

Series: Spiritual Mythbusters
Myth #2: The Bible is Full of Errors
Psalm 119:9-16; 2 Timothy 3:14-16
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OK, we all know the church bulletin isn't always accurate. We sometimes have the wrong time, and there is the occasional typographical error. We do proofread, but some of those things still slip by.

But we are not alone! Here are some mistakes that other churches printed in their Sunday morning bulletins:

- Thursday night: Potluck Supper - Prayer and medication will follow. (Some church folks could use a little medication!)
- Scouts are saving aluminum cans, bottles, and other items to be recycled. Proceeds will be used to cripple children. (That's a ministry I haven't heard of.)
- The outreach committee has enlisted 25 visitors to make calls on people who are not afflicted with any church. (Maybe you've been to that kind of church before.)
- The Pastor would appreciate it if the ladies of the congregation would lend him their girdles for the pancake breakfast next Sunday morning. (Sounds like the pastor has a secret!)
- Ushers will eat latecomers. (Now there's a church you want to get to on time.)
- The Adult Choir invites any member of the congregation who enjoys sinning to join them. (Now there's a new approach to a membership drive!)
- Brother Lamar has gone on to be the Lord. (Talk about a job promotion!)

I remember the first time I found a typographical error in a school textbook. It was a shock to realize that even the experts sometimes made mistakes.

But what about the Bible? One of the criticisms that non-believers sometimes have of our faith is that "the Bible is full of errors." We say, "The Bible tells us that..." and the critic responds, "Yes, but the Bible is full of errors." Now, in my experience, when I have responded, "What errors are you talking about? Could you show me one of those errors?" the person cannot name a single error. They are merely repeating something they have heard.

But there are others who have done some work putting together their lists of the Bible's supposed errors. And what shows up on these lists?

Quotation Accuracy Errors

Complaints that New Testament quotations of Old Testament passages often differ in wording from the Old Testament verses they are quoting. But if we understand that the Jews 2000 years ago didn't have their own copies of the Scriptures, they couldn't pull it up on the computer and cut and paste. They were quoting these many passages from memory, so it's no surprise that they aren't word-for-word copies of the original.

I cannot count it as an error that these writers and speakers did not quote the Old Testament verbatim when I myself cannot do it either. Many of us today, even with two or three copies of the Bible in our homes, still paraphrase the passages we cite in our conversations.

Scientific Errors

In 1 Kings 7:23, the writer is describing one of the items crafted for the temple - an ornate reservoir or cistern that held about 12,000 gallons of water. The author says that it was ten cubits in diameter (about 15 feet) and 30 cubits in circumference (about 45 feet). But we know that $\pi = 3.1417\dots$ and we know that $\pi \times \text{diameter} = \text{circumference}$. So the circumference would have been 31.4 cubits, not 30. Are we holding the ancient Hebrews to our modern standards of measurement? Is that an error or an approximation?

Keep in mind that this section is describing the things that Hiram, the Phoenician craftsman, made for the temple. Why a Phoenician craftsman? Because the Hebrews did not have the technical knowledge to do some of these projects. So is it any wonder that their math isn't exact?

Beyond that, what was the writer's purpose? Was he trying to give us a "blueprint" of the exact dimensions of these items, or was he simply trying to convey the grandeur and scale of the furnishings of this first temple?

Another objection is that, in Leviticus 11, where the Hebrews are being given their dietary laws, it says that they should not eat rabbits because they "chew the cud." Modern critics say, "There's another error in the Bible! Rabbits don't chew the cud!" And it's true that rabbits don't regurgitate their food and chew it again like cows do. They don't "ruminates." But they do, indeed, re-process their food.

A rabbit's digestive system expels pellets of partially digested food, and rabbits will eat those pellets and run them through their digestive system again to get additional nutrients out of them. So, in our standard use of the phrase "chew the cud," rabbits don't do that, but in a broader sense of re-processing food that has been eaten once, rabbits do, indeed chew the cud.

So the problem here isn't a factual error in the Bible, but a failure of modern critics to understand the scope of what the Hebrew writer was describing. In all fairness, we cannot place modern definitions and restrictions on ancient language and then say, "They didn't know the facts." The problem here is that *we* don't know the facts of what they were referring to.

And, in this same category of scientific errors, there is the issue of phenomenological language in the Bible. Phenomenological language is language that describes how things look. For instance, even today the weatherman says, "As the sun travels across the sky tomorrow..." But we know, and so does he, that the sun doesn't move. It just looks that way as the earth spins on its axis. The Bible is filled with phenomenological language that really shouldn't be counted as scientific error.

Historical Errors

Camels are mentioned in Patriarchal Period (Genesis). Critics say, "That's wrong, because camels were not domesticated until centuries later. They say the earliest evidence of the use of camels is not until about 1200 B.C.

Now, this is interesting because they take the earliest evidence they know about and make the assumption that, because there is no proof of camels being used earlier, then they must not have been, so the Bible is wrong. Because I assume a certain thing is true, then the Bible's statement to the contrary makes it wrong.

But Egyptologist K. A. Kitchen has pointed out that there *is* evidence for earlier use of camels. Archeologists have found a figuring of a kneeling camel from Byblos, around 1900 B.C. And there are mentions of the use of camels in Sumerian texts dating back to the early second millenium. In areas of Iran, archeologists have found the remains of ancient human encampments – from as early as 2700 B.C. – and there uncovered extensive numbers of camel remains.

So sometimes the conflict is not with a historical fact, but with a historical assumption that may later be proven wrong. Interestingly, archeologists have often found evidence that supports some story in the Bible, but no archeological find has ever shown the Bible to be wrong.

Internal Contradiction Errors

Most alleged inconsistencies are cleared up by a more careful reading of the text. One critic declared that Genesis 7:4 says the Flood lasted forty days while Genesis 7:11 says it lasted an entire year. But a more careful reading shows that the rains lasted forty days, but it took a year for the flood waters to subside.

I will admit that the critics are right on one issue. There are a few places in the Bible where numbers seem to have been copied incorrectly at some point. For instance:

- 2 Kings 8:26 – "Two and twenty years old was Ahaziah when he began to reign..."
- 2 Chronicles 22:2 – "Forty and two years old was Ahaziah when he began to reign..."

The Hebrews did not have a number system like ours. Instead, letters of their alphabet were assigned numerical value and did "double duty" as numbers. So in reading these characters and figuring out the numerical value, some copyist erred somewhere in the past. I've noticed that numbers is an area where we tend to most easily err, even today.

- 2 Samuel 6:23 – "Therefore Michal the daughter of Saul had no child unto the day of her death"
- 2 Samuel 21:8 – "But the king took...the five sons of Michal the daughter of Saul"

More modern translations have already corrected this error. Based on the best manuscripts, we now know that the second passage refers to someone named Merab, not Michal. Better information on the original text has cleared up this mis-translation.

- 2 Samuel 8:3-4 – "David smote also Hadadezer...and took from him...seven hundred horsemen..."
- 1 Chronicles 18:3-4 – "David smote Hadadezer...and took from him...seven thousand horsemen..."
- 1 Kings 4:26 – "And Solomon had forty thousand stalls of horses for his chariots..."
- 2 Chronicles 9:25 – "And Solomon had four thousand stalls for horses and chariots..."

But these "copying errors" bring up an interesting point: When you look at all of these supposed errors together – how many horses someone had, the circumference of a water reservoir, how old a ruler was when he began his reign – do these issues have any impact on the great truths of the Bible?

...namely that there is a God who created us,
who has taught us his standards of right and wrong,
who calls us to live in obedience,
who invaded history in the person of Jesus Christ,
through whose death and resurrection we can have forgiveness and eternal life.

Does the critic want me to say, "Well, I guess that could all be wrong, because we don't know how many horse stalls Solomon had. The Bible can't be trusted, because the Hebrews didn't have good math skills when it came to diameters and circumferences."

Think how many typos and grammatical errors are found in the daily newspaper. But would any of the critics say, “Today’s journalists cannot be trusted because they make mistakes. So it’s wrong to cite a newspaper article to prove a point.”

In fact, the reason we *can* find these discrepancies is because so many of the major facts of the Bible are told by different writers from different perspectives. That does not take away credibility. It *adds* credibility as they agree over and over on all of the most important parts of these stories of God’s actions in history.

No, if you take the time to look at each supposed error in the Bible – if you look at the most modern study, the most accurate translations we have... if you look at the scientific issues from the perspective of the writer’s culture 2000 or 3000 years ago, the vast majority of these supposed errors just evaporate.

But, most importantly of all, what the Bible tells us over and over – in our main passages for today, Psalm 119 and 2 Timothy 3, is that the books collected in the Bible were written for a specific purpose. They weren’t written and collected to be a textbook of astronomy or geometry. These books weren’t written to teach us how to catalog the biodiversity of our planet. They weren’t written to give us the blueprints to build our own Noah’s Ark or Jerusalem Temple. The Bible never claims these purposes for itself.

The words of the Bible were written for a purely spiritual purpose. Listen again...

Psalm 119:9,11

How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word. I have hidden your word in my heart **that I might not sin against you.**

2 Timothy 3:16-17

All Scripture is God-breathed and is **useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness**, so that the man of God **may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.**

Now if you ever encounter something that seems to be an error or problem, I invite you to call me or email me. I have ridiculous amounts of Bible study materials, and I would be happy to look into the issue for you.

And, I also want to encourage you to look at every issue through the lens of the Bible’s intended purpose, and ask, “Is there something here that calls into question what God wants *for my life* and what God wants to do *in my life*?”

Is the Bible full of errors? No. There are a few minor discrepancies on issues that have no impact on our faith – discrepancies most likely caused by centuries of hand-copied manuscripts. And there are incorrect assumptions we have imposed on the Bible that, once understood, also become non-issues. But the Bible has stood up to the fiercest of examination by brilliant critics of our faith throughout the ages. If there were some great flaw in the Bible, it would have been publicized long, long ago.

Myth #2 Busted!

Extra material.....

The Nature of the Errors...

Is what the Bible is seeking to affirm affected in any way by these errors?

Are all discrepancies of equal importance?

Does God's plan for our lives, God's standards of holiness, God's work in Christ, fall apart because we are unsure whether David captured seven hundred or seven thousand of his enemy's horses?

Our modern Bibles, do contain some copying errors, but those errors

Some of the food laws have been attacked by sceptics as 'proof' that the Bible makes mistakes, meaning it could not be God's written word. For example, Leviticus 11:3-6 says:

3. 'Whatever divides the hoof, and is cloven-footed, chewing the cud, among the animals, that you shall eat.

4. 'Only, you shall not eat these of them that chew the cud, or of them that divide the hoof: the camel, for he chews the cud but does not divide the hoof; he is unclean to you.

5. 'And the rock badger, because he chews the cud, but does not divide the hoof; he is unclean to you.

6. 'And the hare, because he chews the cud but does not divide the hoof; he is unclean to you.'

We showed a photo of the camel's hoof in Creation 19(4):29, 1997, proving that the Leviticus 11:4 assertion was right that the camel did not completely 'divide the hoof', despite what some sceptics claim. Other sceptics have claimed that the Coney (Hebrew shaphan, = hyrax, rock badger) and hare (Hebrew 'arnebeth = rabbit) don't chew the cud.

In modern English, animals that 'chew the cud' are called ruminants. They hardly chew their food when first eaten, but swallow it into a special stomach where the food is partially digested. Then it is regurgitated, chewed again, and swallowed into a different

stomach. Animals which do this include cows, sheep and goats, and they all have four stomachs. Coney and rabbits are not ruminants in this modern sense.

However, the Hebrew phrase for 'chew the cud' simply means 'raising up what has been swallowed'. Coney and rabbits go through such similar motions to ruminants that Linnaeus, the father of modern classification (and a creationist), at first classified them as ruminants. Also, rabbits and hares practise refection, which is essentially the same principle as rumination, and does indeed 'raise up what has been swallowed'. The food goes right through the rabbit and is passed out as a special type of dropping. These are re-eaten, and can now nourish the rabbit as they have already been partly digested.

It is not an error of Scripture that 'chewing the cud' now has a more restrictive meaning than it did in Moses' day. Indeed, rabbits and hares do 'chew the cud' in an even more specific sense. Once again, the Bible is right and the sceptics are wrong.

God, through Moses, was giving instructions that any Israelite could follow. It is inconceivable that someone familiar with Middle-Eastern animal life would make an easily corrected mistake about rabbits, and also inconceivable that the Israelites would have accepted a book as Scripture if it were contrary to observation, which it is not.

"On Technology" (Category #1)

"The information superhighway is a dirt road that won't be paved over until 2025."
-- Sumner Redstone, CEO of Viacom/Blockbuster.

"Who the hell wants to hear actors talk?" --H.M. Warner, Warner Brothers, 1927

"This telephone has too many shortcomings to be seriously considered as a means of communication. The device is inherently of no value to us." -- An internal Western Union memo, 1876

"I think there is a world market for maybe five computers." -- IBM chairman Thomas Watson, 1943

"There is no reason anyone would want a computer in their home."
-- Ken Olson, founder, chairman & president of DEC, 1977

"640k ought to be enough for anybody." -- Bill Gates, 1981 (Did he mean \$640K?)

"Computers in the future may weigh no more than 1.5 tons."
--Popular Mechanics, forecasting the relentless march of science, 1949

"Everything that can be invented has already been invented."
-- Charles H. Duell, director of the U.S. Patent Office, 1899

"Computer games don't affect kids; I mean if Pac-Man affected us as kids, we'd all be running around in darkened rooms, munching magic pills and listening to repetitive electronic music."
- Kristin Wilson, Nintendo, Inc., 1989.

"A rocket will never be able to leave the earth's atmosphere." --The New York Times, 1936

"The only thing I'd rather own than Windows is English. Then I'd be able to charge you an upgrade fee every time I add new letters like N and T." --Scott McNealy, chairman of Sun Microsystems, Inc.

"I have traveled the length and breadth of this country and talked with the best people, and I can assure you that data processing is a fad that won't last out the year."
--The editor in charge of business books for Prentice Hall, 1957

"But what ... is it good for?"
--Engineer at the Advanced Computing Systems Division of IBM, 1968, commenting on the microchip.

"The wireless music box has no imaginable commercial value. Who would pay for a message sent to nobody in particular?" --David Sarnoff's associates in response to his urgings for investment in the radio in the 1920s.

"The world is coming to an end in 1950." --Historian Henry Adams, 1903

"There is no likelihood man can ever tap the power of the atom."
--Nobel Prize-winning physicist Robert Milliken, 1923

"If I had thought about it, I wouldn't have done the experiment. The literature was full of examples that said you can't do this." --Spencer Silver on the work that led to the unique adhesives for 3-M "Post-It" Notepads.

"So we went to Atari and said, 'Hey, we've got this amazing thing, even built with some of your parts, and what do you think about funding us? Or we'll give it to you. We just want to do it. Pay our salary, we'll come work for you.' And they said, 'No.' So then we went to Hewlett-Packard, and they said, 'Hey, we don't need you. You haven't got through college yet.'"
--Apple Computer Inc. founder Steve Jobs on attempts to get Atari and H-P interested in his and Steve Wozniak's personal computer.

"Professor Goddard does not know the relation between action and reaction and the need to have something better than a vacuum against which to react. He seems to lack the basic knowledge ladled out daily in high schools."
--1921 New York Times editorial about Robert Goddard's revolutionary rocket work.

"You want to have consistent and uniform muscle development across all of your muscles? It can't be done. It's just a fact of life. You just have to accept inconsistent muscle development as an unalterable condition of weight training."
--Response to Arthur Jones, who solved the "unsolvable" problem by inventing Nautilus.

"Television won't last because people will soon get tired of staring at a plywood box every night."
--Producer Darryl Zanuck, 20th Century Fox, 1946

"Drill for oil? You mean drill into the ground to try and find oil? You're crazy!"
--Drillers who Edwin L. Drake tried to enlist to his project to drill for oil in 1859

"Well-informed people know it is impossible to transmit the voice over wires and that were it possible to do so, the thing would be of no practical value."
--Boston Post, 1865

"Stocks have reached what looks like a permanently high plateau."
--Irving Fisher, Professor of Economics, Yale University, 1929.

"Airplanes are interesting toys but of no military value."
--Marechal Ferdinand Foch, Professor of Strategy, Ecole Superieure de Guerre.

"Louis Pasteur's theory of germs is ridiculous fiction." --Pierre Pachet, Professor of Physiology at Toulouse, 1872

"If excessive smoking actually plays a role in the production of lung cancer, it seems to

be a minor one."

--W.C. Heuper, National Cancer Institute, 1954

"The abdomen, the chest, and the brain will forever be shut from the intrusion of the wise and humane surgeon."

--Sir John Eric Ericksen, British surgeon, appointed Surgeon-Extraordinary to Queen Victoria 1873.

"By 2000, politics will simply fade away. We will not see any political parties."

--Visionary and inventor R. Buckminster Fuller, 1966

"You ain't going nowhere, son. You ought to go back to driving a truck."

--The Grand Ole Opry's Jim Denny to Elvis Presley, 1954

"Good morning, doctors. I have taken the liberty of removing Windows 95 from my hard drive."

--The winning entry in a "What were HAL's first words" contest judged by 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY creator Arthur C. Clarke

"[Andy] Grove giveth and [Bill] Gates taketh away."

--Bob Metcalfe (inventor of Ethernet) on the trend of hardware speedups not being able to keep up with software demands

"The concept is interesting and well-formed, but in order to earn better than a 'C', the idea must be feasible." --A Yale University management professor in response to student Fred Smith's paper proposing reliable overnight delivery service (Smith went on to found Federal Express Corp.)

"That rainbow song's no good. Take it out." - MGM memo after first showing of The Wizard Of Oz

"You'd better learn secretarial skills or else get married." - Modeling agency, rejecting Marilyn Monroe in 1944

"Radio has no future." "X-rays are clearly a hoax". "The aeroplane is scientifically impossible."

- Royal Society president Lord Kelvin, 1897-9.

"Forget it. No Civil War picture ever made a nickel."

- MGM executive, advising against investing in Gone With The Wind

"Can't act. Can't sing. Slightly bald. Can dance a little." - A film company's verdict on Fred Astaire's 1928 screen test

"The atom bomb will never go off - and I speak as an expert in explosives." - U.S. Admiral William Leahy in 1945

"Television won't matter in your lifetime or mine." - Radio Times editor Rex Lambert, 1936

"And for the tourist who really wants to get away from it all, safaris in Vietnam."
- Newsweek magazine, predicting popular holidays for the late 1960s

Enjoy the following bloopers from church bulletins. I've collected all I could find but would love to add more. Please send any additional ones you come across to my email address below. Thanks so much!

A small town newspaper carried the following ad in their classified section on Monday morning:

The Rev. A. .J. Jones has one color TV set for sale. Telephone 626-1313 after 7 p.m. and ask for the housekeeper, Mrs. Donnelley, who lives with him, cheap.

Tuesday: "We regret any embarrassment caused to Rev. Jones by a typographical error in yesterday's paper. The ad should have read: 'The Rev. A. .J. Jones has one color TV set for sale, cheap...Telephone 626-1313 and ask for Mrs. Donnelley, who lives with him after 7 p.m.'"

Wednesday: "The Rev. A. .J. Jones informs us that he has received several annoying telephone calls because of an incorrect ad in yesterday's paper. It should have read: 'The Rev. A. J. Jones has one color TV set for sale, cheap. Telephone 626-1313 after 7 p.m.

and ask for Mrs. Donnelley who loves with him.””

Thursday: “Please take notice that I, the Rev. A. J. Jones, have no color TV set for sale; I have smashed it. Don't call 626-1313 anymore. I have not been carrying on with Mrs. Donnelley. She was, until yesterday, my housekeeper.”

Friday: “Wanted: a housekeeper. Usual housekeeping duties. Good pay. Love in. Contact the Rev. A. .J. Jones. Telephone 626- 1313.”

If you've read a few newspapers, you've found more than a few mistakes. Factual errors, misquotes, typographical errors,

If you hold the ancient Hebrews to modern scientific accuracy, then you'll find “errors.”

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Not useful for astrophysical research.

Not useful for the study of mathematics and geometry.

When the Bible is expected to speak on subjects to which it is not trying to speak, you run into problems.

The biblical writers, just like modern writers, sometimes used hyperbole and exaggeration. Even in modern news stories we see these kinds of exaggerations that are accepted as ways to intensify a story. A house burns, and the reporter says, “Bob, the family is totally devastated, and it's not certain if they'll ever recover. Let's talk to the parents now.” And the parents say, “We are thankful that we are all alive and safe, and we have insurance and good friends, so we'll be just fine.”

Every seeming contradiction in the Bible – every discrepancy, every apparent historical or scientific error, grammatical mistake, or puzzling fact or comment – has been noted and argued about and debated literally thousands of times, for hundreds of years, by the greatest minds in history. So nothing – literally nothing – they say about the Bible is new.

Their list of errors: