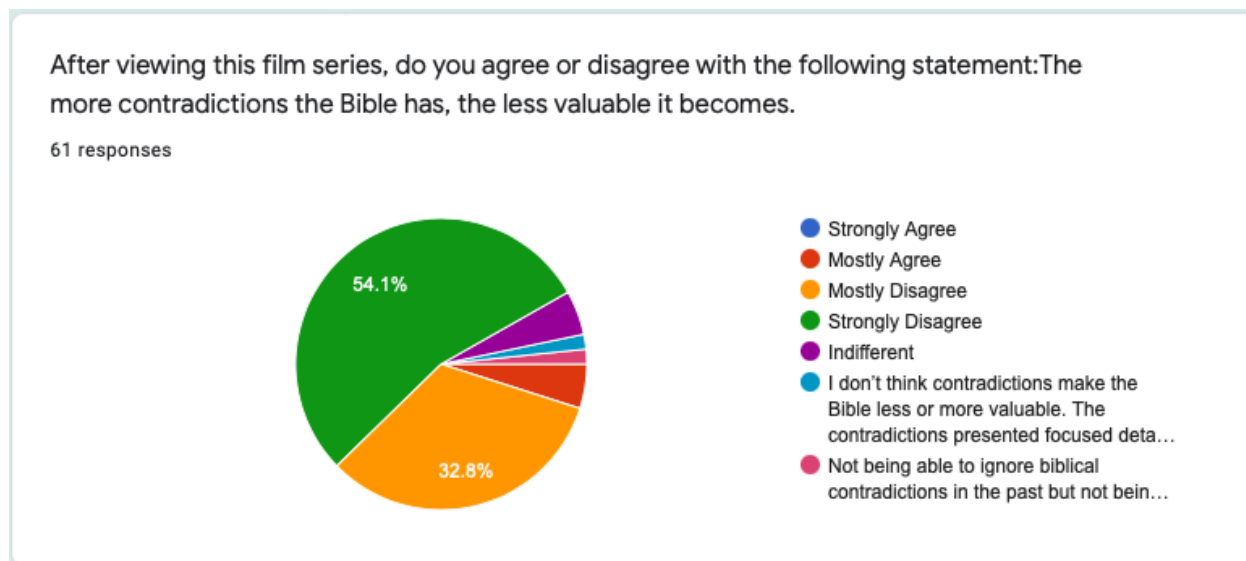


Figure 5-Final Survey Results on the Value of Scripture

Lastly, 17% of people who responded “Mostly Agree” in the first survey fell to just 5% in the second survey. In addition, 67.2% of participants¹ said that this film series made them want to study the Bible more, which is a strong indicator that they found the Bible to be more valuable after the film series, even though the content of the film series transparently pointed out the contradictions of scripture.

¹ Graph not pictured.

Project Launch Plan

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The majority of practicing Protestant Christians believe that the Bible is without error and every word in the Bible should be taken literally.¹ There is an opportunity to help Christians participate in more dialogue about contradictions, engage in more study of the Bible because of the contradictions, and to embrace the contradictions of scripture as springboards to grow in faith. To address this opportunity, I created a seven-part film series walking people through the history of inerrancy, specific contradictions in scripture, and the value of the Bible. These films will be placed on social media by the end of June 2022 and labeled intentionally to be found by anyone who is searching for a discussion on Biblical contradictions.

AUDIENCE

I grew up in the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Christian tradition, trained and graduated from a Seventh-day Adventist seminary,² and then received ordination from the Seventh-day Adventist church.³ When I was in high school,⁴ I remember being introduced to the 27

¹ *The Bible in America: The Changing Landscape of Bible Perceptions and Engagement* (Ventura, CA: Barna Group, 2016), 90.

² La Sierra University in Riverside, CA in 2011.

³ October 25, 2014.

⁴ This story took place in 2001.

Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists⁵ during baptismal classes. During this introduction, I remember being surprised that the first Fundamental Belief of SDA's was not God, but instead was in the inerrancy of the Bible. This order of belief sent a transparent message to me; the inerrancy of scripture leads to a belief in God, and without an inerrant scripture, there is no belief in God. This made me uncomfortable, but I still decided to go through with the baptism.

Several years later, I was hired as an SDA pastor. As a bit of a small rebellion, I regularly preached on the importance of placing God before scripture, rather than the other way around. These sermons gained traction with a small group of people, but also rubbed another small group of people the wrong way. By the end of 2015, I was removed from my position as an SDA pastor for preaching what those in authority deemed to be a low view of scripture. Since that time, I no longer identify as Adventist.

A few months later,⁶ some family and friends of mine joined me in starting Paradox Church, which is non-denominational. Despite the lack of a denomination, our church holds one belief: Jesus Christ. We are proud to identify as a Christian church. We emphasize the centrality of Jesus Christ, the two commandments that he taught were the most important,⁷ and then focus on three spiritual practices to help us learn how to follow those commandments better. The three

⁵ The 28th Fundamental Belief of Seventh-day Adventists was added in 2005.

⁶ February 20, 2016.

⁷ Love God and love others, Matthew 22:34-40.

spiritual practices are scripture, prayer, and community. In this belief system, placing Jesus Christ before the Bible was entirely intentional.

While we at Paradox has never explicitly said it, our church is in line with the Protestant Christian tradition. Paradox is composed of people who grew up SDA, Baptist, Methodist, Pentecostal, atheist, and more. In my sermons at Paradox, I often speak about the shortcomings of inerrancy, and highlight the contradictions of scripture as some of our greatest spiritual teachers. While our church is not a megachurch, we have found a hunger from Protestant Christians to discuss contradictions in a healthy and constructive way to better understand the inspiration of scripture. For this reason, this project's primary audience is Protestant Christians in America.

When discussing contradictions, Protestant Christians are often forced into a binary response. They feel that they must gloss over the contradiction or walk away from the faith entirely. My hope is that this film series can provide a third way for Protestant Christians and former Protestant Christians to embrace the contradictions in the Bible and accept them as spiritual teachers. Ultimately, the contradictions are about the inclusion of differing points of view, which is something that our Protestant Christians desperately need today.

DEVELOPMENT TIMELINE

My plan is to premiere these films, one-by-one over seven weeks, in-person in August 2022 at Paradox Church,⁸ with discussion groups taking place after the audience views each film.

⁸ I currently serve as the Lead Pastor at Paradox Church in Redlands, California.

Hopefully, this will encourage the dialogue that these films were intended to create. Within the week of their in-person premiere, we will then premiere the films online. With word of mouth and digital promotion, I believe that we can raise awareness that these films exist by December 2022. In addition, I am planning to release some behind-the-scenes content for creators by the end of 2022, which will hopefully get more of our target audience involved in the conversations.

ITERATION PROCESS

The ultimate benchmark for this film in the real world is people, after viewing the films, being more willing to engage in dialogue about Biblical contradictions with their friends, their family, and their church. To track the progress of this conversation, the number of shares, views, and engagements with the content we have on YouTube will be recorded. If six months after the online releases no one is watching it and no one is sharing it, then I will reevaluate how to make the videos more easily discoverable through Google and YouTube searches. Over the course of this project, I have found that there is a real hunger for this conversation among Christians, which means that delivering it in a way that Christians can access it is necessary for the success of this project.

Lastly, if this project goes exceedingly well and is meaningful to many people, then we will look at adding more films to the seven-part series. Our church loved making these films together in community, and I know we have the resources to pull off a series that continues the conversation around Biblical contradictions.

Appendix A—Milestone 1 The NPO Charter

Personal Research Manifesto

I will say, “No,” to the perfect, the predictable, and the padded ego,
and I will say, “Yes,” to the imperfect adventure of wherever my research leads me.

NPO Statement

Considering Christians in America,
we’ve discovered that Biblical contradictions threaten spiritual growth
which is caused by the doctrine of Biblical inerrancy.
If solved, it would mean Christians could swim in the depths of a meaningful faith.

NPO Scope

I am limiting my research in 2020 to four areas:

1. The History of the Doctrine of Inerrancy
2. Critiques and Commentaries of the Doctrine of Inerrancy
3. The work of Georg Hegel
4. Practical Application of Contradictions and Paradoxes Helping Faith Communities

To ensure I don't dive in too deep to any of the first three topics, I will remind myself that I am most interested in the practical application of this project. The major cost of this project will be the books that I purchase, but I will attempt to use libraries as much as possible to keep the costs within my personal budget.

NPO Context

This primary ministry setting for NPO is Paradox Church. Paradox Church is composed of two congregations, our in-person worship gathering (we average about 120 attendees each weekend) and our online community (we average 200 downloads on our weekly podcast, and about 200 views on our weekly Facebook Live feed). Both of these congregations are made up of a wide diversity of people: from Christians to atheists, from those who identify as Seventh-day Adventists to Roman Catholics, from children to octogenarians, from the Maine to California, and from people of myriad ethnicities, sexual orientations, and gender identities. The common thread that is found among all of these people is a passionate interest in honest and open discussions about the Bible. Our congregations love to dive in and fully embrace the contradictions with scripture, and what these errancies can teach us about God.

Root Causes

The doctrine of Biblical inerrancy is the root cause of the majority of Christians' inability to address and embrace Biblical contradictions. These Christians view Biblical contradictions as a threat to what they believe, which causes them to insist that the contradictions in the bible are

not actually contradictions. This inability to see the Bible for what it actually is stems from a desire to protect the doctrine of inerrancy over the Bible itself.

On the flip side of this idea, a minority of Christians, who have gone through deconstruction, often look at the Bible and the contradictions it possesses and ask, “What do we do with this book?” This uncertainty about the role of the Bible is rooted in the doctrine of inerrancy. The loudest voices in American Christianity insist that the Bible does not have any inherent value if it possesses contradictions, and deconstructed Christians believe them.

Discovery Session Stakeholders

1. An Elder at Paradox Church
2. An Agnostic
3. A Former Young Adult Pastor
4. A High School Student
5. A Layperson at Paradox Church
6. A Masters in Theological Studies
7. A Member of Sermon Study Group at Paradox Church

One-on-One Interviews

1. An Ordained Reverend

2. A Professor of Philosophy and Religion
3. A Well-Known Author and Philosopher

Academic Resources

There are four major areas of study I want to focus on for this project, and I have listed the authors and scholars of the books in my Working Bibliography to illustrate how to accomplish this research.

1. The History of the Doctrine of Inerrancy

Resources: Karen Armstrong, R. J. Coleman, Bart Ehrman, Richard Freeman,
Howard Lindsell

2. A Critique of the Doctrine of Inerrancy

Resources: Peter Enns, Harry Fosdick, Jennifer Knust, Brian McLaren, Thomas Paine,
Benjamin D. Sommer, Howard Thurman

3. The Work of Georg Hegel

Resources: John Caputo, Todd McGown, Peter Rollins, Peter Singer, Slavoj Zizek

4. Practical Application of Teaching...

Resources: Rachel Evans, James Fowler, Bailey Gillespie

Working Bibliography (20-30 Sources)

The Bible by Karen Armstrong

Headless Hegel by John Caputo

Biblical Inerrancy: Are We Going Anywhere? by R. J. Coleman

Jesus, Interrupted by Bart Ehrman

Misquoting Jesus by Bart Ehrman

How the Bible Actually Works by Peter Enns

For the Bible Tells Me So by Peter Enns

Inspired by Rachel Held Evans

Searching for Sunday by Rachel Held Evans

Stages of Faith by James W. Folwer

A Guide to Understanding the Bible by Harry Emerson Fosdick

Who Wrote the Bible by Richard Elliot Freeman

Valuegenesis Ten Years Later by V. Bailey Gillespie

Unprotected Texts by Jennifer Wright Knust

The Battle for the Bible by Harold Lindsell

The New Kind of Christianity by Brian McLaren

Emancipation after Hegel by Todd McGown

The Age of Reason by Thomas Paine

The Idolatry of God by Peter Rollins

Hegel: A Very Short Introduction by Peter Singer

Revelation and Authority by Benjamin D. Sommer

Negro Spirituals by Howard Thurman

Less than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism by Slavoj Žižek

The Most Sublime Hysteric: Hegel with Lacan by Slavoj Žižek

Appendix B—Milestone 2 NPO Topic Expertise Essay

Overview of the Topic

*Do not answer fools according to their folly,
or you will be a fool yourself.*
-Proverbs 26:4

*Answer fools according to their folly
or they will be wise in their own eyes.*
-Proverbs 26:5

The Bible is filled with contradictions.¹ These inconsistencies range from the logical to the historical to the theological and beyond, and are found throughout all parts of scripture. There are two major responses that people have when presented with these irregularities. Believers² respond by attempting to prove that the contradictions in the Bible aren't actually contradictions with a closer look. Skeptics respond by highlighting the contradictions in an effort to undermine the authority of the Bible. While both sides claim to be discussing the merit of scripture, both of these responses are more about the doctrines of the inerrancy of scripture. Believers and Skeptics are both working from the assumption that the Bible's ability to be free from error is directly tied to how much one should prioritize its words in their life. But what comes as a surprise to most Believers and Skeptics is where the doctrine of inerrancy came from, and when it was brought into Christian practice.

The seeds of inerrancy were sown during the Reformation, when Martin Luther proclaimed *Sola Scriptura* to the western world. A few centuries later, inerrancy came to the fore as one of the great tests of faith for believers as they faced new rational discourse during the Enlightenment. In the twentieth

¹ It is impossible to read Proverbs 26:4 & 5 (cited above) and come away with the conclusion that the Bible is free from contradictions.

² I have used the terms Believers and Skeptics to represent the two most vocal sides on the debate about contradictions in scripture. Believers are those who trust that the inerrancy of scripture validates the authority of scripture. Skeptics are those who trust that the errancy of scripture undermines the authority of scripture.

century, the inerrancy of scripture became even more prominent among Christians as scientific, archaeological, and anthropological advancements increased at an exponential rate. This progress directly challenged several of the claims in scripture, and it led to Christians and denominations proclaiming their belief in the infallibility of scripture in the late twentieth century. Compared to the millennia that have passed since the Bible was written, inerrancy is a recent and liberal interpretation of scripture. Biblical scholar, Marcel Sarot, writes "...fundamentalism, like liberalism, is an adaptation fo modernity.³"

Few people who believe or dismantle the idea of an error-free Bible understand that inerrancy was never central or discussed when the Bible was put together or written. Without that knowledge, Believers naively place an emphasis on inerrancy while Skeptics walk away from the faith due to the errors of scripture. However, inerrancy was, as far as we can tell, never a concern for the people who wrote the Bible (ca. 1000 BCE-120 CE), the people who canonized the Hebrew Bible (ca. 2nd century BCE), or the people who canonized the New Testament. (ca. 4th century CE). In fact, when reading through the Bible and the history of how it was put together, one would leave with the impression that they purposefully sought out to include contradictions, rather than eliminate them.⁴

Which means that deep in the heart of the Biblical tradition is the acceptance of and appreciation for contradiction. Several scholars feel that the ability for human beings to return to this tradition of contradiction is necessary for humanity to experience the relational nature of God. The tradition of contradictions is meant to inspire discussion, spark debate, and begin dialogues, rather than threaten or undermine the credibility of the Bible. There is a real sense among some scholars that the more we lean into the contradictions, the more we will find that the Bible and God become alive. While this makes

³ Sarot, Marcel. "Christian Fundamentalism as a Reaction to the Enlightenment Illustrated by the Case of Biblical Inerrancy." In *Studies in Theology and Religion*, 251. Vol. 15. (Brill Academic Publishers), 2011, 251.

⁴ Kings and Chronicles being the primary example of this in the Hebrew Bible and the four gospel accounts being the primary example of this in the New Testament.

certainty about God less attainable, what it shows us that God is infinitely knowable. In other words, the contradictions are what inspire us to wrestle with our faith, and to look beyond the words on the page.

Biblical and Theological Foundations

At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?"

which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" -Mark 15:34

The central contradiction of the Christian faith is the death of God. This contradiction should influence the way that Christians think about all contradictions more than any other story, image or metaphor in the Christian in scripture or in faith. First and foremost, the death of God invalidates God. For God to be God, God must always be God. And if God ceases to be alive while time continues to move forward, then God is exposed as never possessing the power to sustain life and move life forward. Which means that god was never actually God. Therefore, if anyone wants to be part of the Christian faith, then they must be willing to enter into and hold the paradox of God's death. At the heart of our tradition is a contradiction.

Matthew and Mark invite us deeper into the paradox by telling us that Jesus Christ openly testified to the abandonment of God by asking the question above.⁵ Author and philosopher Peter Rollins writes about this testimony by describing Jesus Christ as an atheist, "This is a profoundly personal, painful, and existential atheism. Not an atheism that arises from some rational reflection upon an absence

⁵ Matthew 27:46

of divinity but rather one that wells up from the trauma of personally experiencing that absence.⁶ While most would assume that Christians would want to avoid the complexities of the Son of God becoming an atheist, Christians, counterintuitively, adopted the cross as the predominant symbol of our faith. Considering how much Christians value and teach and proclaim the resurrection of Christ, there is something fascinating about the fact that the church chose the trauma of the cross as its symbol instead of an empty tomb. Scholar David M. Carr hypothesizes that the only reason the Christian faith and story survived the test of time was because the Gospel aligned itself with the contradictory suffering and abandonment by God, rather than strength and victory through God.⁷ If the cross is truly the symbol of the Christian church, then the work of the church should be to inspire people toward contradictions and paradoxes.

Beyond the cross, Paul brings contradictions and paradoxes to the fore of early Christian theology by discussing “the mystery⁸” so frequently in his letters. The metaphor of mystery invites us to love God before we fully know God.⁹ One of the early church fathers, Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150-215 CE), saw the mystery as a necessary veil over Christianity. He is remembered for embracing contradiction and saying, “the word conceals much,” implying that language and theology can only take one so far in knowing God.¹⁰ For Paul and Clement (whose lives were separated by less than 100 years), seeing the

⁶ Rollins, Peter. *Insurrection: To Believe Is Human, to Doubt, Divine*. (New York: Howard Books, 2011). 51.

⁷ Carr, David M. *Holy Resilience: The Bible's Traumatic Origins*. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014). 2-4.

⁸ Romans 16:25, 1 Corinthians 4:1, Ephesians 3:3, Colossians 1:26, to name a few. Paul mentions “the mystery” several times in those epistles, beyond the verses mentioned above. The pseudepigraphal epistles mention the mystery as well.

⁹ Rohr, Richard. *The Divine Dance: The Trinity and Your Transformation*. (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 2016). Kindle Edition, Location 1979.

¹⁰ MacCulloch, Diarmaid. *Silence: A Christian History*. (New York: Penguin Books, 2013). 62.

whole of faith as a mystery, or a paradox, or a contradiction, was essential to understanding the nature of God.

This idea is illustrated when considering one of the central characters of the Hebrew Bible, Solomon. After the death of his father, David, Solomon violently consolidates his power and becomes the undisputed King of Israel.¹¹ God is, apparently, pleased with this violent ascension to the throne and appears to Solomon in a dream and says, “Ask what I should give you.”¹²

“An understanding mind,” Solomon responds.

According to the story, God is elated to hear Solomon ask for wisdom instead of wealth and power. God is so elated that God decides to reward Solomon with an abundance of wealth and power.¹³ From that moment forward, the author tells us the story of how Solomon leads Israel into the golden age of the nation’s ancient history. Solomon builds an opulent temple to God, an extravagant palace for himself, and massive amounts of weapons and wealth for the nation’s storehouses. Leaders from other nations visit in person or send delegates to Israel to learn from the governing wisdom of Solomon, because this man clearly understands how to govern people successfully. When the church tells the story of Solomon today, they attribute his success to the wisdom given to him by God, and encourage their congregants to seek wisdom in their own lives before they seek wealth and power.¹⁴

But a closer reading of 1 Kings reveals that the author does not actually believe that all is well in this golden age. In chapter six, the author records that Solomon takes seven years to build the Temple, or, as the author calls it, “The House of the LORD.” The very next verse states that the palace, or the house of Solomon, took *thirteen* years to build.¹⁵ This unsubtle metaphor illustrates where the author believes

¹¹ 1 Kings 2

¹² 1 Kings 3

¹³ A rather unimaginative theological contradiction by the author of 1 Kings.

¹⁴ Which, in an indirect way, is still encouraging congregants to seek wealth and power.

¹⁵ 1 Kings 6:38 and 7:1

that Solomon's priorities lie. Not only that, but the author reveals that Solomon built these decadent structures by enslaving human beings. As Rob Bell and Don Golden point out, there is sinful loss of identity as the nation who was freed from slavery by God, enslaves people to build a temple to God.¹⁶ The harshness of this slavery is what led to the ten northern tribes to secede and form their own nation after the death of Solomon.¹⁷

Solomon's utilization of slavery extended beyond monumental architecture to include his bed chamber as well. He had 300 wives and 700 concubines¹⁸, or, more appropriately, 1000 sex slaves. On top of the tragedy of Solomon's sinful sex trafficking, the (most likely male) author blames these 1000 enslaved women for Solomon's downfall. According to the author, the enslaved women turned Solomon's heart away from God, which is why God punishes Solomon's son with a secession and split kingdom.¹⁹ This is the author's attempt to reconcile and resolve the contradictory nature of Solomon: how can one be so wise and also be so cruel? The author's answer is that women are the problem.²⁰

Solomon's slavery is often ignored or glossed over by Christians, churches, and pastors because it challenge the very notion of Solomon's divinely-gifted wisdom. If God grants Solomon wisdom, and Solomon decides to sinfully enslave others, then either God did not grant the wisdom that scripture records, or God's wisdom isn't actually wisdom at all.

However, 1 Kings is not the end of the story for Solomon. There is a major contradiction canonized within scripture, which is almost completely overlooked by Christians today. Many people assume that Solomon wrote the book Song of Solomon, because his name is in the title. They feel

¹⁶ Bell, Rob and Don Golden. *Jesus Wants to Save Christians: Learning to Read a Dangerous Book*. (New York: HarperOne Publishing, 2008). 36-38

¹⁷ 1 Kings 12

¹⁸ 1 Kings 11:3

¹⁹ 1 Kings 11:4

²⁰ Sadly, this is a consistent Biblical theme with origins in Genesis 3. This is due to the fact that men, most likely, wrote 64 of the 66 books of the Bible.

comfortable with this assumption because the explicit content of the writing seems to fall in line with the sexual virility of Solomon in the church's mind.²¹

After reading through Song of Solomon, it becomes difficult to believe that Solomon is the primary author of this work. Solomon is only a minor character in this poetic writing, and when he assumes the role of the primary antagonist. The protagonist is an unnamed woman, and she boldly speaks against the sins of the patriarchy and the oppression of women. This is one of the few books canonized in the Bible that was written by a woman.²² She offers a scathing critique of the idea that marriage is a vehicle for men to own women as property. Instead, she repeatedly speaks about a new vision for marriage: one in which partners are equal and valued at equal worth to each other.²³ Through metaphor, she closes out her letter by telling Solomon to keep his vision of romance by saying, "My vineyard, my very own, is for myself; you, O Solomon, may have the thousand, and the keepers of the fruit two hundred!"²⁴

Why hasn't her voice been highlighted by the church and Christians when telling the story? Because the overwhelming majority of Christendom is lead by men, and they are interpreting the Bible which was written mostly by men. This exclusion of the feminine voice speaks to the misogyny in church history, and that sexism continues to thrive today because of the church's unwillingness to engage the contradiction of Solomon's "wisdom," the sins of his oppression, and the empowering critique by a woman. The Bible is most vibrant when we hold all of these contradictions together. When we can see all, and not just some, of the story of Solomon, we find that these words breathe fresh perspective about

²¹ The church is more comfortable with Solomon having a strong sexual appetite than being a sex trafficker.

²² If a woman is the main character of a book in the Bible, the burden of proof should be on proving male authorship.

²³ Song of Songs 2:16, 6:3

²⁴ Song of Songs 8:12

wealth, power, wisdom, gender equality, hope, and justice that are necessary for the church and Christians to step forward.

Which brings us back to the central contradiction of Christianity; the death of God. The questions Christians need to ask are, “How am I tempted to resolve this contradiction?” and “What value can I find in embracing this contradiction?”

In Matthew’s and Mark’s Gospel, Jesus’ last words are a on the cross are a proclamation of abandonment by God. There is no resurrection in this part of the story. Resurrection must wait until Sunday. Here, at this moment, Nietzsche is correct in proclaiming that God is dead. Throughout history, Christians have sought to resolve the contradiction of God’s death by quickly skipping ahead to tell the story of God’s resurrection. The contradiction invites us to see that at the very moment that we give up our faith we are simultaneously standing in solidarity with God.²⁵ When we give up our faith in God, God is with us. When we are betrayed, God is with us. When we die, God is with us.

The contradiction of the cross teaches us that God is where God should not be.

The doctrine of the omnipresence of God is almost universally accepted by Christians from every denominational background in word, but the idea that God is truly everywhere is a paradox that requires the cross to fully understand. We can only see that God is where God should not be if we embrace the contradiction of the death of God, and refuse to resolve it with the resurrection.

There are several objections to the idea that we should embrace, rather than resolve, contradictions in scripture in spirituality. The major objection is, due to the doctrine of Biblical inerrancy, accepting contradictions means rewriting our definition of the Bible. If the Bible is not inerrant, then what is it?

²⁵ Rollins, *Insurrection*. 62.

The Bible is 100% accurate in the way a people group understood and perceived the divine over multiple generations. What this means is that the Bible is ultimately a work about what it means to be human, written by humans, for humans to read.²⁶ The contradictions ask us to move the author's perspective from Heaven down here to Earth. While this may seem like a progressive idea, it's actually the traditional view of scripture. Jewish readers highlight the contradictions found in scripture and use them as a place to begin discussions about God.²⁷ The God of Israel is angry, happy, bitter, jealous... just about every human emotion you can imagine. But what the authors were trying to convey is that God is in relationship with people, and that relationship is defined by dialogue.²⁸ For the majority of the Bible's history it was added too, edited, and deleted based on that culture's day and age.²⁹ Therefore, our ability to embrace the contradictions actually brings us more in line with what the Bible was originally intended to be. The majority of Biblical contradictions come from Biblical authors reimagining God in their specific time and place.³⁰ To be devoted to the tradition of Scripture, readers need to believe that we are encouraged to do the same as we read the Bible today.

Another objection to embracing contradictions is that these contradictions will lead people to question whether God exists and the Bible truly is God's word, and that unnecessarily puts people at risk for their Eternal Salvation. That's important for us to identify as a belief that certainty is the greatest

²⁶ Bell, Rob. *What Is the Bible? How an Ancient Library of Poems, Letters, and Stories Can Transform the Way You Think and Feel About Everything*. (New York: HarperOne Publishing, 2017). Kindle Edition, Location 329.

²⁷ Evans, Rachel Held. *Inspired: Slaying Giants, Walking on Water, and Loving the Bible Again* (Nashville: Nelson Books. 2018). 104.

²⁸ Brueggemann, Walter. *An Unsettling God: The Heart of the Hebrew Bible*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009). Kindle Edition. Location 74.

²⁹ Armstrong, Karen. *The Lost Art of Scripture: Rescuing the Sacred Texts*. (New York: Knopf, 2019). 30.

³⁰ Enns, Peter. *How the Bible Actually Works: In Which I Explain How an Ancient, Ambiguous, and Diverse Book Leads Us to Wisdom Rather Than Answers*. (New York: HarperOne Publishing, 2019). 102.

indicator of spiritual maturity. While it's possible for one to believe that, the authors and compilers of the Bible did not share that viewpoint. If they did, they would have removed Lamentations, Job, 1 and 2 Kings, and just about all of the prophets from the canon (and more). The Bible canonizes contradiction.³¹ And if salvation is based on who one's ability to be certain or not about God, then that is a notion that the very collection of the Bible contradicts.³²

The death of God invites us to embrace the contradictions of scripture and the paradoxes of reality. In the most human element of Jesus Christ's life, his death, we find that the contradictions are where the life is. Here is where the Bible becomes the most human, and also, the most inspired.

Topic History and Key Voices

The driving theological idea behind the Protestant Reformation was *Sola Scriptura*. When Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to church door in Wittenberg in 1517, the primary thesis spoke about the need for the authority of scripture. that church was in need of reform, and the Bible alone should be the foundation of those reforms. This doctrine stunned the leadership of the church—how could anyone understand the Bible without guidance from priests and councils? Luther responded, “A simple layman armed with scripture is to be believed above a pope or a council without it.”³³ While most Christians believe that this was Martin Luther calling people back to the original tradition of the Bible, this idea was without precedent in the history of scripture. Historian Karen Armstrong explains, “For Jews, the oral

³¹ Beal, Timothy. *The Rise and Fall of the Bible: The Unexpected History of an Accidental Book*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011). 173.

³² Enns, Peter. *How the Bible Actually Works*. 11.

³³ Armstrong, Karen. *The Bible: A Biography* (Books That Changed the World) (p. 163). Grove/Atlantic, Inc.. Kindle Edition.

Torah was essential to the understanding of the written Torah. Before the New Testament had been written, the gospel had been preached by word of mouth and the Christians' scripture had been the Law and the prophets.³⁴ So while Martin Luther was demanding that the faith return to the roots of their scriptural tradition, the tradition he was calling the church back to simply did not exist.

Martin Luther eventually started the Lutheran church holding tightly to the belief that the Bible, and not fallible human beings, should be placed in authority over the church. However, one thing that the last five centuries have taught us, is that when people read the Bible for themselves, they come to vastly different conclusions. As Biblical scholar Peter Enns writes, "When people read the Bible for themselves, they often disagree about what it means. The Bible does not have a good track record of promoting unity among those who read it."³⁵

Sola Scriptura led directly to the most terrible sin in the history of the American church—the purchase, enslavement, and abuse of human beings from Africa. Historian Mark Knoll writes about the Bible's influence in America with these words:

American national culture had been built in substantial part by voluntary and democratic appropriation of Scripture. Yet if by following such an approach to the Bible there resulted an unbridgeable chasm of opinion about what Scripture actually taught, there were no resources within democratic or voluntary procedures to resolve the public division of opinion that was created by voluntary and democratic interpretation of the Bible. The Book that made the nation was destroying the nation; the nation that had taken to the Book was rescued not by the Book but by the force of arms.³⁶

The sin of slavery occurred while white Christians went en masse to church services on Sunday and were taught from the pulpit, with great certainty, that God ordained this racial hierarchy from the beginning. Specifically, pastors repeatedly turned to the a white supremacist reading of the story of Noah and his

³⁴ Armstrong, Karen. *The Bible: A Biography* (Books That Changed the World) (p. 164). Grove/Atlantic, Inc.. Kindle Edition.

³⁵ Enns, Peter. *The Sin of Certainty: Why God Desires Our Trust More Than Our "Correct" Beliefs* (pp. 48-49). HarperCollins. Kindle Edition.

³⁶ Noll, Mark A.. *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (The Steven and Janice Brose Lectures in the Civil War Era) (p. 8). The University of North Carolina Press. Kindle Edition.

three sons,³⁷ a passage in Leviticus where God tells Moses that owning slaves is morally acceptable as long as they aren't your own people,³⁸ and the writings of Paul which encourage slaves to be obedient to their masters.³⁹ Additionally, these white Christians did not feel that the Bible condemned their racially-motivated chattel slavery until the early 1830s, when abolitionism began to gain more prominence.⁴⁰

Frederick Douglass tells a heartbreaking story about how Protestant Christianity in America condoned, rather than condemned, slavery. His "master" went to a Methodist camp-meeting and found God. Upon hearing of his conversion, Douglass held on to hope that this new faith might lead him to emancipate the slaves, or, at the very least, be kinder to his enslaved men and women. Neither came true. "If it had any effect on his character," Douglass writes, "it made him more cruel and hateful in all his ways; for I believe him to have been a much worse man after his conversion than before."⁴¹ Rather than confronting the abhorrent sins of racially-motivated chattel slavery, Christians used the Bible to double-down on the certainty of scripture, and it relieved white Christians from the guilt they felt from treating another human being as property. Douglass observed, "Revivals of religion and revivals of the slave-trade go hand in hand together."⁴²

White Christians took the Bible, with great certainty, back home to their plantations. They read select passages to their slaves because they hoped the Christian faith would make enslaved men and women less violent and willing to accept the hierarchy that oppressed them. In addition, they also told the slaves that as long as they obeyed their masters, as Paul repeatedly said, then they would be freed in the next life by Jesus Christ.

³⁷ Genesis 9:18-27

³⁸ Leviticus 25:39-46, specifically verse 42

³⁹ Ephesians 6:5, Colossians 3:22

⁴⁰ Noll, Mark A.. *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (The Steven and Janice Brose Lectures in the Civil War Era) (pp. 6-7). The University of North Carolina Press. Kindle Edition.

⁴¹ Douglass, Frederick. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (p. 36). Kindle Edition.

⁴² Douglass, Frederick. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (p. 67). Kindle Edition.

While there are passages in scripture that view slavery as a moral practice, there are also contradicting passages that condemn the practice of slavery. The most obvious being the entire book of Exodus. In this story, we read about God hearing the cry of the oppressed, and liberating them with a mighty and miraculous hand. Solomon leads Israel into the wealthiest and most powerful moment of his nation's history, but the people consider him a terrible king because he achieved this wealth by enslaving his own people. The entire epistle to Philemon is Paul pleading the recipient of his letter to see the humanity in his slave, Onesimus.

Within the pages of the Bible, there are passages that condone slavery, and there are passages that condemn slavery. What is really difficult about this, is that the Bible does not offer a clear cut answer on whether slavery is morally acceptable, which lead to an immeasurable amount of suffering from African Americans. If white Christians could have admitted that the Bible holds contradictory statements about slavery, then the tragedy of slavery could have been resolved more peacefully, or even, possibly sooner.

Sola Scriptura also created problems with scientific advancement. Around this same time, Charles Darwin published *On the Origin of the Species* in 1859, and introduced the scientific ideas of common descent and natural selection.⁴³ These two ideas challenged the account of creation in the book of Genesis, and, ultimately *Sola Scriptura*. Christians really appreciated the tidiness of the creation story as told in Genesis: God created everything with purpose and in order, death was never part of the original plan, and God was so intimate with creation that God breathed life into Adam's lungs. But along comes Darwin, and all of a sudden death, violence, and conflict are not glitches in creation, but rather are central to progress. On top of asking people to consider human origins, Darwin also asked people to reimagine the role and purpose of death. In a similar vein, Clair Cameron Patterson discovered the age of the earth

⁴³ Enns, Peter. *The Sin of Certainty: Why God Desires Our Trust More Than Our "Correct" Beliefs* (p. 35). HarperCollins. Kindle Edition.

about 100 years after Darwin's work. While most Christians use the genealogies of scripture to determine the age of the earth and universe to be about 6000 years old, Patterson was able to demonstrate that the earth was actually 4.5 billion years old. Patterson's work also invalidated God's creative order in Genesis 1, by proving that there were stars in existence before the earth was created.

Fourteen years after Darwin's publication, Charles Hodge from Princeton became the first theologian to engage in creation apologetics against *On the Origin of the Species*.⁴⁴ For Hodge, all science should begin with the assumption that God exists and is the animating force behind the entirety of the natural world. And, according to Hodge, when scientists do their work without this assumption, they are practicing bad science. What Hodge did not understand is that he was the one proposing bad science, specifically attempting experiments with a confirmation bias. But Hodge needed the six-day account of creation to be true, otherwise it would undermine his entire understanding of *Sola Scriptura*. To this day, many Christians believe that Hodge's proposal of (bad) science is correct, and they continue to subscribe to this ideas because they need Genesis 1 to be true.

Charles Hodge's son, Archibald Alexander Hodge, continued the work of his father but took it one step further. A. A. Hodge, along with Benjamin Warfield, made inerrancy an article of faith in the Presbyterian's Confession of Faith in 1881. According to historian C. S. Cowles, "This was the first time

⁴⁴ Armstrong, Karen. *The Bible: A Biography*. (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press), 2006.

in church history in which such an article had been articulated and adopted by any denomination.”⁴⁵ The whole concept of Biblical inerrancy did not grow out of a desire to return to the heart of a scriptural tradition. Rather, inerrancy came out of Christianity’s desire to offer apologetics when challenged with Darwin’s *Origin of the Species*. In addition, Benjamin Warfield is famously remembered for issuing the challenge for someone to show him, “just one indisputable error” in scripture.⁴⁶

The origin of inerrancy to passionately defend a Biblical account of creation is particularly ironic the moment one reads the first two chapters of Genesis. In Genesis 1, God creates everything in six days:

On the first day, God creates light.
On the second, God separated the waters
from the waters.¹
On the third day, God created land and
vegetation.

On the fourth day, God created the sun,
moon, and stars.
On the fifth day, God created sea
creatures and birds.
On the sixth day, God created animals,
and then many women and men at the
same time.

⁴⁵ Oord, Thomas J. *Rethinking the Bible: Inerrancy, Preaching, Inspiration, Authority, Formation, Archaeology, Postmodernism, and More*. (Grasmere, ID: Sacrasage Press, 2015). Kindle Edition. Location 1323.

⁴⁶ Coleman, Richard J. "Biblical Inerrancy: Are We Going Anywhere?" *Theology Today* 31, no. 4 (1975): 297.

¹ Christians interpret this as the sky and the oceans, which is definitely not what the author of Genesis had in mind.

This creation story then proceeds to chapter 2, where we read that God rested on the seventh day. The story should be over. Instead, the creation story starts over again. Except this time, it's entirely different.

In this second creation story, the author (who is most likely not the same person who wrote Genesis 1¹) tells us a completely different creation story of how the material world came into being. In this story, God creates the heaven and the earth, but it's rather bare. There is a stream that rises and falls and soaks the earth. When the stream receded, God swooped down and formed an unnamed man in the mud. After crafting this man, God breathed into his nostrils and gave him the breath of life. After the man comes to life, God placed him in a garden, and then God created every tree on earth (note the difference in creation order). Of all the trees God created, God instructed the man not to eat of one particular tree, and God asked him to till the garden. As the man is tilling the garden, God all of a sudden felt a great deal of empathy for the man and declared, "It's not good for the man to be alone." So God created every animal on earth (note the difference in creation order) and brought them before the unnamed man to name. But none of these sufficed as a companion to the man. So God caused the man to sleep, and God created woman (note the difference in creation order).

There are two contradicting creation stories in the first two chapters of the Bible, and it was first noticed by German minister Henning Bernhard Witter in 1711.² But rather than accepting these stories as contradictions, the doctrine of inerrancy requires that the two creation accounts do not contradict each other. Instead, inerrancy insists that Genesis 2 is a retelling of Genesis 1. This is a faulty statement that can only be reached if you start with a theological confirmation bias (the Bible is inerrant and never contradicts itself) and then read the first two chapters of scripture. The desire to eliminate the

¹ Friedman, Richard Elliot. *Who Wrote the Bible?* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2019). 52.

² Friedman, 52.

contradictions between these stories set the church up for an adversarial relationship with science that still continues to this day.

Sola Scriptura ran into even more problems beyond slavery and science. Returning to Charles Hodge's work from 1873, *Systematic Theology*, Hodge went against the grain and declared that the Bible should not be placed under the same scrutiny that all literature on earth faces, but instead should receive special treatment.³ He suggested that the principal task of Biblical scholarship is to affirm the authority of the Bible. Specifically, he suggested that there is no truth beyond the words of the Bible, because every word is infallibly true. When you look at the long history of the Bible, this was a brand new idea at Hodge's time. Prior to his work, the Bible led the readers/hearers toward God. But Hodge suggested that the highest understanding of God is in the Bible.⁴

Decades before Hodge wrote these words, Thomas Paine wrote a scathing critique of organized Christianity in his book *The Age of Reason*. Paine argued that the central premise of Christianity, that one must believe in the resurrection of Christ, was inherently flawed. Specifically, why is it that God would ask all of humanity to believe something that only a handful of people (the Apostles) got to witness first-hand? If this is true, and Christians claim that it is, then this inherently speaks to a God who does not view us as equals, but instead favors a small, select few over others (which most Christians would, tragically, agree with).

Countering the idea of a God who favors inequality, Paine proposed that God must be equally accessible to all in order to truly be God. Therefore, Paine suggested that creation, not the Bible, is the ultimate testament of God. Everyone on earth has access to creation, and if God cannot be fully known through creation, then God is not truly a God of all.⁵

³ Armstrong, *The Lost Art of Scripture*. 412.

⁴ Armstrong, *The Lost Art of Scripture*. 412.

⁵ Paine, Thomas. *The Age of Reason*. London: Barlow Press, 1794. 5.

In his letters to the Romans, Ephesians, and Colossians, Paul heavily discredits Hodge's understanding of God's presence through scripture and religion, and surprisingly agrees with and champions Thomas Paine's theology. In Romans, Paul writes to the Jews and the Gentiles about their experience with God. Rather than speaking about the Jews having a higher understanding of God, Paul tells the Gentiles that they have "no excuse" because the fullness of God's presence has already been revealed to them through creation.⁶ In the first chapters of Ephesians and Colossians, Paul talks about how Christ was present at the beginning of time, and Christ can be infinitely known through all things that we experience in material reality.⁷

What all of this reveals, is that Paine's ideas are more in line with the traditional view of God, and Hodge's ideas are more out-of-line with tradition by suggesting that God can only be known through the Bible. Paradoxically, fundamentalists that believe in the literal truth of all scripture, are the ones who hold the liberal ideas about scripture and God.

All of these arguments crescendoed toward the second-half of the 20th century. An explosion of advancements in science, archaeology, philosophy, civil rights, and more continually forced Christians to return to their Bibles and ask how they could believe what the Bible professed in light of this new information. In a form of intellectual retaliation, Christian churches and denominations began to verbally express and canonize their belief in the inerrancy of scripture.

At the Second Vatican Council in the early 1960s, the Catholic Church (yes, the same Catholic Church that Martin Luther protested against 400 years before this) released a statement on the authority of scripture. "Therefore, since everything asserted by the inspired authors or sacred writers must be held to be asserted by the Holy Spirit, it follows that the books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching

⁶ Romans 1:19-20

⁷ Ephesians 1:3-14 and Colossians 1:15-23

solidly, faithfully and without error that truth which God wanted put into sacred writings for the sake of salvation.⁸”

In 1978, Evangelical theologians and preachers gathered in Chicago to proclaim that the Bible was inerrant. They penned and passed the Chicago Statement, which includes these words: “The Bible, being wholly and verbally God given, is without error or fault in all of its teaching in not only its witness to God’s saving grace in individual lives, but in all matters of that which it speaks, not only in the whole but in every part...”⁹ This statement was eventually published in the Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society that same year.

Seventh-day Adventists established their 27 Fundamental Beliefs in 1980 in Dallas. The first of these twenty-seven beliefs is The Holy Bible, and in the description of this doctrine reads, “The Holy Scriptures are the supreme, authoritative, and the infallible revelation of His will.”¹⁰ This is still the official primary belief of Adventists, and the description remains unchanged to this day.

The official indoctrination of inerrancy in American Christianity is from the late 20th century. What’s stunning about these statements, is that they are all an attempt to take the Bible’s authorship out of human hands, and place the inspiration entirely in God’s hands. If God, and not humans, wrote the Bible, then scripture is perfect, because God is perfect, and God witnessed all of the events in scripture and recorded them without bias or error. And if God did not write scripture, then we cannot call the Bible holy. Retired Old Testament professor, Dennis R. Bratcher sums it up this way, “Inerrantists made the

⁸ From the Vatican archives online.
https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html

⁹ Oord, Location 1188.

¹⁰ From the Seventh-day Adventist Church website.
<https://www.adventist.org/beliefs/fundamental-beliefs/god/holy-scriptures/>

Bible serve the doctrine of inerrancy. This move runs counter to a primary tenet of the Reformation: that Scripture is the primary authority for the church's faith and practice.¹¹”

Today, Biblical contradictions invoke a strong reaction because of the doctrine of inerrancy. For the church to proceed in the future, and to make an honest attempt to embrace, rather than resolve contradictions, the church must first be willing to define what inerrancy is.¹² When most American Christians believe in the inerrancy of scripture, they are typically referring to one of three tiers of belief. The first is the infallibist, which believes that the Bible is without error in matters of faith, but contains errors in history and science. The second is the inerrantist, which believes that the Bible is completely true, but some of these truths are poetic. And the last is the literalist, which believes that every word of the Bible is true and should be taken without question.¹³ Inerrancy is the foil that makes contradictions taboo, and to fully understand it, we must first define it.

In 1975, in the midst of the indoctrination in mainstream theology, scholar Richard J. Coleman wrote a necessary article in *Theology Today* pointing out one of the central problems with inerrancy: it doesn't change anything. “The question of biblical inerrancy is remarkably the same now as it was nearly a century ago,” Coleman wrote, “If history is to be our teacher, and biblical inerrancy our illustration, we have somehow not learned from the past.”¹⁴ While contradictions can bring life to scripture, inerrancy leads one to feel that the scriptures are dead.

One of the most intriguing voices today speaking about contradictions in relation to scripture and the church is philosopher Peter Rollins. Rollins proposes that the church has become the equivalent of a

¹¹ Oord, Location 967.

¹² Carson, D., John Frame, and Ben Witherington. “Plenary Discussion on Biblical Inerrancy” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 57, no. 1 (2014): 42.

¹³ Jelen, Ted, Clyde Wilcox, and Corwin Smidt. “Biblical Literalism and Inerrancy: A Methodological Investigation.” *SA. Sociological Analysis* 51, no. 3 (1990): 307-313.

¹⁴ Coleman, 295.

pop song in our society; much like a pop song suggests we find happiness when we fall romantically in love with someone, the church proclaims happiness can be found when we fall in love with God.

However, the death of God on the cross dismantles this pop-song theology, which Rollins brilliantly refers to as the “Idolatry of God.” Instead of incarnating the Resurrection of Christ (the resolution to a contradiction), Rollins believes that the church should incarnate the Death of Christ (the contradiction).¹⁵ Only through embracing contradiction, can we truly be transformed. This transformation moves us from being interested in self-preservation to being more in line with the contradictory nature of reality.

Another valuable voice speaking about the unity of contradictions is Catholic Priest Richard Rohr. While Rohr doesn’t address specific Biblical contradictions, his central teachings revolve around non-dual awareness. This awareness involves seeing how love and suffering are not contradictions, but instead are two sides of the same coin. There is no love without suffering, and there is no suffering without love. He writes about this in his book about prayer, *Everything Belongs*, “Human life has a cruciform pattern, it is a ‘coincidence of opposites.’¹⁶” For Rohr, the ability to hold and embrace contradictions and paradoxes are necessary for becoming aware of the oneness we share in Christ.

One last voice to consider speaking about contradictions and how to embrace them is Rachel Held Evans. In her last published book before her early death, *Inspired*, Evans discusses how the Bible inhibited her spiritual growth, because she could not ignore the copious contradictions and inconsistencies in its pages. Throughout the book, she humanizes and imagines perspective of people both writing and hearing the words of scripture for the first time. The whole effort of her work is seeking to move the Bible from God’s perspective, back down to the earth’s surface and human perspective. From this human

¹⁵ Rollins, Peter. “The (Pyro)Theological Cure” YouTube.com, (March 14, 2020) https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1&v=3TxQ6p1pOWM&feature=emb_title, 53:00-57:00.

¹⁶ Rohr, Richard. *Everything Belongs: The Gift of Contemplative Prayer*. (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1999). 177.

perspective, God meets us where we are, when we are, and the Spirit is in the thick of it. This not a perfect way to record things, but it is a human way. And so, the contradictions can help the scripture to breathe.¹⁷

In the life of the Bible, inerrancy is one of the newest doctrines. When Biblical authors sat down to write the words that would eventually become canonized as part of the Bible, they were over 1700 years (at a minimum) away from someone later declaring, “These words are without error!” The whole idea of inerrancy is a response to scientific and ethical advancement, and this doctrine needs be treated as recent idea in church history. Once that is accepted as fact, then the contradictions call us back to longer standing tradition of scripture inspiring discussion. Where we can read and value the Bible, but also move beyond the words on the page to interact with and experience the divine presence of God.

Synthesis and Conclusion

The first major consensus I came across in my research took me by surprise: inerrancy is a relatively recent idea within the life of the Bible. I thought that inerrancy had its roots in Judaism and in earlier Christian history, but there is no way to trace inerrancy back before the 17th century. Instead, inerrancy was a direct response to the Enlightenment, scientific advancement, and Darwin’s *Origin of the Species*. I assume there are authors and theologians out there who believe that inerrancy goes back before the New Testament was written, but I didn’t find any authors who supported this idea from a reputable publisher. Given the extent and quality of the work of the scholars I read for this paper, I believe it would be nearly impossible to justify inerrancy’s existence prior to the Reformation (and even that date is a stretch).

¹⁷ Evans, xxiii.

What's surprising about the overwhelming consensus on the history of inerrancy is how few Christians I encounter that understand the recency of this doctrine. While I have shared several conversations with Christians who believe in the infallibility of scripture, they have never shared with me any knowledge of where that belief comes from. Back when I personally believed in the inerrancy of scripture, I was deeply under the impression that I was being faithful to tradition by holding on to this belief, and assumed that this belief's origins dated back to origin of scripture.

In addition, this research helped me understand why the people who canonized the Bible seemed indifferent to including the contradictions. Before this semester, I assumed that there was a big debate among the councils that put together the Bible as to whether or not they should include the contradictions. But now, I can now see that contradictions are only a problem for the doctrine of inerrancy. If inerrancy was a 2000 year-old idea, instead of a 200 year-old idea, then the people who compiled the New Testament would have never allowed the four gospel accounts to be canonized, because there are simply too many contradictions.

From the consensus of the historical origins of inerrancy, comes the tension and disagreement for what to do with the contradictions. The majority of my research revolved around Biblical scholars who appreciate and embrace the contradictions. I found their work and writings to be a breath of fresh air and insightful for how to engage the contradictions of scripture. But scholarship does not reflect the majority of Christendom's attitude toward scripture. There are several Christians who take issue with their central understanding of the Bible. There is also an inaccessibility to reading thick commentaries to help one understand the density of the Bible. One of inerrancy's seductions is that it makes studying scripture much easier, because all that it requires from the reader is to take the words on the page at face value.

The scholars, commentators, and pastors that I truly admire address Biblical contradictions with a very similar theme: the human experience. From the Bible and faith being referred to as breathing, human, imperfect, relatable, and beautiful, the authors that really inspired me were the ones who desired to move the "camera" of scripture from Heaven down to Earth. Obviously, there is strong disagreement

within Christendom about the idea that the Bible is a human work. If there was not a disagreement, then there is no reason to pursue this research in Biblical contradictions further.

Going forward, I want to take this research and use it to help communities of faith embrace the contradictions of scripture. This is the biggest gap in the research I encountered. Believers write numerous articles and books that attempt to resolve the contradictions of scripture. Skeptics respond with a plethora of articles and books exposing the contradictions of scripture and then dismissing scripture altogether. Scholars and authors write a copious amount of articles and books about the beauty of the contradictions, but they rarely speak about how to apply and teach these ideas in communities of faith composed of skeptics, believers, and everyone in-between. My hope is that I can write or deliver something that compassionately challenges Christians to think critically about what they believe, and at the same time invite Skeptics back to the table to find beauty in the heart of the faith tradition.

I have spent the past seven years serving as the Lead Pastor of Paradox Church, a faith community in Redlands, California.¹⁸ Back in 2013, we started doing sermon series in the books of the Bible, one book at a time. Paradox is still in that sermon series, and we are currently on our 51st book. What I love about this sermon series is the ability we have the time to teach the contradictions of scripture, and what it means for us to embrace them. My hope is that I can take what I learn from the research of this project and add it to what I have learned from the past seven years of experience, and create a resource that can help communities of faith to embrace the Biblical contradictions, and to find the life in them. This resource will be meant meant to fill the gap that I encountered in my research: to take the remarkable work of Biblical scholars and give it practical application in the setting of a community church. If I am successful, then I can help Christians to find the life in Biblical contradictions.

¹⁸ I serve at Paradox Church, which is a non-denominational church founded four years ago. Prior to that, our community met as a young adult group in the Seventh-day Adventist church for three years.

Appendix C—Milestone 3 Design Workshop Report

NPO STATEMENT

Christians and churches believe that contradictions in the Bible could undermine the entire message of Jesus Christ. There is an opportunity to help Christians and churches work through the contradictions healthfully, and to view these contradictions as springboards to grow in faith.

NPO SCOPE AND CONSTRAINTS

Non-Negotiables:

-The Bible contains contradictions. My research will be rooted in what do with the contradictions not whether or not the Bible contains contradictions.

-My work will be constructive rather than destructive. While there will be some doctrines that need to be dismantled, my goal is to be helpful rather than critical.

Boundaries:

-This research and work are limited to the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. Other religious texts, as well as the Apocrypha, will not be examined.

Costs:

-This research and work will require ten hours of work each week for the next year and a half.

NPO CONTEXT

The aim of this research is to be helpful to Christians, pastors, and churches across the United States of America as they encounter the contradictions in the Bible. My primary context for ministry, Paradox Church in California, will serve as a laboratory to try out and implement new strategies as we strive to process the contradictions in a healthy manner. Paradox is a non-denominational church with about 120 attendees each weekend. These attendees represent myriad generations and beliefs. About twenty people started this church with me back in February of 2016.

The research and work that I will be conducting is meant to serve Christians, pastors, and churches of a similar size. However, my aim is to make the work apply across denominations, geographies, and generations. What we need to have in common for this work to apply is a high respect for the role of scripture within the Christian tradition.

ROOT CAUSES

The root cause of the NPO is the doctrine of Biblical infallibility. In our design workshop, the five pastors that I spoke with candidly shared how this doctrine ultimately led their congregants to a fragile faith. They pointed out the irony in the fact that denominations constructed this doctrine to offer their people a greater level of certainty, and the result lead them further away from certainty than what they experienced before.

In one of the one-on-one interviews, a seminary professor proposed that human beings are naturally insecure. This insecurity leads churches to avoid the messiness of scriptural contradictions, which in turn results in a fragile faith. He suggested that congregations do not want to wrestle with the contradictions because they may find out their pastors and institutions are just as insecure as they are.

The consensus between the workshop and the interviews suggested that churches are actively avoiding the contradictions in the Bible in an effort to protect a doctrine that leads people to a fragile faith.

DEFINITION OF ‘DONE’

The ultimate goal in addressing the NPO is for Christians to be able to view the contradictions in scripture as springboards to grow in faith.

THREE BIG IDEAS

1. YouTube Videos
2. Podcast
3. Instagram Account

THREE NAPKIN PITCHES

YouTube Videos

Big Idea: I want to create a series of YouTube videos that would act as a “Masterclass” in how Christians can embrace Biblical contradictions.

Audience: These videos are intended for any Christian with an internet question and a hunger to learn more about Biblical contradictions.

NPO: The unmet NPO we are addressing is how to view Biblical contradictions as springboards to a deeper faith.

Benefit: The user benefits by taking this class for free. I benefit by being able to publish for free.

Approach: The majority of videos on YouTube that address Biblical contradictions either a) exist to convince the viewer that the contradictions aren't really contradictions or b) exist to convince the viewer that the contradictions undermine the value of scripture. My approach will be to demonstrate how the contradictions make the Bible more human, and therefore more valuable.

Risks: This project may fail because it can easily get lost in the vast sea of videos in the YouTube library.

Assumptions/Hypotheses to Test: What I am testing with this idea is whether or not we can get Christians to embrace the contradictions in scripture as teachers rather than enemies.

Benchmarks of Success: 1) Number of views and comments on each video. 2) People who are willing to follow up and reach out to Paradox because of the material they encountered.

Other Approaches: There are very few videos on the surface levels of YouTube that show up describing the contradictions in scripture as a blessing or springboard to deeper faith. This approach is all about leading people into the Bible with the mindset that the contradictions can help our faith, rather than hurt our faith.

Podcast

Big Idea: I want to create a podcast that empathizes with Christians who feel that contradictions in the Bible are a threat to their faith, and encourages them to see how they can greet contradictions as an aid to their faith.

Audience: This approach is intended for busier Christians than the YouTube series listed above. At Paradox, our podcast continually receives more downloads over time because people can do the dishes, take a walk, or garden while listening to the podcast.

NPO: The unmet NPO we are addressing is how to view Biblical contradictions as springboards to a deeper faith.

Benefit: The user benefits by getting this content for free without commercial interruption. I benefit by delivering content to the user for a relatively cheap cost.

Approach: With a podcast format, I could bring in multiple voices from all walks of Christianity to share their experience with the Bible and the problems with believing it is infallible. This format is exciting because it can continue beyond the time table of my time at Portland Seminary.

Risks: This approach may fail because of the sheer volume of podcasts that are available right now.

Assumptions/Hypotheses to Test: I am testing whether we can create spiritual growth and community from a medium (podcasting) that doesn't require people to sit face-to-face. This is actively being tested by the remote church I am overseeing during the global pandemic in 2020.

Benchmarks of Success: 1) Number of downloads and comments on each podcast. 2) People who are willing to follow up and reach out to Paradox because of the material they encountered.

Other Approaches: There's not a lot out there on Podcasts that are strictly devoted to Biblical contradictions. While podcasts will offer an episode or two on the topic, after an initial search I cannot find a podcast with this singular focus.

Instagram Account

Big Idea: I want to create an account devoted entirely to addressing Biblical contradictions. Instagram offers a wide variety of options to make a dynamic account: from Reels to Stories to Posts to Live, this project could take on a life of its own.

Audience: This approach is intended for the youngest audience out of any of the three big ideas.

NPO: The unmet NPO we are addressing is how to view Biblical contradictions as springboards to a deeper faith.

Benefit: The user benefits by getting this content for free on a platform that they are already using frequently. I benefit by learning how to use the most influential social media platform with people younger than myself.

Approach: This approach would demand that I gear my work toward a younger audience (between 16-30 years old). Additionally, there are very few conversations on Instagram about Biblical contradictions.

Risks: This approach may fail because I may not be able to connect with a younger generation. Additionally, the shorter format may preclude me from the necessary nuance to discuss Biblical contradictions.

Assumptions/Hypotheses to Test: With young people, one of the biggest markers of success is whether they share something on their own page or account. The hypotheses I want to test from this approach is whether or not we can make the conversation around contradictions something that is worth being shared.

Benchmarks of Success: 1) Number of shares on each post. 2) People who are willing to follow up and reach out to Paradox because of the material they encountered.

Other Approaches: Of the three napkin pitch ideas, Instagram has the least amount of conversation about Biblical contradictions, so this approach is unique to the platform.

DESIGN WORKSHOP STAKEHOLDERS

1. Associate Pastor in Orange County, California.
2. Associate Pastor in San Bernardino County, California.
3. Associate Pastor in San Bernardino County, California.
4. Associate Pastor in San Diego County, California.
5. Associate Pastor in Lee County, Florida.

All pastors in my Design Workshop are under the age of 35 and have multiple years of experience in ministry.

ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEWS

1. Philosophy of Ministry Professor at a Seminary
2. Hebrew Bible Professor at a Seminary
3. Associate Pastor in New York City

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Florés, Laurent. *How to Measure Digital Marketing*. New York City: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

In this book, Florés discusses digital marketing in three different sections. The first section is in devising a metric to measure effectiveness of digital marketing. The second is moving from the design of the metric to the implementation of that metric. And the last section is how this metric, once implemented, can serve the owner's needs. Throughout this book, Florés highlights different methods and ideas to help the reader assess what statistics matter, what constitutes as success in the digital landscape, and how the reader can more effectively develop their idea to share with others.

Osmer, Richard Robert. *Practical Theology: An Introduction*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008.

Osmer breaks practical theology down to four basic parts: Priestly Listening, Sagely Wisdom, Prophetic Discernment, and Servant Leadership. These four sections are meant to take theological practice out of the ivory towers and into the real world. Beyond that, Osmer wraps up his book by writing his epilogue to professors in seminary and their teaching tactics. He implores them to get out of their head and move to action in the way that Christianity is taught to the next generation of ministers.¹

Sweeney, Marvin A. *Theology of the Hebrew Bible: Volume 1: Methodological Studies*. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature Press, 2019.

¹ The Professor of Philosophy of Religion recommended this book to me.

This book is a collection of ten essays recently compiled by Marvin A. Sweeney that discusses Biblical contradictions in the Hebrew Bible and was recommended to me by the Hebrew Bible Professor from my one-on-one interview. Each essay examines a theological idea from the author's perspective, and how those theological ideas are interwoven into the human nature of the text. Furthermore, the authors write with the intent to reclaim the standard of value in the Bible that is in the heart of the scriptural tradition, which is critical to my development for understanding how contradictions can act as springboards.²

APPENDIX

DESIGN WORKSHOP OUTLINE

On Tuesday, November 3 from 1:00-3:00 pm, I met with five pastors over Zoom to conduct the Design Workshop for my NPO. At the top of the meeting, I walked our pastors through the agenda for our workshop:

1:00-Welcome and Introduction

1:10-Summary of Survey Results

1:20-Explore: The Anti-Problem Game

This is a game designed to get the stakeholders to look at this problem from the opposite point of view. I selected this game because of the irony that it will ask the stakeholders to look at what the church is currently doing to encourage the doctrine of

² The Old Testament Professor also offered to meet with me again after I read this book, which I think will be helpful.

inerrancy, which will reveal the best way to solve it. At the end of this game, I am hoping to have around ten problems that need to be solved.

1:40-Three Big Ideas: The \$100 Test

This is a game designed for the stakeholders to place a monetary value on the problems and identify which problems are the most important.

2:00-Napkin Pitch

Utilizing the Napkin Pitch Worksheet, we will work with the three biggest problems at length to give us ideas as to what needs to be worked on.

2:50-Conclusion and Prayer

3:00-Done

All of the stakeholders in the workshop are practicing pastors. For a bit of control on the research, they were all Seventh-day Adventist pastors.³ While all from the same denomination, all five pastors represented congregations with a wide range of theology on what the Bible is and how it should influence our lives. Each of these pastors also believed that Bible is filled with contradictions, but they also felt that they needed help in understanding how to best address contradictions with their congregation.

The workshop revolved around five major activities:

- 1) Reading a summary of the research so far.⁴
- 2) Answering questions on a survey (and then reporting the results of those survey).⁵

³ I grew up in the Seventh-day Adventist tradition, but I no longer identify as Adventist. The reason I

⁴ The stakeholders received this before the meaning.

⁵ The participants took this survey before our workshop.

- 3) Playing the Anti-Problem Game. The purpose of this game was to get the participants to think about the NPO from the opposite direction.
- 4) Playing the \$100 Game. This game helps to prioritize the three biggest NPOs that we want to explore going forward.
- 5) The Napkin Pitch worksheets. These worksheets guided our discussion for how to better talk about the NPOs before us.

On a Likert scale, I would give our workshop a “4,” because I agree that this workshop helped me significantly in my research. The reason I withheld a “5” from my assessment is that the group didn’t really enjoy the games, they felt there was plenty to talk about with just the source material.

DESIGN WORKSHOP DOCUMENTATION

Here is the summary of research I sent to each stakeholder ahead of our workshop:

The majority of Christians and churches believe that contradictions in the Bible could undermine the entire message of Jesus Christ. There is an opportunity to help Christians and churches work through Biblical contradictions healthfully, and to view the contradictions in scripture as springboards to grow in faith.

I am currently in my second year of the Doctor of Ministry program with Portland Seminary. Last year, we held an initial focus group composed mostly of laypeople to discuss their experiences with the church and how clergy handled Biblical contradictions. By the end of the focus group, the consensus was that the doctrine of Biblical inerrancy led people to be afraid

of contradictions in scripture. On top of that, the diverse focus group felt that inerrancy acted as a precursor and enabler to several sins in the church: misogyny (primarily in the form of ordination being withheld from female clergy), white supremacy, and homophobia. The focus group encouraged me to research the doctrine of Biblical inerrancy, where it came from and why so many churches held it as a foundational doctrine, so that my work could be the most helpful to the largest amount of Christians possible.

During the winter semester, I explored the doctrine of inerrancy in scripture. In the western world, Martin Luther proclaimed “Sola Scriptura” in the sixteenth century. But for Luther, *Sola Scriptura* was about Biblical authority, not Biblical perfection. In fact, Martin Luther strongly believed that the book of James and the book of Revelation (as well as Hebrews and Jude) should be removed from the Biblical canon because they did not represent proper Christian belief. So while Luther believed that the Bible possessed flaws, he also believed that this flawed book should be treated with the highest authority.

While it was never intended to do so, *Sola Scriptura* laid the groundwork for Biblical infallibility. The doctrine of inerrancy came into being in a direct response to the publication of Darwin’s *Origin of the Species* in 1859. Fourteen years later, Charles Hodge from Princeton Seminary wrote *Systematic Theology* and declared that all science should begin with the presumption that God exists, otherwise it will result in faulty science. His son, Archibald Alexander Hodge continued his work by making inerrancy an article of faith in the Presbyterian Confession of Faith in 1881. According to at least one church historian, this was the time in church history that any church adopted a position of inerrancy.

As science continued to progress, denominations became more and more interested in adopting inerrancy. This trend exploded in the 1960s, 70s, and 80s as

denominations in America formalized bold statements of inerrancy. In protestant circles, the biggest turning point took place in 1978 with a multi-denominational collaboration known as “The Chicago Statement.” A line from that statement reads:

“Being wholly and verbally God given, scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching, no less in what it states about God’s acts in creation, about the events of world history, and about its own literary origins under God, than in its witness to God’s saving grace in individual lives.”

This context is crucial to understanding why Seventh-day Adventists, for the first time, adopted the doctrine of Biblical infallibility at the General Conference Session in 1980 in Dallas.

Most Christians are unaware that the idea of Biblical infallibility is a recent theological development in the Bible’s history.

The focus group that you have agreed to be a part of is composed entirely of pastors, all in different ministry contexts. My goal is to facilitate a discussion where you can share how you think this information could possibly be approached where you are currently working, or where you anticipate where your work will lead you in the future. We have a couple of brainstorming exercises to bring out the best ways to address this opportunity, and I believe the discussion will guide where I go with my research in the next two years.

What to expect in our workshop:

- Our focus group will meet for (no more than) two hours over Zoom to discuss Biblical contradictions. I promise we won’t cross over the 120-minute mark.

- This conversation will be recorded, but is entirely confidential. The recording will not be published, and will be deleted at the conclusion of my research. I am the only person who will

have access to the recording. No one will be cited or quoted without expressed written consent.

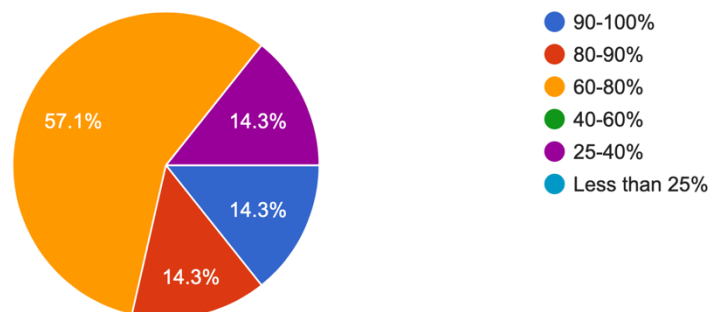
The most important thing is that you have the space to speak freely and honestly.

-The focus group discussion will be much more academic and practical in nature than theological. I also think we'll have a lot of fun.

In addition to the above introduction, I also sent out a survey. Here are all of the questions and results from the survey⁶:

As a rough estimate, how many people in your congregation believe in that the Bible is infallible and perfect?

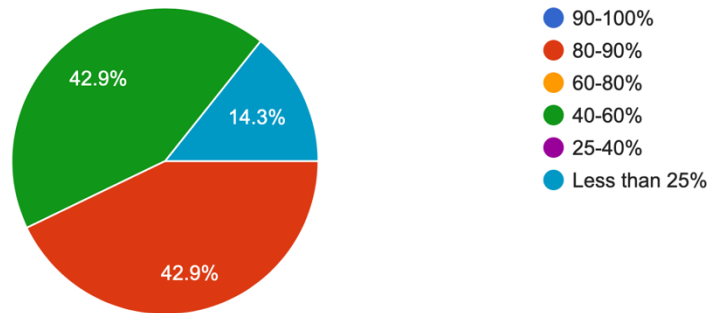
7 responses



⁶ We originally had seven pastors commit to this workshop, but two had to back out as the workshop grew nearer. That's why I have seven responses to the survey.

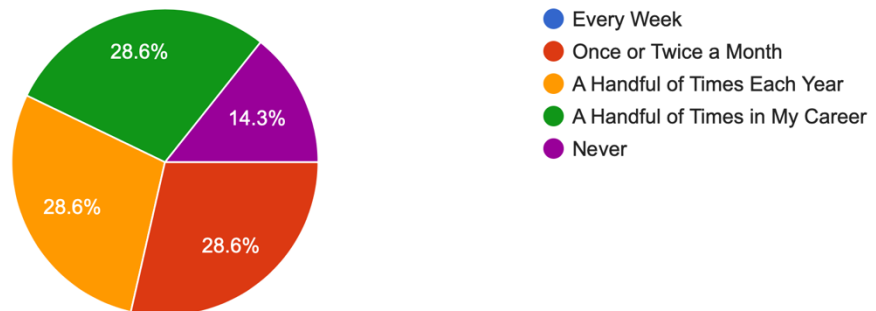
As a rough estimate, how many young people (ages 18-30) in your congregation believe in that the Bible is infallible and perfect?

7 responses



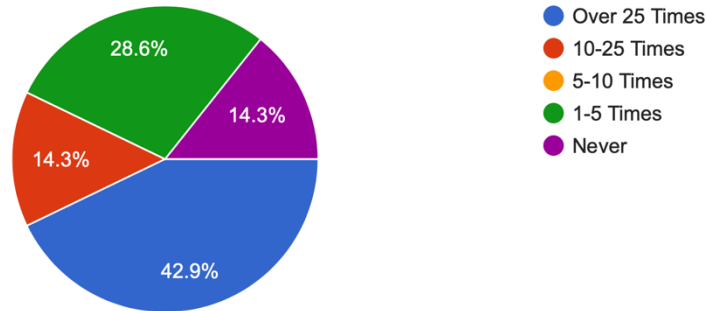
How often do people from your congregation ask you about Biblical contradictions of the infallibility of scripture?

7 responses



How many times have you seen a contradiction in scripture lead to a deeper faith or greater understanding of God for someone in your congregation?

7 responses



If a member of your congregation asked you what role the Bible plays in a Christian's spiritual journey, how would you respond? 7 responses

- 1) If this question were in a vacuum, I would say that the Bible is a revelation of God that culminates in the gospel of Jesus. Subscribing to Christianity necessitates a deep knowledge and understanding of the Bible in order to get the fullest understanding/relationship to Jesus/God.
- 2) For me, the Bible is a story that has continually shed light on my own story. It's a story about beauty, oppression, forgiveness, empire, emotion, and holiness. It pulls back the curtain on the cycles of evil that has run rampant through world history. And corners me with the person of Jesus.
- 3) The Bible is a real picture of humanity interacting with God and trying to find meaning in God's move in the world. The Bible can serve as a guide into how we should or shouldn't enact our spirituality.
- 4) I would tell them that the Bible helps us understand the story of God's people throughout history, and helps us to know God better.
- 5) The Bible is a rich book documenting the human experience, telling us how humanity has understood God through time. It helps us learn and be challenged by ancient wisdom and connects us to those who came before us.
- 6) The Bible is the beautiful story of God's movement to be more fully and wholly with humans, told by people who encountered God and did their very best to interpret the significance of those experiences given their stories and contexts. Sometimes they got it right, sometimes they got it tragically wrong, and yet - the Bible tells us - regardless of it all, God, driven by love, never stopped and continues still to move to be more fully with us.
- 7) The Bible is the beautiful story of God's movement to be more fully and wholly with humans, told by people who encountered God and did their very best to interpret the significance of those experiences given their stories and contexts. Sometimes they got it right, sometimes they got it

tragically wrong, and yet - the Bible tells us - regardless of it all, God, driven by love, never stopped and continues still to move to be more fully with us.

NOTES FROM ONE-ON-ONE WITH PHILOSOPHY OF MINISTRY PROFESSOR

5. With what do you agree with? Why?

The superstructure is the fragile faith. The reasons for it are the messiness of those passages, and because of the messiness, there is an approach to addressing scripture that ignores the larger human experiencing. The fragile faith is the mountain. The messiness is the water level. Foundationally, avoiding the human experience is the substructure. That seems to be the logical ways that this plays out. **If humans are insecure, then you will avoid the messiness of scripture, which will lead to a fragile faith.**

The depths of our human experience is about our insecurity. We are fragile. We are thrown into the world as a newborn. We are insecure. When we find out that the institutions that nurture us are themselves insecure, we are thrown back into the world as infants and that mode of insecurity we had when we came into this world.

Surely the pastor and my parents are strong. Then you find out they are weak as water!

Well God then is more secure! And then the text is contradictory.

The charleton minister will not engage with that text. Instead, the minister will go to the faith affirming texts. These texts will lead to counter-intuitively insecurity, not the other way around.

It's almost like a physician treating the symptom and not the cause.

When that happens, you only get more and more doses, but you will continue to experience symptoms.

8. What do you disagree with? Why?

I think that description is an accurate portrayal of what those pastors in the workshop have gathered. Is there a degree to which they are projecting their own experience on to what their members actually feel and think?

What kind of young person would stay in church when they can find all of the Biblical contradictions in the internet?

Mohammed Ali story:

52 contradictions in the Bible.

Oh no, there's way more than that.

How can you still believe in Christianity?

Well...

Is it the case that the pastors are describing themselves instead of their congregations?

Ask pastors what their experience was like engaging in Biblical contradictions?

To what degree does your own experience make you feel comfortable in your role to address these matters?

Their own fears may inform you how you go about answering this question.

The point is not so much what I think about these descriptions. I think this description is true of a number of people. This may be true of the pastors only.

This may be a problem with faith leaders instead of faith congregations.

Then it becomes an issue of the spiritual/pastoral formation of the clergy instead of the spiritual formation of the congregation.

4. What is missing?

Richard Osmer said that practical theology has an empirical task of priestly listening (data studies, what is going on?), the interpretative task is sagely wisdom (why is it going on?), the normative task is prophetic discernment (what ought to be going on?), and then the pragmatic task is servant leadership (How can we make this happen?).

You also want to hear reports about their congregations and themselves.

We need to make the determination about whether this is about the clergy or is this about members?

This could potentially be that clergy is projecting their own fears on their clergy.

Then we ask, “Why is this going on?”

Then we ask, “What ought to be going on?”

We have an example of Jesus when they got upset he said, “I am the Son of God.”

There is a contradiction in the experience of the One.

**Lord The Messiah is the Son of David, but Jesus says, “How can David call him
 when David is his son?”**

There is servant leadership in that you could hold retreats where pastors attend and talk them through how to deal with this in themselves and their congregations.

NOTES FROM ONE-ON-ONE WITH HEBREW BIBLE PROFESSOR

Life is a contradiction, so it should be no surprise that the Bible is a contradiction.

It took 1000 years for the formation process of the Bible to unfold.

The oldest layer of the Hebrew Bible.

That’s a long time.

From San Diego to Hollywood is the geography we are talking about.

In that area, over 1000 years, we are bound to see humongous diversity.

The diversity itself is not contradiction, but the diversity contradicts each other.

What about the people in the pew?

That’s a different story.

Contradiction is actually an opportunity for growth.

OT theology meets on Sunday this year.

Marvin A. Sweeney has a book that he edited.

Every written text is in dialogue with some other text, consciously or unconsciously.

The task of Biblical theology is to put diverse theologies into dialogue into each other.

1 Samuel 15:10-35 is a major contradiction.

Harem-

In verse 29 God does not change God’s mind about Saul

In the beginning of this passage, verse 10 begins with God regretting that God made Saul.

The author's conclusion in this book is that
God changes God's mind, and God doesn't not change God's mind. This is dialogical truth.

Our job is not to choose one over the other, but instead to acknowledge how both are true.

Fiddler on the Roof, you know you're right, you know you're right, a third person says, "You can't both be right!" They turn to the third person and say, "You are also right!"

Dialogue is a place to begin.

But you cannot simply not have a dialogue and move on.

There are places where you can do that, but there are also places that you cannot.

Liberation in Exodus leads to conquest in Joshua which are two contradicting concepts.

Hegelian concept of dialectics, which is more than dialogue. You have to move beyond the dialogue and choose one over the other or have a synthesis that includes the dialogue.

Free market theology doesn't work.

It doesn't matter who wins the presidency, America is an empire.

What we are witnessing is a rise of fascism.

This is precisely what fascism looks like (when Trump tweets, "I love Texas.")

Walter Brueggemann, "The Theology of the Old Testament" The subtitle is "testimonies and counter-testimonies."

He uses a court for his theological model.

Someone critiqued this work and said that court, by definition renders a verdict.

You can't call this a court model if you do not render a verdict.

Otherwise it's a forum.

Wonil: he's trying to have a post-modern cake and eat it too.

There are certain theological contradictions that are life or death matter.

Proverbs operates out of a paradigm that life is formulaic. If you do ABC then you will get XYZ. It's a manual for how young men should succeed in life.

Ecclesiastes is the opposite of Proverbs.

Job, "I did everything by the book, and it got me nowhere!"

They included all of this to say that life is complex.

There are other matters where we cannot do that.

Is God liberating or is God conquering? You cannot have this both ways!

Dialogical truth only takes us so far.

At some point you have to move to a dialectical paradigm.

"Theology of the Hebrew Bible Vol. 1"

NOTES FROM ONE-ON-ONE WITH WORSHIP PASTOR

6. With what do you agree with? Why?

I definitely agree with number one. America's move toward anti-intellectualism have produced a fragile faith. This takes something like infallibility and runs with it. The house of cards, the wall of bricks where you take so many bricks and the whole wall crumbles.

There are even progressives that think that if you spend enough time on the contradictions, are people going to stick around enough to find any value in the faith. I've deconstructed this for awhile now, is there enough good left to be worth my time and energy. A lot of progressives lean into experience as any pentecostal does. There isn't really any kind of deep looking into scripture anymore. Totally experiential driven, no tradition and history of theology.

I've found myself in a progressive Methodist church because of the Wesleyan quadrilateral.

9. What do you disagree with? Why?

I pretty much agree with these three big ideas. I always thought that the churches I was involved in growing up were middle of the road kind of churches. But when I look back at it now, I realize how conservative it was. Full on inerrancy. Complimentarian rather than egalitarian. It was pretty reformed in their thinking around the cross and salvation. Extremely conservative theologically. The idea that we can even address the human experience would be a heresy. I've heard all the time "The Bible has the answer to every question you could ever ask." and then also say, "The Bible is Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth."

I can't believe that everyone doesn't come to this point eventually, where they question their faith and the role of the Bible. I know leaders who have never opened their mind to question these things. I have to believe it's programming. In every other aspect of their life, they would question something like this, but this one they just avoid the questions. They have been programmed from a young age to avoid these questions.

The word that jumps out from me for number 3 is the word INTENT. How could we possibly know what the author's intent? In evangelical Christianity, you work with the intent that every word in the Bible is meant for you. These words that have become wildly popular in Christianity are heretical to what the Bible actually stands for.

Just because something is widespread and popular does not mean it is correct. (He said this in regards to theology). The most popular Christian pastors on Instagram believe one way, but NONE of the theologians believe that way. Ask people, "Who are your favorite theologians?" they usually respond with Instagram pastors. NT Wright doesn't believe in inerrancy, and he's CONSERVATIVE.

5. What is missing?

The word "interpretations" comes to mind. Look at the story of the talents, there are a WIDE variety of interpretations of this parable. All of these interpretations ultimately contradict each other. This is the author's interpretation of what happened.

During the Worship Wars, tradition became the enemy of progress.

We took this and made it all about me. Tell me how to fix my marriage, fix my finances, fix my life. All of this comes from an abandonment of tradition.

Liturgical services are not as accessible to others, but we've thrown out the baby with the bathwater.

In the last 30 or 40 years, we've abandoned deep, historical thinking that the tradition offered. It's much more about bringing heaven to earth.

Appendix D—Milestone 4 [Design Research Report] / [prototype iteration report]

PROTOTYPE #1 SUMMARY AND FINDINGS

1. **Prototype Description:** The first episode of an audio podcast meant to introduce people to working through Biblical contradictions.
2. **Goldilocks Quality Strategy:** Rather than focus on production quality, I'll focus on the content to be as efficient and compelling as possible.
3. **Research Question:** Is an audio podcast a suitable medium to help people process Biblical contradictions?
4. **Benchmarks of Success:** People engaging with the content of the podcast, a desire for the listener to hear more, and the podcast being able to illicit a reaction from the listener.
5. **Participant Demographics:** Two Christians over the age of 55, two Christians under the age of 30, one atheist under the age of 30.
6. **Summary of Three Main Questions Asked to Participants:**

What Worked: The organization of the podcast, the history and the context, and the categories of the contradictions we explored.

What Needs to Be Improved: Too short, auditory processing can be difficult so maybe an accessible version that includes the manuscript can be included, one subject said that their guard was up because it felt like I had an agenda.

What Matters in This Conversation: We must be sensitive when talking about these things, I want to share this with the world and tell them they don't have to be stuck in their inerrant ways, this needs to be done and spoken about.

7. Important Discovery: If I go forward with an audio podcast for my project, I need to remember that people often listen to podcasts as a background activity. This means I cannot ask them to do things with their hands, and need to very carefully walk the listener through the contradictions.

PROTOTYPE #2 SUMMARY AND FINDINGS

1. Prototype Description: A YouTube video engaging in the practical application and process of working through a specific Biblical contradiction.
2. Goldilocks Quality Strategy: I will not ask an entire production crew to be involved in the making of this video. Rather, I'll do it with only one person running tech behind the scenes, and limit shooting to just one day.
3. Research Question: Can we get people to engage in the conversation on Biblical contradictions without much of an introduction?
4. Benchmarks of Success: Viewers accepting that there are contradictions in scripture, and being willing to discuss and engage what contradictions can mean for their own faith, as well as the faith of the church at large.
5. Participant Demographics: Five Christians at a wide variety of stages in their journey of faith, with a different set of beliefs, and between the ages of 25-60.
6. Summary of Three Main Questions Asked to Participants:

What Worked: Dealing with a specific Biblical contradiction, particularly where a character in the Bible wrestled with the contradiction, was much more helpful than speaking about the concept of contradictions.

What Needs to Be Improved: Better lighting, a desire for more perspectives other than the one person speaking, addressing the context in each interpretation, and the semantics of the story.

What Matters in This Conversation: That ultimately, this work leads the viewer to one of a posture of openness and discovery, rather than superiority and judgment.

7. Important Discovery: Viewers are immediately drawn in the moment that the content addresses specific Biblical contradictions. For maximum engagement, the content should quickly point out the contradictions, and then spend time addressing them. If the content can highlight Biblical characters addressing contradictions, then viewers will be even more engaged.

MOST VIABLE PROTOTYPE

The Most Viable Prototype is #2, the YouTube series of videos dealing with specific Biblical contradictions. Throughout the research, the participants consistently responded in a much stronger way to the visual metaphors contained in this prototype, and this response regularly led to deeper and richer conversations than the first prototype. While the audio podcast requires much less singular attention than the YouTube series, the YouTube series engaged the viewers with both audio and visuals, and allowed more room for creativity with the central metaphor in the video.

Additionally, discussing specific contradictions quickly is important to the success of this project. The less time I spend in introductory material, the stronger the response will be from people who are participating in this content. Contradictions in the Bible instantly invite people in, and the sooner I can highlight the contradiction, and allow the contradiction to be the main source of tension in the content, the more engaging this material will be.

When considering the time frame and the resources available to me, I believe that I can bring 8 to 12 of these videos to life, each with a central visual metaphor that helps the viewer to embrace the contradictions in scripture. Over the next year, I will compile and select the best 8 to 12 contradictions to discuss, develop a visual metaphor for each of them, and then produce each video to eventually be released on YouTube as part of a series. This series will meet my NPO head-on, and will exist to help people view each of these contradictions as springboards to a greater faith.

APPENDICES

STORYBOARDS

Prototype Storyboard:



RECRUITING SCREENER

Question	Accepted Answer	Rejected Answer
How important is the Bible in your life?	Barely important to Completely important.	Not important at all. Unless they give a thoughtful answer to question number three.
If you view the Bible as important, can you give a specific example of how the Bible influences your behavior today?	Any thoughtful, specific answer.	No, I can't think of a specific answer. Unless they give a thoughtful answer to question number three.
If you do not view the Bible as important, then can you describe the moment you started to feel that the Bible didn't have much to offer to your life?	Any mention of contradictions in scripture.	Any answer that describes a personal story with a broken relationship with church (outside of the Bible).
Does it matter if there are contradictions in the Bible? Why or Why not?	Yes and no, as long as they provide a thoughtful support for their answer.	Yes and no, if they are not willing to engage in the discussion as to why the contradictions matter.
If someone you deeply respected and cared for told you that the Bible is both valuable and contradictory, how would you respond to that person?	Answers that suggest that someone might be open to a new conversation.	Answers that would suggest that someone might be closed off to new conversations.
What's the biggest question you have about the Bible?	(This answer isn't a screener, but helps us further the research to see if there's a question we aren't answering in the work).	(This answer isn't a screener, but helps us further the research to see if there's a question we aren't answering in the work).

INTERVIEW SCRIPT

- 1) What were your initial thoughts?
- 2) What worked?
- 3) What needed to be improved?
- 4) What matters to you in the conversation about Biblical contradictions?

DOCUMENTATION OF PROTOTYPE

Prototype #1 Script:

I want to invite you to open the Bible that is on the table right in front of you.

Fan through the pages.

Hold the weight the pages in your hand.

Notice the volume of words that are held within these pages.

What is it that you feel when you hold the Bible?

Do you feel a deep connection to the people who came before you?

Do you feel a gravity of reverence for the Divine?

Do you feel a wave of doubt as you consider all of the questions that come with these pages?

Do you feel like a foreigner, uncertain of what lies within these words?

Do you feel an underwhelming sense of apathy?

Humans feel a lot of different things when they turn the pages that you now hold in your hand.

And no matter what you are feeling,

the chances are someone else feels the exact same way as you do touching the Bible.

At this time, I want to invite you to stop turning the pages of the Bible, and just leave it open in front of you, on any random passage of scripture that you find.

Scan over the words that are in front of you.

And ask yourself, “What is it that makes these words so special?”

Is it inspiration?

Is it delusional hype?

Is it tradition?

Or is it random chance?

Christians love to talk about the value of the Bible.

And how these words contain the very presence, the very essence, the very eloquence of God.

For this reason, Christians in America will tell you that these words can be trusted because they are the words that God gave us.

And God makes no mistakes.

But what if I told you that the Bible contains contradictions?

And these contradictions are very easy to find.

These contradictions can appear to be as trivial as mismatched numbers,
and as concerning as confusing God to be Satan.

To point this out, I would like to share with you three contradictions.

The first is a logical contradiction found in Proverbs 26, verses 4 and 5.

Please turn to Proverbs 26, and if you need time to find it, take a moment and pause the track while you locate Proverbs 26.

“Do not answer fools according to their folly, or you will be a fool yourself.”

While this seems like good advice from the book that is meant to offer good advice, the caliber of this advice becomes murky when we read the next verse.

“Answer fools according to their folly, or they will be wise in their own eyes.”

This wisdom is the exact opposite of the wisdom that is offered in the previous verse.

So which is it: should one answer fools according to their folly

or should one refuse to answer fools according to their folly?

To that question, the Bible smiles back and says, “Both.”

The second contradiction is a theological contradiction, and it can be found in 2 Samuel 24.

Take a moment and locate 2 Samuel 24 and if you need more time, please pause the track.

In 2 Samuel 24 verse 1 we read about one of the last major sins that David committed in his lifetime, when he took a public census. We read,

“Again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying, ‘Go, count the people of Israel and Judah.’”

So in this story, God tests David by tempting him to sin and David falls to that temptation.

The book of Chronicles offers a very different historical account of David's temptation.

Please turn in your Bibles to 1 Chronicles 21.

If you need more time to get to 1 Chronicles 21, then please pause the track at this time.

While you are in 1 Chronicles 21, we must remember that 2 Samuel 24 tells us that God tempted David to take the census.

1 Chronicles 21 verse one records a very different reality. The author writes, "Satan stood up against Israel, and incited David to count the people of Israel."

Here in the Bible, we find two accounts of the story of David's census.

Samuel tells us that God tempted David, while Chronicles tells us that Satan tempted David.

So which one is it?

Where does temptation originate from?

Is it God? Or is it Satan?

And to that question, the Bible smiles back and says, "Both."

The third contradiction is a historical contradiction, and this can be found by turning to the Gospel of Mark, chapter fifteen. If you need a moment to turn to Mark 15, then please pause the track at this time.

In Mark 15, we read about the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. In verse 32 of that chapter, we read, "Those who were crucified with him also taunted him."

In other words, Mark wants us to know that even the other thieves who were crucified with Jesus looked down on him in his moment of execution.

This is a very different account than what we find in Luke 23. Luke 23 is just one book to the right in your Bible, and if you need more time to get to the 23rd chapter, then please pause the track at this time.

In Luke 23, we read about the story of the crucifixion from Luke's perspective. Luke tells us that one of those who was crucified with Jesus taunted him, but there was another who was crucified who rebuked the man who taunted him. This culminates in the thief on the cross

begging Jesus to remember him in verse 42, and Jesus responds by saying to him in verse 43, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”

So did those who were crucified with Jesus taunt him?

Or was there one person who stood up for and defended Jesus?

To which the Bible answers, “Yes, that’s correct.”

So here are three quick examples of how the Bible contradicts itself logically, theologically, and historically.

Now these contradictions have been in the Bible for thousands of years.

And while the contradictions are not new,

the expectation that the Bible should not contain any contradictions is very recent development in the Bible’s history.

This expectation began in the 19th century when Christians, threatened by the scientific development of Darwin’s theory of Evolution, doubled-down on scripture. They began to use new words like “inerrant,” and “infallible” to describe the Bible. In the 19th century, these were liberal ideas, they were brand new ways of discussing scripture, and they departed from the tradition of what scripture was originally intended to be.

So when we dig into these contradictions, we unearth the original application for what the Bible was meant to be.

And that application, apparently accepts and embraces contradiction, rather than ignoring and denying contradiction.

The central claim of Christianity is that God dies and God lives.

Think about Christianity without the cross.

This tradition ceases to make sense, doesn’t it?

Think about Christianity without the empty tomb.

Well, this tradition loses all meaning at that point.

But when we allow the contradiction of God,

the contradiction of Christ,

the contradiction of the crucified and resurrected savior to breathe,

at that moment we are truly living in the rooted tradition of Christianity.

Therefore, the embrace of these contradictions can lead to a richer understanding of what it means to be Christian today.

My friend, the Bible was written by human beings for human beings,
and the more we accept the humanity of the Bible,
the more we can begin to comprehend the divine.

If this sounds like a contradiction, then I would point to the contradictions in scripture and say,

“Exactly.”

This course is designed to help you see the contradictions in scripture as guides rather than hindrances in the growing of your faith.

Welcome to Biblical contradictions.

[Prototype #2 Video Link, Click Here](#)

Script for Prototype #2:

Let's begin with a passage of scripture from the Holy Bible. Today's reading is from Deuteronomy chapter twenty-three, verse one.

(READ Deuteronomy 23:1)

Uhm. Excuse me?

This is in the Bible?

People actually consider these words sacred?

Maybe we should read it again to make sure we heard it correctly the first time.

(READ Deuteronomy 23:1)

Yup, it's just as bad as we remember.

And if you find that another English translation of this verse is not as graphic as the translation that I am reading this morning, then please know that the earliest Hebrew manuscripts we have contain the word "Shophkah," which is the ancient Hebrew word for penis.

So rather than translating the text for what it is, translations like the NIV will throw in the word "emasculated" in an attempt to tone down the unfiltered words of the text.

I particularly enjoy the King James Translation of Deuteronomy 23. In the KJV, we read "He that is wounded in the stones, or hath his privy member cut off, shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord."

Which sounds very British to me.

Have you ever had someone tell you that the Bible is boring?

Because my response is that the Bible isn't boring.

The problem is that the church insists on reading the boring parts.

But here's a verse that really grabs our attention from the moment we read it together, and all of a sudden, we are filled with questions, because this verse is anything but boring.

Questions like,

"When we read stories about people who risked their lives for translating the Bible into new languages, do you think they got to Deuteronomy 23:1 and thought, 'Really? I'm risking my life for this?'"

Another question,

"Why on earth is this in the Bible? Was this passage really helpful to anyone at any time?"

Another question,

"Why is it that I've never heard anyone insist that we need to take Deuteronomy 23 more seriously, and do genital inspections of every man who walks into church?"

That question is a fair one, right?

I mean, people are adamant that we cannot pick and choose what Biblical commandments we need to follow. Rather, they should keep ALL of the commandments. And yet, I don't know of one church who cares to even attempt to follow Deuteronomy 23:1.

This is remarkable, because there isn't a lot of gray area in this verse.

The person who is speaking, Moses, is very clear.

If men have all their parts, then they are in.

If they are missing something down there, then they are out.

Discussion over.

Even though Deuteronomy 23:1 is clear and easy to interpret,
this verse, and other verses like it, call into question the very role of the Bible in our
lives.

A lot of Christians view this book as the moral authority for all of humanity.

And there is a real sense among Christians that if people just read the Bible for
themselves, then they will arrive at the same logical conclusions for what is ethical and what is
not.

But that simply isn't the case.

I want to share with you three stories about my experience with the Bible.

The first story takes place all the way back in 2019, I attended the first ever Pride event in
downtown Redlands. This long overdue celebration of queer folks featured vendors, giveaways,
inspiring speakers, and alternative rockers Hoity Toity, one of my favorite local bands. It was a
blast, and because it was a pride event, the colors of the rainbow were everywhere. People waved
pride flags, others sported temporary pride tattoos, and companies rebranded their logos to affirm
queer folks in Redlands.

However, across the street, a small group of less than 25 Christians stoically looked at
Pride with a posture of judgment.

They held signs high above their head that were devoid of any color.

On white poster board they had written Bible verses with black markers that they
believed condemned queer life.

I remember standing in a sea of swirling rainbows,
looking across the street at the monochromatic signs quoting scripture,
and shaking my head.

Is this what the Bible is supposed to be?

A book that tells people that we shouldn't join in the party,
that people should condemn and judge queer folks from the sidelines,
and that people should remove all of the colors from our signs, so we won't be mistaken
with the prism of joy that is pride?

The second story occurs in 2008, when I enrolled as a first-year student in seminary.

I arrived at the seminary hungry for answers.

This appetite stemmed from a relationship with my best friend in undergrad, a man named Tyler who identified as atheist.

For four years, he logically and methodically picked apart my belief in a six-day creation, which in turn threatened my entire understanding of the Bible.

I could not wait to get to seminary, and discover answers and retorts and arguments that would put me at an advantage the next time that I engaged Tyler in conversation.

My very first class was Introduction to the Hebrew Bible.

And within the first two or three weeks we began to study the book of Genesis.

Even though I grew up going to church every week and spent thirteen years in Christian education, for the first time in my life in grad school I heard that Genesis 2 contains an entirely different Creation story from Genesis 1.

This completely blew my mind.

And I felt betrayed

I felt betrayed by all the teachers who came before me,

and either knew there were two creation stories and didn't tell me,

or worse, they didn't even know that Genesis possessed two different creation stories.

These contradictory accounts reveal that the Bible cannot even agree with itself about how life on this planet began.

I went home that day from seminary, utterly confused about the Christian faith.

What is the purpose of the Bible

if the Bible doesn't give us answers?

The third story happened in 2015.

In that year, I worked for a global denomination. And this denomination, like a lot of other global denominations in 2015, debated whether or not female pastors can be ordained as equal to male pastors. There were committees and study groups and sermons and pamphlets flying around like wildfire.

Those who were in favor of women's ordination used verses from across scripture to justify their position of gender equality. Conversely, the misogynists in the church, who also happened to be in charge, cited just as many verses from scripture in their work to justify the inferiority of women. During that year, I heard more quotes about what the Bible says about the equality or the oppression of women, and how the equality or oppression of women will ultimately determine whether or not we are people of the word.

And even though they believed in opposite agendas, the misogynists and the reasonable human beings used the exact same book to justify their view of women in the workplace.

Living through that time felt dissonant.

And I remember during that year, thinking a very strange and a very new thought for me.

As this conversation unfolded. I thought to myself, “I don’t care if there’s 2000 verses in the Bible that clearly state that women should not be ordained in the church, because I would still support the ordination of women!”

And when I thought that, I realized that my entire perception of the Bible since I attended seminary.

I did not view the Bible as a moral authority anymore.

And I felt it was imperative to openly disagree with the Bible if it violated human rights.

And if I could freely disagree with the Bible,

then what role is the Bible supposed to play in my life?

I grew up in a household and a church that held the Bible as a moral authority. The idea was that God gave us the Bible as a kind of instruction manual for human beings to read, digest, and then apply into our daily actions so that we might live in a way that honors our Creator. But that raises the question, “What does it mean when we say ‘God gave us the Bible?’”

There are a lot of different opinions about how God gave us these writings, but the dominant narrative in Christianity is that God directly inspired each and every word in the Bible. To illustrate what this traditional understanding looks like, let’s go back to the book of Genesis. God creates the heavens and the earth, the rocks and the trees, the birds and the fish, and the animals and the humans. The humans begin to populate the earth, but God doesn’t like this specific population of earth. So God sends a flood, an ark, and then a rainbow. Noah’s family emerges from the ark and begins to repopulate the earth. Nations emerge from the descendants of Noah until finally a man named Abram is born. God calls Abram to leave his family and go start a new kind of nation, and Abram goes. Four generations later, Abram’s family settles in Egypt due to a draught in modern-day Israel, and a few generations later, Egypt enslaves the men and women who are the descendants of Abram.

Before we continue in our story, we must make a note that we still do not have a Bible. No matter how conservative or liberal you are, there is not a soul who believes that any kind of religious text exists for the children of Israel at this point in their history.

Returning to the story, the children of Israel are enslaved by the empire of Egypt for 400 years. The Israelites cry out for liberation and God hears their prayers. God sends a liberator known as Moses, and with a mighty and miraculous hand, God emancipates the Israelites from bondage. They are led across the sea and into the wilderness while God vanquishes their oppressors.

Here in the wilderness is where the Christian tradition typically believes that things started to change.

The tradition tells us that God, all of a sudden, decides that humanity needs a code of ethics encapsulated in writing.

While this isn't in the Bible, the tradition assumes that God approaches Moses. She says to him, "Moses, I need you to write a Bible. Go and fetch a piece of papyrus and a writing utensil."

So Moses, just like his forefather Abram, goes in faith. He returns and says to the almighty, "I'm here, God. What do you want me to write?"

God says, "Write the word 'Genesis' on top of the page."

And Moses dutifully obeys.

Then God says, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth,"

Moses writes, "in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."

God continues, "The earth was a formless void..."

Moses follows along, "The earth was a formless void..."

and so on and so forth all the way through the book of Genesis.

And then God says, "Now write 'Exodus' at the top of the page."

Moses, once again obeys.

The tradition believes that God dictates every word of Exodus to Moses,

and Moses perfectly transcribes every word from the tongue of the Creator.

This holy dictation continues for the book of Leviticus, the book of Numbers, and then the book of Deuteronomy.

If you subscribe to the tradition, then you believe that there was a historical moment when Moses recorded Deuteronomy and God said,

"No one whose testicles are crushed or whose penis is cut off shall be admitted to the assembly of the Lord."

And if you believe this is a historical moment, then I have to ask you,

"Do you think Moses blindly copied this rule down in silence?"

Or do you think Moses stopped writing, looked up and said, 'Now hang on a minute, I need an explanation.'

Because if it was me, I would definitely have some questions for God.

Either way, the tradition holds that God needs Moses to include Deuteronomy 23:1 in the scriptures, and Moses obliges the inspiration of God.

After recording the first five books of the Bible, Moses dies, and his writings become known as both “The Torah,” and “The Law of Moses.”

The next generation embraces the Torah, and the generation after them does the same.

Centuries and even a millennium later, the Torah becomes the most influential writing in all of Judaism.

These words are so important that, according to historians Ann Spangler and Lois Tverberg, the people of Judea send every male child, and a few female children, to school to memorize, all five books of the Torah. By the age of ten, most boys could recite all five books of the Torah from memory. And if they could do that, then there is a moment when each boy must learn and memorize Deuteronomy 23:1.

A boy named Philip is born into this culture and this academic expectation 2000 years ago. Philip grows up in a region known as Bethsaida, and Bethsaida has a reputation as being the most conservative region in all of Judea. While we don’t know for sure, we can plausibly assume that Philip travels to school every day to memorize the Torah. By the age of ten, he commits all five books of Torah to his internal memory.

A few years later, John 1 tells us that Jesus finds Philip and says to him, “Follow me.” Philip drops everything and follows Jesus as one of his disciples.

Over the next several months and possibly years,
Philip witnesses firsthand Jesus dining with sinners,
empowering women,
reading Torah in the Synagogue,
deconstructing sacred rules,
and reconstructing new ethics.

Philip abandons Jesus when the Romans arrest him.

He hears of the crucifixion of Jesus.

He weeps when Jesus is buried.

And then he sees, with his own eyes, the resurrected life and body of Jesus Christ.

Before Jesus returns to heaven, Jesus says to all of the disciples that they are to go out into all of the world and baptize all of the people in the name of the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

So Philip, just like his ancient ancestor Abram , goes.

In Acts 8, Philip follows the direction of God down a sparsely populated desert road from Jerusalem to Gaza.

After walking for some time, Philip meets a royal official from the court of the Queen of Ethiopia sitting in a chariot on the side of the road. We later learn from the narrator that this man is in charge of the Queen's treasury, and that this man is also a eunuch.

A eunuch is a man whose testicles have been crushed,
and, according to the clear law in Deuteronomy 23,
cannot be admitted to the assembly of the Lord.

Philip looks over at the official from Ethiopia, and notices that he is reading from the prophet Isaiah. He asks him, "Do you understand what you are reading?"

The official says, "How can I?" and he invites Philip to sit with him on the chariot.
The passage that puzzles the royal official is from Isaiah 53. He reads it to Philip,
"Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter,
and like a lamb silent before its shearer,
so he does not open his mouth.

In his humiliation justice was denied him.

Who can describe his generation?

For his life is taken away from the earth."

The official then looks up from the scroll and asks Philip,

"Who is this passage about? Are these words about the prophet Isaiah, or someone else?"

Philip happily answers that these words from Isaiah are a prophecy about Jesus Christ, and the author of Acts tells us that Philip then shared the good news of the Gospel.

After hearing about Jesus, the Royal Official looks around, sees some water and says in verse 36, "Look, Here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?"

Well, the answer to that question is that Deuteronomy 23:1 is what prevents this official from being baptized.

And here's Philip, who, most likely, has Deuteronomy 23:1 memorized, and those words from Moses are tying a knot in his stomach.

The tension arises from the fact that the words in Deuteronomy are clear. Deuteronomy 23:1 does not offer any wiggle room in the attitude one should take toward eunuchs.

Eunuchs are out.

Eunuchs cannot participate in the work of the people of God.

And seeing as reconstructive surgery does not exist in the ancient world, there is nothing that the Royal Official can do to be readmitted into the assembly of the Lord.

The tension increases when we consider that Acts tells us that God led Philip to this Royal Official on this very road.

In my imagination, Philip is trying to discern whether God is putting him through a test.

Philip wants to know if God is testing him to see if he will remain devout to the Torah.

Or, Philip wonders if God is testing him in the opposite direction, to see if Philip will discard scripture in the name of greater humanity?

I picture all of these things going through Philip's mind in a matter of seconds.

As the Royal Official's question hangs in the air,

"Philip, what is to prevent me from getting baptized right now?"

The Bible is the correct answer.

And somehow, it's also the wrong answer.

Because after a moment, Philip shakes his head and says,

"Nothing. Nothing is preventing you from being baptized right now."

He then walks down to the water with the Royal Official, and baptizes him in the name of the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

My friends, in this story,

Philip disobeys scripture so that he can follow God.

The baptism of the Royal Official is a blatant disregard of what many people consider to be the infallible word of God,

and God is the one leading Philip into that blatant disregard.

When we talk about what it means to be a Christian,

we go back to the very dawn of this religion with this story of Philip and the Royal Official.

Here we discover that the Christian faith is deeply rooted in disobeying scripture to become more inclusive.

The early church challenges us to recognize that God is much bigger than the Bible and much bigger than any book that we have in our existence.

We do not worship a Bible.

We worship the God who is bigger than the Bible.

Which brings us back to the original question that Deuteronomy 23:1 dared us to ask,

"What exactly is the purpose of the Bible in our lives today?"

When I was growing up, I believed that the Bible was dictated to the authors of scripture, like Moses, from the very mouth of God.

But the more that I read this book, the more problematic that became.

I encountered stories like Philip disregarding scripture.

I read biblical laws that justified the hatred of other human beings.

I experienced contradiction after contradiction in scripture, which testified consistently to the humanity, rather than the divinity, of scripture.

And the more I studied the Bible, the less I believed the Bible to be an infallible inspiration.

Instead, I have found that it is much more helpful to imagine the Bible, and the inspiration behind, the Bible, through the metaphor of an art gallery.

Behind me, I've asked a model, Bev, to sit for five artists and allow them to draw her picture.

(CUT TO ARTISTS)

I gave each artist only one instruction: I asked them to draw what they see.

Now in a thought experiment, one would assume that at the end of their drawing time, every artist would all produce the same portrait.

Because, each artist is drawing the same person

at the same time

with the exact same lighting.

But common sense overrides this assumption.

Because immediately, we notice that each artist is sitting from a different vantage point.

While our model is the same, the fact is each artist sees the model from where they are sitting. Not only that, but our artists are all different heights, which means that some are perceiving our model from various elevations.

Additionally, pay attention to the fact that I asked each artist to bring their own drawing medium. Some have markers while others have pens and others have pencils. These mediums deeply impact each artists' final drawing.

On top of all of that, we must consider the unique soul and life experience of each artist. We have artists of different skill levels, different ages, different genders, and different histories. None of our artists can separate their drawings from themselves.

So while each artist is drawing the same person with the same instructions at the same time, the same inspiration and the same instructions for their drawing,

We can safely assume that these each artist will produce a very unique result.

(CUT TO ARTISTS SHOWING THEIR PORTRAITS)

My friends,

as you look at all of these drawings,

I must tell you that this is a more accurate representation of what the Bible truly is.

A collection of finite people attempting to convey creative ideas about the infinite God.

Some of these drawings may speak more to you than other drawings you see.

And some drawings are unique and special, in their own way.

But when we can see and recognize and include and love the humanity of the people behind the writings of scripture and behind the drawings, well then we grow in appreciation of something deeper, don't we? I call that thing that we appreciate more inspiration.

The Bible is like an art gallery.

And the pages are filled with human beings who encountered the divine in some transcendent way, and then did their best to try and convey that experience in words.

The Bible is valuable as long as the Bible stays in its proper place.

And the proper place of the Bible is a human record of multiple generations sharing how they perceived God in their own lifetime.

Which brings us back to Deuteronomy 23:1.

This is a bizarre verse.

There is a sense that we should not put forth any effort to practice Deuteronomy 23:1 in 2021.

But I do not think we should dismiss this verse entirely.

While our modern egos want to dismiss this restriction on men with mutilated genitals as primitive, I think this verse can teach us to grow both in empathy and in humility.

While we don't know for sure why this verse exists, my best guess is that whoever wrote down Deuteronomy 23:1 for the first time did so because they read the book of Genesis and took it seriously.

In Genesis 1, God creates all of material reality in six sequences.

During the sixth sequence, God creates many men and women at the same time, and all of them are created in God's image.

Once these men and women begin to breathe and become aware of reality, God blesses them. And then God speaks directly to all of them by giving them a commandment. She says, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth!”

According to this author, God’s initial desire for humanity is to make some babies.

Now this might seem like a strange desire for God to have, until you consider that this author lived during a tumultuous time in which the number one way for a nation to grow in power, was to grow in numbers. More people meant more military, more farmers, more workers, and more money. And all these things were interpreted as blessings from God. After all, if you became rich and powerful in the ancient world, it was because God was pleased with you, and blessed you with power and riches.

With that in mind, we can see how in the ancient world, “Be fruitful and multiply” is the most logical theological conclusion.

Around the same time that Genesis is being written down, the book of Deuteronomy is being written down. And the person that is writing Deuteronomy, most likely, lives in the same society and during a similar era as the author of Genesis. This means that both authors hold similar religious ideals, specifically that the best way to receive God’s blessing is to make sure that people in our society create as many babies as possible. So while the author of Genesis writes, “Be fruitful and multiply...” the author of Deuteronomy is much more threatening with his words. He says, “If any man damages his genitals, then he is kicked out of the community.” The implied application of this commandment is that a man should protect his reproductive organs with his life.

With this kind of backstory, I can still disagree with Deuteronomy 23:1, but I can now empathize with Deuteronomy 23:1. Before I dismissed it as bizarre, but now I can understand the reason why this verse became part of the Torah.

But the story of Deuteronomy 23:1 doesn’t end there.

Because some time after Deuteronomy 23:1 restricts eunuchs from being admitted into the assembly of the Lord, the Jewish prophet Isaiah heard that verse, and flat-out disagreed with the discrimination against these men. Isaiah railed against Deuteronomy 23 in chapter 56 of his prophecy with these words,

“Thus says the Lord...Do not let the eunuch say, ‘I am just a dry tree.’ To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me, and hold fast to my covenant, I will give, in my house and within my walls, a monument and a name better than sons and daughters. I will give eunuchs an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off.”

Isaiah disobeyed and overruled scripture in order to be more inclusive,

Centuries after Isaiah, Philip would follow Isaiah and eventually disobey and overrule scripture in order to be more inclusive.

And speaking of Philip, I hope this perspective and these ideas change the way that you understand his encounter with the Royal Official.

This story is from the book of Acts and is written from the Christian perspective. The Christian perspective colors the way we experience the story. But what if we recognize that this story is bigger than the perspective offered in Acts?

In chapter 8, Philip believes that God sends him to the Royal Official to welcome him into the Assembly of the Lord by way of baptism.

But who was it that actually needed to be saved?

After all, Philip is the one who looks down on and excludes the Royal Official due to his physical condition because of Deuteronomy 23. I get the sense that the Royal Official knows about Philip's prejudice. So he confronts Philip, and asks him, "What is to prevent me from being baptized?" In that question, the Royal Official is challenging Philip to let go of his prejudice and accept him as an equal. The Royal Official calls out Philip and dares Philip to stop seeing him as inferior, and instead as a man who bears the image of God. In this story, Philip is the one who lets go of his narrow perspective of God, which means that Philip is the one who needs to be saved.

While the text is written from the Christian perspective and tells us that Philip was called by God to save the Royal Official, I believe that the historical event that occurred was that God led Philip to the Royal Official so that Philip might be saved from his hatred.

This theory only gains more credibility when you consider how the Royal Official and Philip started to talk.

The Royal Official is studying Isaiah.

The one man in the Hebrew Bible who dared to challenge the notion that eunuchs should be excluded from the assembly of the Lord.

Now the author of Acts says that the Royal Official asked Philip about Isaiah 53, and Philip told the Royal Official that Isaiah 53 was a prophecy about Jesus Christ.

Remember, Isaiah 53 is just three chapters before Isaiah 56.

And Isaiah 56 is where Isaiah boldly argues for the inclusion and full acceptance of eunuchs everywhere.

So when the author of Acts, whose name is Luke, records this story, he writes it down years after this interaction occurred.

Luke hears the entire story secondhand, and most likely thirdhand.

Which means it's entirely plausible that the Royal Official encouraged Philip to keep reading after Isaiah 53 until he got to Isaiah 56, and demanded that he read about the inclusion of eunuchs.

Or it's also entirely plausible that the Luke got the citation of Isaiah wrong, and the Royal Official called Philip over to study Isaiah 56, which is about the equality and affirmation of eunuchs.

In my imagination, I picture the Royal Official calling out Philip and saying to him, “You have not lived up the standard set forth by your Prophet Isaiah. You need to learn to accept people like me.”

And Philip, realizes the pain his discrimination has caused.

And he says, in a humbled tone, “You’re right. This must change.”

From there, Philip baptized the Royal Official in water,

but the Royal Official baptized Philip with the truth of God’s love.

Philip is the one who needed liberation.

And God sent him a messenger to free him from his hatred.

The Royal Official is Christ in this story.

My friends, the Bible is a wonderful book when we keep it in its proper place.

The Bible is composed of writings from people who shared how they perceived and understood the inspiration of God in their own life experiences.

But we must never forget that God is always calling us to a love that is bigger than the Bible.

We are called to let go of the Bible whenever it prevents us from loving another human being.

We are called to recognize that there are limits to the perspectives offered in the Bible, and to empathize with those that the Bible would seek to marginalize.

We are called to be students and learn from people who are outside of the Christian tradition,

because we believe that every human being is made in the image of God.

We are called to empathy.

We are called to humility.

We are called to appreciate the diversity of perspective.

And we are called to humanity.

May we have the courage to let go of our religion, our scripture, and our church when they get in the way of loving another human being.

And May we see and embrace Jesus Christ in all.

Amen.

ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEW NOTES

Prototype #1 Interview #1 (Christian, over the age of 50)

What did you think?

A little bit too obvious, in my home we embraced the contradictions. I was launched on a growth relationship. Every time I read the Bible, it's a different book. I still get a thrill. I love the contradictions. It keeps the cobwebs out of my faith.

I try to look at the Bible through a lens of freedom. I look at the cross and see God saying "I love you this much." Here's Christ smiling at me from the cross. This has so enriched my ability to live. These contradictions make sense from arm to arm of Jesus. There are so many things that are so consistent in scripture. This just blows my mind. This is not a small god. We bring our brokenness and we are just purified. One of my really good friends was destroyed because her husband came home and was an atheist. Her son came out as gay. This wasn't the end of her life, if she just remained faithful, then God would do the rest.

What Works?

I think it's really good. I really like your organization. The brevity. It's a little cheesy, but consistent. I liked the way that it walked through the contradictions.

What needs to be improved?

I liked looking through the Bible, but maybe it would be better on a card.

What matters to you in this conversation?

Be sensitive, this could be derailing to others. Talk about it instead of just being condescending. Make the contradictions inviting. I'm sensitive to proof-texting. This is spot on for what needs to be done.

Prototype #1 Interview #2 (Christian, over the age of 50)

What did you think?

I grew up in a little more black and white household. Until I had Alden Thompson. He explored the census of Israel in great detail. He sensitively addressed these contradictions. How can God with this character be ok with humans misrepresenting him imperfectly? This is part of God's overall picture.

What works?

Excellence in production value. I liked the categories of the contradictions.

What needs to be improved?

I wanted to hear more about the numbers contradictions.

It feels like there is an agenda to explain the contradictions. I am not sure where this was going.

What matters to you in this conversation?^[11]_[SEP]

Pay attention to how people react.

I'm sensitive to proof-texting.

This is spot on for what needs to be done.

Prototype #1 Interview #3 (Christian, under the age of 30)

What did you think?

I think it's a great concept. When I read the Bible in the past, I just used to be confused at the contradictions, but I appreciate the embrace of the contradictions. Embracing the contradiction makes it so you don't have to take the Bible so literally.

What Works?

I loved the three contradictions and how it framed the podcast. A better way to find fulfillment in the Bible is to study the context it is.

What Needs to Be Improved?

Subtitles, we watch movies with subtitles on.

What Matters to You in this Conversation?

How can we get the idea across to Christians that contradictions matter?

Prototype #1 Interview #4 (Atheist, under the age of 30)

What did you think?

I think it's such a valuable concept. My more recent experiences with the church. If more of Christianity leaned into contradiction, then I think I would be able to find a place. Sadness, this was a response to Darwinism, what if they didn't do that? I don't want to frame history in negative context, but it's hard not to.

What Works?

The history is what really grounds me in it. As someone who doesn't have a personal connection with the Bible, the history provides perspective and grounds me in it. I loved the bookmarks and the Bible. Tell people where the books are when they are turning it in. The context is solid. I want to hear more about the facts and figures from the time of Darwin.

What Needs to Be Improved?

I have a little bit of trouble with auditory processing. If there was a way that this was printed out or accessible with a screen.

What Matters to You in this Conversation?

I want to share with others that it doesn't have to be this way. There is room for practical idealism.

What Worked?

I loved what you were saying about disobeying scripture to become more inclusive.

When you said that God is bigger than the Bible!

There are plenty of times in my life that the Bible is not inclusive, in turn religion becomes exclusive.

I'm one of my only friends who still identifies as religious.

I use my religion to become more inclusive.

The contradictions in the Bible testify to the humanity instead of the divinity of the scripture.

What could be improved?

For me, addressing the idea of context in interpretation.

So much of the excuses around infallibility is that it's about the context.

But you could have made it more about the humanity.

There was an idea that a lot of the old testament was nullified by the atonement of Christ.

But it's really about the humanity, isn't it?

Could there have been human error as they copied it, or did they add anything?

I really like the Philip story, but I would really love to do more.

What matters to you?

The biggest thing for me is keeping God as central, who we believe God to be, and then seeing God through with that lens. When we hold God on an equal playing field with the Bible, then we find a problem. We can look at the bigger picture and see the nature of God, and the humanity of writers.

Prototype #2 Interview #2 (Christian, under the age of 30)

What Worked?

It was helpful to understand why that verse existed in the first base. It's helpful to hear a speculative reason for why a verse exists.

I love the Biblical examples of people in the Bible who disobeyed the Bible to include others. It made it feel like it was possible for me to do that.

I strongly related to the feeling of betrayal about the two creation stories.

I got two very different things watching vs. listening:

Watching-the whole artist's portrayal. At the end, I thought, "I want to see what Bev looks like."

Explicitly talk about what the IG live brought up, how we didn't show Bev's face.

Listening-God is calling us to let go of the Bible to include other people.

Double baptisms

Men are baby makers was an interesting point. Here's the Bible emphasizing this idea.

What Needs to Improved?

Semantics: toward the end you said, "The Royal Official is the image bearer of Christ in this story." Bring home the point of the fact that he was excluded.

Why did Craig feel all over the place? One way to feel more linear is to return to the stories you brought up at the beginning of the sermon.

What matters to you?

It matters and was helpful to bring up a Biblical example of Biblical disobedience. It also gave you credibility because you come across as informed.

When you helped me fill in the gaps of the political agenda for Deuteronomy 23:1.

Prototype #2 Interview #3 (Christian, under the age of 30)

What Worked?

It was very effective. The visual representation of different artists really impacted me.

It wasn't done for shock factor, it was very logical and approachable progression.

What Needed to be Improved?

The lighting of the video could have been done much better.

Acknowledging there were artists in the back at the beginning.

What matters to you?

Acknowledging that the contradictions exist. It's not a threat to God to acknowledge that they exist. It's beautiful to exist.

Prototype #2 Interview #4 (Christian, under the age of 50)

What works?

I love it. What worked was:

#1-Discussing that there are contradictions. Just like in a 12 step, if you can't accept that there are contradictions, then it isn't possible to work with them. This is what makes people angry. When I went to college, I was finally told about the contradictions, and I was angry that no one told me about them until that late in life.

#2-The speaker was OK with those contradictions. He brought out personal examples of how he personally dealt with the contradictions.

#3-Being OK with recognizing contradictions and accepting that there is not a solution to those contradictions at this time.

What needs to be improved?

The understanding that no one has the right perspective compared to others. Each perspective is valuable. We may not all be able to meet in the middle ground, but if we cannot listen to each other, then there can never be a meaningful conversation.

There's a limitation on having one person offer their perspective on the contradiction. There needs to be more perspective.

What continues to work is the statement that this teaching should start discussions not end them.

I've long had a conflict and inner turmoil, and you give voice to the fact that there are contradictions. It's OK to have different perspectives. Every day we continue to see it more fully.

What matters to you in this conversation?

An acceptance that there are contradictions and allowing people to be OK with them.

It's important for me to be true to my logical and spiritual self.

For us to be open to new thought, no matter what our position is. We must be willing to be malleable when having the conversation.

It's important for each of us to be willing to accept people in their position and in their journey. Each of us is not more righteous or less based on how we perceive the same question.

All of this goes back to your contradictions. If you can't accept that there are verses forbidding women from speaking, then you can't have a loving conversation. We can say, "I know the Bible talks about this, but we choose love."

Prototype #2 Interview #5 (Christian, under the age of 60)

What Worked?

Hahaha, what didn't work in the sermon? Having the artists behind you drawing their perspective behind you of the model was perfect. That was really very powerful.

When you brought Isaiah in, when you talked about how he had the gall to stand up to Moses, to see that contradiction was addressed biblically even.

What needed to be improved?

I don't really feel that anything needed to be improved. You took us from point A, to point B, to point c.

Point A is that this is ridiculous.

Point B is here's why it's ridiculous.

Point C is "It's ok it's ridiculous."

If there was something to improve on, I don't know how you would of done it.

What matters to you?

The roadmap matters. The ability to go from point A to point C and even beyond has always been important for me. There's always been important things for me to read in the Bible. It's ok for me to disagree with the text and know that my disagreement can live in the same space.

I think it really matters in the overall Christian context. How do we interpret the Bible?

To where they are important enough for us to act on today.

Appendix E—Supplemental Project Documentation

Here in the Appendix, I've included a Shot List, a Filming Schedule, and a Script from the fourth film in our series, "The Royal Contradiction." This documentation provides a behind-the-scenes look at how these films were made.

THE ROYAL CONTRADICTION SHOT LIST (PART 4)

Set Up:

Emily to the Left of the Kings.

Jen up close to both Kings. (Encourage absence of lines)

Crystal First to the Right.

Leslie Furthest to the Right (Include Context)

Colin is living. Josh is slain.

Note: We should not see the models who are dressed as king close up, we should see the models primarily through the artists' artwork.

8. Resurrection Contradiction Closing Shot
9. Wide Dramatic shot of two kings, one powerful, the other dead. Artists take their positions and begin to draw.
10. Wide Dramatic shot of two kings, one powerful, the other dead. Artists take their positions and begin to draw Take 2.
11. B Roll of Artists Creating Art
12. Craig, Monologue 1, kings visible in the background over his shoulder, but out of focus.
13. Craig, Monologue 1, kings visible in the background over his shoulder, but out of focus Take 2.
14. B Roll of Artists Creating Art

15. Wide Shot of all four artists drawing the kings from the various perspectives (45 Seconds Long).
16. Wide shot of two kings and two artists to the right of the kings.
17. B Roll of Artists Creating Art
18. Shot of Artist to the Left of the Kings.
19. Perspective of Artist to the Left of the Kings.
20. Shot of Artist in front of the two Kings.
21. Shot of First Artist to the Right of the Two Kings.
22. Perspective of First Artists to the Right of the Two Kings.
23. Shot of Second Artist to the Right of the Two Kings.
24. Perspective of Second Artist to the Right of the Two Kings.
25. Artist Reveal 1 from Perspective
26. Artist Reveal 1 from Perspective Take 2
27. Art close ups from Artist 1.
28. Artist Reveal 2 from Perspective
29. Artist Reveal 2 from Perspective Take 2
30. Art close ups from Artist 2.
31. Artist Reveal 3 from Perspective
32. Artist Reveal 3 from Perspective Take 2
33. Art close ups from Artist 3.
34. Artist Reveal 4 from Perspective
35. Artist Reveal 4 from Perspective Take 2
36. Art close ups from Artist 4.
37. Closing shot of all art hanging on easels from the spaced out perspectives.

(Artists and Models can go home)

10. Craig Monologue 2, Empty Set, Paintings on Easels behind him.
11. Craig Monologue 2, Empty Set, Paintings on Easels behind him Take 2.
33. Reveals and Close ups of Crucifixion and Resurrection.

THE ROYAL CONTRADICTION FILMING SCHEDULE

November 14—1-6 pm

1:00-Brandon, Craig, and Jordan arrive at warehouse and begin setup.

2:00-Artists and models arrive.

2:30-Begin Filming Video 4

3:30-Artists finish drawings, begin filming reveals of artwork, models go home.

3:45-Reveals finished, filming of video 4 finished, artists go on break, crew sets up for video 5.

4:30-Artists return from break, model arrives

4:45-Begin filming Video 5

5:45-Artists finish drawings, begin filming reveals of artwork, model goes home.

6:00-Wrap up filming for the day, Video 4 and 5 in the can.

Synopsis and Needs for Shooting:

We have two models pose as a slain king in front of the artists. However, they are different distances from the model. Each artists' drawing is different based on the space between them and the scene they are painting.

The thesis of this video is that interpretation is vital in the creation of the Bible.

Required: 2 Models (**Colin** and **Josh?**), 2 **King's Capes**, 2 **crowns**, arrows, Table for king to be slumped on.

Filmed on November 14 (4:00-6:00 pm)

One artist draws the living king as a great and powerful king.

Second artist draws both kings in a way that represents sorrow.

One artist needs to draw optimistically

Another artist needs to draw tragically

Third artist needs to draw matter of fact

And the fourth artist needs to draw an alternative reality.

THE ROYAL CONTRADICTION SCRIPT

(Opening shot of Two Kings, One Alive and Powerful, the other Weak and Dead)

The artists enter the frame and begin to create)

(MONOLOGUE 1)

The Bible is best understood as an art gallery and not a history museum. While this may be easy to understand while reading four Gospels, it can be difficult to apply when reading the portions of scripture that record history. But a closer look at the books of Kings and Chronicles reveals that even the history of the Bible becomes richer when seen through the lens of art gallery.

(Shot of Craig with Kings and Artists in Background)

First and Second Kings records 400 years of history for the nations of Israel and Judah. During that span, one queen and forty kings sat on the throne of their respective nations. Of those forty-one monarchs, only seven kings walked in the ways of God, while the other thirty-four monarchs committed evil in the sight of the Lord. Between the thirty-four wicked monarchs, King Manasseh may have been the worst. Manasseh reigned during the seventh century BCE. He sacrificed children to the gods, he shed a plethora of innocent blood, and he undermined the religious reforms of his father. For fifty-five long years, Manasseh reigned over Judah as a tyrant until, he finally died.

Two years after the death of Manasseh, Judah coronated his grandson, Josiah, as their new king. Unlike his grandfather, Josiah walked in the ways of God. Josiah outlawed religious child sacrifice in every form, he tore down monuments to pagan gods, and he integrated long-

forgotten religious feasts and holidays back into the culture of Judah. In the historical record, the author of Kings proclaimed that Josiah was Judah's greatest king ever because he turned with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might to God, in accordance with the law of Moses. This is the highest praise that the author of Kings can give Josiah. As a reader, we assume that God smiled upon Josiah with pride for being a wholeheartedly devoted to God.

But the opposite is true.

According to the text, God seethed with anger toward Josiah because of the sins of his grandfather, Manasseh. Which is strange, because Manasseh has been dead for over thirty years. God's anger boiled over and the Almighty vowed to bring destruction to the nation of Judah and to the city of Jerusalem because of the sins of Manasseh.

Two verses after that divine vow, Josiah rode into battle against Pharaoh Neco and the Egyptians.

And Pharaoh Neco killed Josiah.

Josiah's servants brought his body back to Jerusalem in a chariot, and then buried him among the kings.

This story presents an uncomfortable picture of God. According to the text, Manasseh committed a lifetime of sins, and those sins provoked an insatiable wrath in God. After his death, Manasseh's grandson, Josiah, committed a lifetime of virtues. But the surfeit of virtues never overcame the surplus of sins. In God's eyes, Manasseh's sins were greater than Josiah's virtues. And in God's residual anger toward Manasseh, God, over thirty years later, enacted revenge on Josiah, and allowed Josiah to die in battle at the hands of Neco.

In this passage, God raged for generations, avoided forgiveness, and then inflicted retribution on an innocent person. While the historian asserts confidence about the actions of God toward Josiah, this certainty leads modern readers to question whether or not God is actually good.

But this is not the end of Josiah's story.

When a reader finishes the book of Second Kings the next book in Christian Bibles is 1 Chronicles. Immediately, the reader teleports back in time all the way to the first human being. Chronicles then plods through an exhaustive genealogy that spits the reader out at the beginning of King David's reign, which took place about 400 years prior to the ending of Second Kings. Reading on, we discover that Chronicles retells the entire 400 year history of Judah's monarchs, that we just read about in the book of Kings. And while Kings and Chronicles strive to archive the same factual events, the recorded history between Kings and Chronicles is vastly different.

In the book of 2 Chronicles, Manasseh still did evil in the sight of the Lord. However, in Chronicles, Manasseh, toward the end of his life, repented and asked God to forgive the litany of sins he committed. God heard Manasseh's cry and restored him as king. These amends are nowhere to be found in the book of Second Kings.

Two generations later, Chronicles remembers Josiah as a righteous king, who led the nation of Judah through a massive religious reform. However, unlike Kings, Chronicles does not record God harboring any anger toward Josiah because of his grandfather.

This absence of God's wrath completely changes the history of Josiah's death. According to Chronicles, Josiah led the army of Judah out to meet Pharaoh Neco and the Egyptians in battle. Moments before the battle began, Neco sent messengers to Josiah. They informed him

that Josiah's God commissioned Pharaoh Neco to march into battle against the Assyrians, and if Josiah decides to interfere with Neco's mission from God, then God will be forced to kill Josiah in battle.

After he heard these words from the Egyptians, Josiah ignored the warning.

He charged into battle against the Pharaoh.

(Shot of Slain King)

The Egyptian archers scored a hit on King Josiah.

His servants gathered his body and traveled back to Jerusalem.

Moments later, Josiah died.

According to Kings, Josiah died because of his grandfather's sins.

But according to Chronicles, Josiah died because he interfered with the work of God through Pharaoh Neco.

Both of these books are in the Bible.

Both of these books were written with the intent to log history.

And both of these books offer contradicting records of King Josiah's death.

How did the Bible end up with contradicting histories?

And what can these contradicting histories teach us about the Bible?

Here in the warehouse,

(Wide Shot of All Four Artists and Two Kings)

four artists are drawing or painting two models. One model poses as a living king, while the other model poses as a slain king. The living king represents the life of Josiah, while the slain king symbolizes the death of Josiah. To the left of these models,

(Shot of Living King and the Artist to the left

Artist Reveals Drawing from that Perspective)

the first artist is positioned in a way that she can only see the living king. Let's imagine that this artist personifies the people of Judah who lived during the reign of Josiah. While Josiah is king, he is beloved by his own people, and no one suspects that his life will be cut short on a battlefield. So while the people go about their daily lives with Josiah on the throne, they are inspired and optimistic about what the future holds. This trust and optimism influences how the story of Josiah is told. Imagine a historian recording the history of Josiah, but finished the history before Josiah died in battle. In that story, the words would likely overflow with God's favor and happiness. In the same way, an artist who draws from the perspective that is blinded to the tragedy will portray Josiah as a confident and optimistic hero. Her unique place in the warehouse informs the art that she creates. If she moved to a location where she could see the model representing death, then her new location would influence the art that she creates.

Which is precisely where our second artist

(Shot of Living King and Slain King with Artist in front of them

Artist Reveals Drawing from that Perspective)

is positioned. This artist represents the people of Judah who loved Josiah, lived during his reign, and also wept at the shocking news of his death on a battlefield. If we asked them to write the

story of Josiah, moments after his death, then we can imagine their account would be saturated in sorrow. The king's death triggered a theological crisis, causing people to shake their fists toward the sky as they wonder aloud, "Why, O God, did you withdraw your protection from Josiah in battle?" And while that question hangs in the air, the heavens do not answer back. Here, in the immediate aftermath of Josiah's death, the people of Judah lived without answers. And that lack of clarity would impact the way they told the story of Josiah. To reflect this lack of clarity, the artist sitting closest to the life and death of our models produced a portrait without concrete lines or clear rigidity. The space between the lines exemplifies the unresolved tension of Josiah being a great king, but also being a king without God's protection in battle.

But as time passes, the people of Judah look back toward the death of Josiah, and filled in the lines. This is represented by our third artist, who metaphorically embodies the author of 2 Kings.

(Shot of Slain King with First Artist to the Right

Artist Reveals Drawing from that Perspective)

This author of Second Kings wrote the story of Josiah about 80 years after Josiah's death. Which means that the author of Kings, most likely, did not live during the life or death of Josiah. This gap influenced the history that the author recorded. From this far-flung perspective, the author of Kings addressed that same theological crisis that arose from Josiah's death on a battlefield. They asked the question, "Why did God allow Josiah to die?" and from the comfort of eight decades away, they answered "Because God was still angry at Manasseh." This emotionally cold solution is concocted from an emotionally cold vantage point, because the author of Kings can only experience the life of Josiah through the lens of his death in battle. In the same way, the artist

sitting from this distance cannot look at the living king, without also seeing the slain king. This unwelcome presence shapes the art that she creates and roots her artistic expression in tragedy, even if she can offer a greater sense of clarity.

The fourth artist

(Shot of Slain King with First and Second Artist to the Right

Artist Reveals Drawing from that Perspective)

paints from an even further distance than our previous artist, and she is a metaphor for the author of Chronicles. While the author of Kings wrote about Josiah about 80 years after his death, the author of Chronicles wrote about Josiah approximately 280 years after he died. And in the two centuries between the composition of Kings and Chronicles, a massive amount of change occurred. During the era of Chronicles' creation, people started to question the theological idea that God punishes children for the sins of their parents. In their minds, God could not be a God of justice for inflicting a penalty on innocent people. This contemporary theological idea nullified the story of God allowing Josiah to die for the sins of his grandfather. For this reason, the author of Chronicles, 280 years after the death of Josiah, changed history to match the contemporary theology. This is why we have two contradicting accounts of history in the Bible. In a similar fashion, our fourth artist is standing at the greatest distance from the two models. While this distance may obscure some of the details, this distance also provides a greater awareness of the models' place in the larger context of the warehouse. She can see more than just the models. From this perspective, the artist creates more space for understanding and reflection for what all of this means. Her work is the same work as the author of Chronicles, who changed history to tell the story of Josiah in a way that made sense for theology of his era.

(Wide Shot of All Artists Drawing and Kings

Arrows Pop Up on Screen as Craig Talks)

When we open the Bible, we read through the stories in this chronological way. We assume that the Bible was written in the same direction. But the fact is the Bible was written in this direction. The authors of scripture looked back at events that occurred in history, and they tried to explain those events through their imperfect, human understandings of God. This led to historical interpretations changing over time, which is why the Bible contains contradicting histories. While changing theology is often dismissed as blasphemy today, the contradiction of Kings and Chronicles teaches us that changing theology is the tradition of the Bible.

(Back to Craig, Empty Set with Paintings Hanging on Easels)

(MONOLOGUE 2)

The Bible is an accurate account of how a people group perceived and understood God throughout multiple generations. Sometimes those perceptions of God changed, and other times those perceptions rang true throughout the ages.

A couple of centuries after Chronicles was completed, the Jews who put the Hebrew Bible together actively chose to include both contradicting accounts of history in the canon. The deeper meaning of this contradiction enables us to see that our theology will change from generation to generation as we seek to understand the work and character of God from our unique moment in history.

And this consistent theological change is the tradition of the Bible.

(Craig Walks out of Frame)

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