

A question has come from a reader, based on my recent post dealing with the apparent contradiction between Luke and Acts on the timing of Jesus' ascension. Do contradictions often result from authors editing several documents together and inserting them side by side in their work? If different source documents have different views, that would create contradictions in the final product which embodies their amalgamation, no? Here's the question.

QUESTION:

I continue to be struck by how often Bible authors, since there were no copyright laws, seem to edit two or more different versions of an event together as seen in the Documentary Hypothesis. Is it likely that Luke and Acts had such an editor editing two or more manuscripts together thus producing contradictions? I would also like to know if this kind of editing together of two or more manuscripts was a common way of writing ancient books.

RESPONSE:

The answer is Yes and Yes. This apparently did happen with the book of Acts and it is indeed a phenomenon we can also see elsewhere. I'll deal with the former issue here.

With respect to Acts, the author - we'll just keep calling him Luke for the sake of convenience - must have had a number of sources of information for his stories about the activities of the apostles, especially Peter and Paul, during their missionary journeys. If he didn't have any sources, then he would have simply been making everything up himself. But that's obviously not the case, since he refers to many events that Paul himself refers to in his letters. So he got the information from *somewhere* (whether he is accurate in what he says about it is another question).

The question is always "Where?" And for that we have no direct information. Given all the information great and small that he appears to get wrong about Paul, it is apparently not the case that ...

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