

My response to Dave Armstrong's article, Reply to Atheist Ward Ricker Re "Biblical Contradictions", posted on May 15, 2020 at <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/davearmstrong/2020/05/reply-to-atheist-ward-ricker-re-biblical-contradictions.html>

Mr. Armstrong:

I hear your complaint about Bible critics not being responsive when you have answered their claims of contradictions in the Bible. Thank you for not giving up, and therefore taking the time to write an article responding to my challenge.

Having said that, however, I would note that in my letter I asked if you would read my book (at least the chapter on contradictions in the Bible) and respond honestly. In your response you didn't say whether you even looked at the (free) book (so I assume you haven't), but, nevertheless, asked me to "take on" one or more of your papers that you have written in response to other people's criticisms of the Bible. I will do that to some degree here, but I still ask you to read at least the chapter of my book pertaining to Bible contradictions (still available for free at www.WardsBooks.com). Note that after each set of contradictory statements I have posed a question or series of questions (some passages contain multiple contradictions). I would like to see your answer to the questions posed. Also note that I have indicated in my book the attempt to balance between thoroughness (not missing any contradictions) and solidness (not including passages when it is not clear whether they truly are contradictory)--a difficult balance to achieve. I have, though, indicated certain entries in my list with a double asterisk that are simple statements of facts and which leave basically no room for "interpretation". I would particularly like to see your answers to these questions.

You refer to three articles that you have written, responding to Seidensticker, Madison and Loftus. It appears to me that the latter two articles don't really say much about contradictions, but rather about other matters such as the morality of god or the Bible (for example, slavery and human sacrifice) or whether the Bible contradicts science or reality. (Jesus not coming back during the lifetimes of the people listening to him or the earth being solid on its foundations doesn't necessarily contradict other Bible passages, even if it contradicts reality.) I will respond just to your comments in the Seidensticker pages, and, for the sake of brevity (and the fact that I have other things to do with my life), to those contradictions which I have also covered in my book. (As I have already agreed, there are indeed a lot of bogus claims out there of contradictions.) Also, many of the arguments that you offer pertain to passages about doctrinal matters, such as whether people are saved by faith or by works. These passages can be widely interpreted, so I won't respond to these; I think it safe to say we would argue forever about such passages. I will respond to those that deal with matters of fact (somebody did an act on a certain day, there were some number of people or angels at an event, etc.), which are, in general, the contradictions I have tried to address in my book.

One more point, just so that you might be a little more understanding. At the risk of offending, in going through your writings I have noted how convoluted your arguments tend to be. Indeed, I find it difficult to respond even to the few that I respond to here, because your arguments are rather convoluted, confusing and unclear. Your lack of clear, concise statements makes it difficult to write a response. It makes for a lot of work (and, indeed, I have other things to do with my life), so if you wonder why you have trouble getting people to respond to you, you might take that into consideration.

Now regarding the specific items from the Seidensticker pages.

In Seidensticker Folly #17 you address his claim of a contradiction between god holding the sins of parents upon succeeding generations (Ex. 34:7) and the claim that each person is responsible for his own sin (2 Kings 14:6). You say that "Even if the above [Ex.34:7] text conveys the idea not only of suffering, but also of *punishment*, yet the language, 'unto the third and fourth generation *of them that hate me*,' indicates children who are sinful like their parents . . . Plainly children are intended to imitate and adopt the sinful habits and practices of their parents; hence, being morally, as well as physically, the representatives and heirs of their parents, they may be, in a certain sense, *punished* for the sins of those parents." (Are you serious?) You go on to say that "This suggests that such punishment 'to the third and fourth generations' applies only to children who *deliberately choose* to follow the sinful ways of their parents, and is not stated in any absolute sense that would preclude individual pardon."

I see nothing that suggests this. It doesn't say "unto the third and fourth generation of those who continue to hate me like their forebears did". It says to the third or fourth generation of the ones who hate god. It is clear enough. Why would you twist the meaning around as you do? Your "suggestions" contradict the clear "words of god". Why would you do so? Also, if your "suggestion" is correct, then why does the Bible say that this specifically applies to the descendants of those who hate god? Do those who are the descendants of those who love god and who go astray and "hate" him get a free pass? Does not anyone who goes against god bear the responsibility for his own actions? Why would god point out that specifically the children of sinful forebears bear this punishment? There is no logical basis for your interpretation. You are simply unwilling to accept what the Bible says, that great-grandchildren are responsible for their great-grandparents' sins (except, of course, when it says differently in other places).

In Seidensticker Folly #34 you deal with the contradiction that the Bible says god never repents (1 Samuel 15:29), and yet he is found in various places in the Bible repenting of what he has done (example given of the flood of Genesis). Here you can hopefully understand why people have a hard time understanding or responding to you. You make the statement that the Hebrew word נֶצַח "signifies constancy, endurance..." You make this statement after quoting the verse, "And also the Trust of Israel doth not lie and doth not repent, for He is not a man to repent." Does this Hebrew word occur in that sentence? It wouldn't appear so. You then say god "is נֶצַח יִשְׂרָאֵל, the unchangeable One, in whom Israel can trust, since He does not lie or deceive, or repent of His purposes". Apparently this is the passage where that word occurs, if it is indeed a passage; it isn't in quotes. I don't know how anyone reading this could understand where this Hebrew word occurs or how it is used. If even you cannot make this clear, then is it because you are unable to? One wonders if you are just trying to confuse.

You also refer to god's repentance as being an anthropomorphic representation of god's attitude (without giving any support for this other than that another Biblical apologist stated the idea). Okay, maybe, but what does it mean anthropomorphically for a human being to "repent". It means that he/she is sorry and turns away from the given action that he or she is sorry for. If the Bible writer just wanted to say that god felt sorry for humankind he could have stated so: god "was aggrieved" for mankind, or, god "was sorrowful" over mankind, or god's "anger was kindled against" mankind. But that's not what it says. It says that he repented, and repentance means recognizing that one's actions are wrong and turning away from them.

The fact is that the Bible says in various places that god repented, and then it says that "he is not a man to repent". How convoluted will you get in trying to say that that is not a contradiction?

Your resort to retranslating the original Hebrew words bring me to one more thought. Christians often try to explain away contradictions by going back and reinterpreting the original language. It makes me wonder how many more contradictions would be found if Bible critics went back and reinterpreted seemingly coherent passages in the same way. I suspect that we would uncover far more contradictions than the biblical apologists claim to clarify (depending, of course, on how we chose to "interpret" them)!

Going a step further, if the problem is that words are not translated properly in our English versions of the Bible, then is the Bible that we have the true word of god, even if it was back sometime at the outset, whenever that would be? And, of course, we have no original documents--only copies of copies, with multiple discrepancies between them even in the original languages. If god has given us "his word", why would he let it get corrupted by men's faulty translation? Are you not admitting that we do not have "the word of god" in what we refer to as the Bible?

One other note: I found the following statement in this section to be enlightening: "Bob always looks for contradictions and absurdities in the Bible, and so (surprise!) he 'finds' them. We assume (in our Christian belief in inspiration of Scripture, as God's revelation) that passages can ultimately be harmonized, and so we usually conclude that this is in fact the case in particulars." Let's see now, Bob *looks*, and Bible apologists *assume*. Which is the better course of action? In other words, you "assume" that the Bible is correct, so you are unwilling to look at it objectively or with a critically thinking mind. You have pre-assumed it to be correct and god-given, as I could pre-assume Homer's *Odyssey* to be correct and god-given, and always be looking for ways to justify that assumption. Would that be a reasonable way for me to approach Homer's *Odyssey*?

In Seidensticker Folly #15 the book of Luke has Jesus leading his disciples out to Bethany, where he then immediately ascended into heaven (Luke 24:51), whereas the book of Acts (presumably written by the same author) has him staying on earth for 40 days before ascending (Acts 1:3). You claim that the former passage does not refer to a single day, but to a more extended period of time. Specifically, you make two points. First, you say that if Jesus' ascension took place on the same day as the events preceding in in the chapter, then his ascension would have been at night. You say that this would contradict the statement in Acts, "And when he had said this, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight." (Acts 1:9) First of all, there is no reason to think it took place at nighttime just because his disciples had said, "it is toward evening and the day is now far spent." We don't know just how "far spent" the day was or how long it would take to walk out to the ascension site. But even if it was at night, I don't see why that would be a contradiction. A cloud took him up out of their sight at nighttime. So? Why not? (Although, if you really think it would truly be a contradiction, please let me know why, so that I may add it to my list!) I see no reason why he couldn't have ascended to heaven at night if he chose to do so.

Secondly, you say that the statement that the disciples "were continually in the temple blessing God" indicates that this was a longer period of time than one day. Well, yes, it was. They went out to the mountain at the end of the first day (after the resurrection) and witnessed the ascension, and then they stayed in the temple after that for many days. What is there to

suggest that the first part of the statement took longer than a day? First A happened (in one day), and then B happened (for a bunch more days). The fact that their worship practices were over a period of time doesn't change the fact that they started with the ascension and the return of the disciples to Jerusalem. (Did their return to Jerusalem take place over 40 days?) The passage is clear: 1) he walked out to Bethany with them, 2) then he ascended, 3) then they returned to Jerusalem, and 4) they then they were continually in the temple. The fact that the whole thing took place over a period of time doesn't change the fact that the walk out was followed by the ascension, by the walk back, by be continually in the temple. That is what it says. It clearly contradicts the statement in Acts that Jesus continued on earth for 40 days.

In Seidensticker Folly #19 you protest his claim that the Bible portrays god as only one of many gods, as opposed to the many claims in the Bible that there is only one god, such as Deuteronomy 32:39: "...there is no god beside me."

In fact there are numerous passages in the Bible which say that god is not the only god. We can start with the statement in Genesis 1:26 where god says, "Let *us* make man in *our* own image," which *implies* such. Indeed, it is unclear who the "us" is in this passage (although it would seem that only a god could create a human being), so I suppose I can't say unequivocally that it is a contradiction. There are a number of clearer statements, though, that I point out in my book (Contradiction entries #36 and #40) which state clearly that there are other gods, such as Psalm 95:3, "For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods," and Psalm 97:7, "...worship him, all ye gods." You explain away these passages from Psalms, saying, "All of this has already been explained, too. It's simply a manner of speaking (more poetic)." I'm not seeing where "this has already been explained", but if what Psalms says isn't true, I guess we can throw that book away and put it all down to "just poetry". (When it makes a statement that Christians agree with they won't say it is "just poetry".) Was Solomon just "being poetic" when he told the people of Israel, "And the house which I build is great: for great is our God above all gods"? (2 Chronicles 2:5)

In Seidensticker Folly #20 you protest his claim of god gradually becoming omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent, which would contradict the passages that you quote stating god's omniscience, omnipotence and omnipresence. Unfortunately, you did not include any of Seidensticker's references that would show that god didn't always have these qualities.

I would assume that Seidensticker referenced the statement from the book of Genesis about the Tower of Babel, "And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded." (Genesis 11:5) Apparently, he could not see it without making the trip.

In the familiar story of how our god of love fried to death every living man, woman, child, and baby in Sodom and Gomorrah the Bible states, "I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know" (Genesis 18:21). Was god omniscient if he had to go down and look around to figure it out? One might argue that saying "I will know" doesn't explicitly state that he doesn't already know, but I think it would be hard to do so with a straight face!

Regarding god's omnipotence, I always think of one of my favorite passages, Judges 1:19: "And the Lord was with Judah; and he drove out the inhabitants of the mountain; but could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley, because they had chariots of iron." The lord was no match for chariots of iron? (I am now snickering; that's why it's one of my favorite passages.)

Seidensticker's Folly #12 you titled "God Likes Child Sacrifice. Huh!?", but the article that you are responding to was titled, "God Loves the Smell of Burning Flesh: Human Sacrifice in the Bible." You have changed "human" to "child", for some reason. We are all familiar with the story of god ordering Abraham to offer his son as a burnt offering. That should be clear enough that god condones and even commands human sacrifice. (And it's bad enough that god ordered a continuous barrage of animals to be killed just to satisfy his bloodlust!) Apparently, your antithesis proposed that Abraham actually killed his son (a rather absurd conclusion if he did), and you go about pointing out that he wasn't actually sacrificed. Okay, but what about the fact that god commanded the sacrifice to happen (even if he then "repented")? Whether the sacrifice took place or not doesn't change the fact that god ordered the child to be killed (and Abraham obeyed right up to the point where he was holding the knife over his child's helpless body). God commanded human sacrifice. (Note that god was not so kind to intervene in the case of Jephthah's daughter, Judges 11.)

Your opponent points out the passage in Leviticus: "But nothing that a person owns and devotes to the Lord—whether a human being or an animal or family land—may be sold or redeemed; everything so devoted is most holy to the Lord. No person devoted to destruction may be ransomed; they are to be put to death. (Leviticus 27:28–9)." You said, "A 'person devoted to destruction' is a murderer, and they received the death penalty under Mosaic Law." Why would you say (without any support given) that this refers to a murderer? You are obviously taking the statement completely out of context. The passage is talking about things that people devote to god. It's not talking about people who commit crimes. Please face up to what the passage says. People could be devoted to god for destruction, and it had to be carried out. That is what the passage says. Your private interpretation doesn't change what it says.

Although I didn't pose it as a contradiction in my book (maybe I will need to correct that), take a look at entry #100 in the following chapter (i.e., chapter 6). In 2 Samuel 21:1-14 King David provided men (whose only crime was being related to the troublemaker in the story) to sacrifice to god, and god "was intreated for the land". The god of the Bible was so pleased with the human sacrifice that he stopped afflicting the land with a famine.

Finally, I must confess that I have perhaps stepped outside of the scope of my thesis here. There is not necessarily any contradiction here, because I know of no place in the Bible that says that human sacrifice is prohibited, unless it is the general prohibition on murder, "Thou shalt not kill," (Exodus 20:13), which was, of course, conveniently ignored when it served "god's purpose", such as committing genocide against the inhabitants of Canaan. Neither do you provide any such passage, although you do present the one prohibiting burning children in fire (exactly what god commanded Abraham to do). There is no prohibition specifically against child sacrifice by drowning, stabbing, etc. or any prohibition against adult sacrifice. I will let you decide whether the general prohibition on murder serves the purpose.

In Seidensticker Folly #s 18 and 37 you address some of the contradictions in the resurrection story. As I state in my book, the four gospel accounts of the events surrounding the resurrection of Jesus are probably the most contradictory parts of the entire Bible. On that note I will not go into detail here, lest I write a whole book, but perhaps you will read my contradictions #329-337 (or 342 if you include up to the ascension) and answer the questions I have there. Furthermore, I will personally offer you \$1000 if you can write a coherent account of the resurrection story that includes all the details of all four gospels and that does not conflict

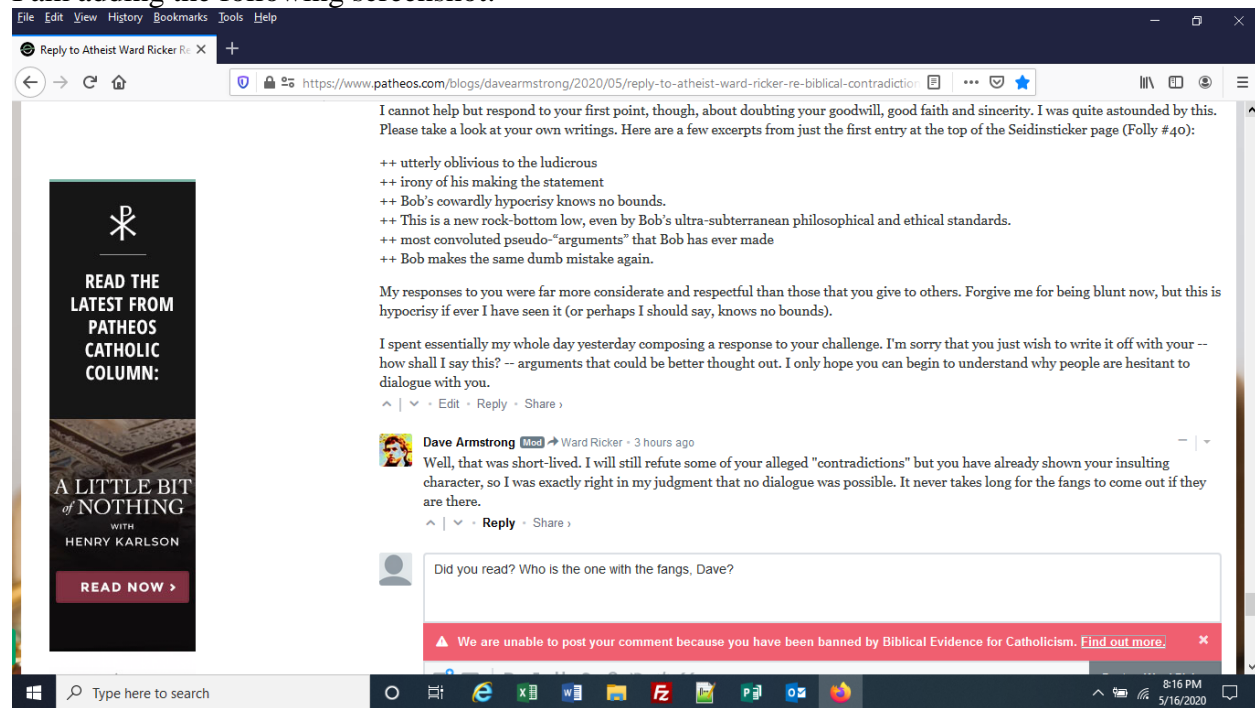
with or contradict any of them in any way. (Make sure you copy this page and point it out to your friends so that I will not be able to back out if you succeed!)

If our god gave us a book of his words to us, why hasn't he protected that book down through the ages? In fact, it was people who decided what writings were the "words of god" in meetings (in particular, the Council of Trent in 1546) of the church. (If anyone wishes to get a feel for what these councils were like, I encourage them to read *The Swerve* by Stephen Greenblatt.) The Bible is a collection of literature written by quite-fallible men and then chosen by other quite-fallible men to represent the "word of god". What reason do we have to believe that it is indeed "the word of god" in the first place?

Imagine someone claiming "You can't find any contradictions in the ancient Greek writings about their gods (that I can't refute). Therefore, these ancient Greek writings are 'god's word'". This would be "putting the cart before the horse", as it were, saying that we have writings that we claim are true, and they will be considered true unless you can prove them false. No. First of all, you have to have some reason for believing that they are true. Then, if someone wishes to challenge them, they might do so, but if there is no reason to believe them to be true in the first place, why would anyone accept them?

I still challenge you to read the contradictions in my book, especially the ones with the double asterisks, and respond to the questions I pose. While you're at it I hope you will read the chapters about the nature of god and the Bible and ask yourself if the Bible isn't an evil, appalling book, and if the god it represents isn't a horrific, sadistic monster. Why would you want to defend a book in the first place that teaches acceptance of murder, slavery, genocide, rape, racism and many of the other evils that still plague our planet today?

I am adding the following screenshot:



When you reply far more thoughtfully and respectfully than Mr. Armstrong responds to his critics, he won't accept it, and you get banned from the site. It's sad when people act this way, and only makes it more difficult for those who do wish to communicate in good faith.