

Here I'd like to add just a couple of more reflections on whether critical scholars \*have\* to claim there are contradictions in the Bible because of their beliefs. As I tried to state as strongly as I could in my previous post, I think the answer is absolutely not.

To begin with, let me stress that I started learning about serious contradictions when I was in a Christian theological seminary taking biblical studies courses with committed Christian teachers who were devoted to the church. But they were also scholars and refused to accept fundamentalist understandings of the Bible. Their theology was much more sophisticated than the simple "The Bible says it, I believe it, and that settles it" mentality I had grown up on.

These were incredibly intelligent and learned scholars intimately familiar with the texts in Greek and Hebrew and massively well-read in scholarship going back centuries in various modern languages. They didn't accept easy answers and pushed their students to realize that knowing what the New Testament really is, as opposed to what one might hope it could be, is vital not only for the sake of true knowledge in and of itself but also for the right understanding of the Christian faith among people committed to the truth.

And they knew full well the Bible was filled with contradictions. They didn't \*have\* to find them. But they wanted to know what was true, and not to hide their heads in the sand or stick their fingers in their ears and hum loudly so as not to have to think or hear something that was uncomfortable for them. Would that more Christians were like that. (Many, many are, of course; but not many of the ones I grew up with!)

These scholar-professors were certainly not invested in creating contradictions that weren't there. But they were interested in knowing more about these biblical books, in reality, not in fantasy. Even though I no longer accept my teachers' views theologically - I am no longer a Christian - I continue to accept this approach to the Bible. That means on one hand that I don't take this approach because I'm a critical non-Christian. I take it because I think it's important and consistent with the truth, for both Christians and non-Christians.

On the other hand it means that ...

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