

## Mistakes in the Bible

---

by Allen Dvorak

“Ahaziah was **twenty-two years old** when he became king, and he reigned one year in Jerusalem” (2 Kings 8:26). “Ahaziah was **forty-two years old** when he became king, and he reigned one year in Jerusalem” (2 Chronicles 22:2). Bible critics love to point to such numerical discrepancies and conclude that the Bible is full of errors.

It is certainly agreed that Ahaziah could not have been both forty-two and twenty-two at the same time! Before we conclude, however, that we have found a “mistake” in the Bible, we should note that there is a difference between a contradiction among Biblical authors and an error created by the method of textual transmission.

While reading a book, occasionally I will notice errors of spelling or the omission of words. I do not immediately conclude that the author of the original manuscript is responsible for the errors or omissions because I understand that someone else published the book. Someone edited the manuscript. There was opportunity for errors, perhaps insignificant ones, to creep into the finished product via the human element in textual transmission, even mechanical printing.

The books of the Bible were written by **inspired men**, i.e., men guided by the Holy Spirit (1 Peter 1:21; 1 Corinthians 2:10-13; 2 Timothy 3:16-17). Certainly the Holy Spirit would let no error, doctrinal, numerical, historical or otherwise, to become part of the original text. It is in this sense that we speak of the Scriptures as inerrant.

The Bible, however, was preserved from one generation to another in the same way that other ancient documents were transmitted – by manual copying. Scribes dutifully and meticulously copied the books of both the Old and New Testaments over centuries. The scribes were **NOT** inspired and thus could make mistakes in their work of copying. A scribal error is **NOT** a Bible contradiction.

The Hebrews used letters to designate numbers and many of the letters used are quite similar to one another. It would be very easy for a scribe to mistake one letter for another, especially if the copy from which he was making his copy was not written carefully or had been smudged or damaged. This is most certainly the way that Ahaziah got to be forty-two in one text and twenty-two in another – a scribe mistaking one letter (representing a numerical value) for another.

The Biblical writers display an astounding accuracy in matters of geography, politics, history and even medicine! Historians were skeptical about the existence of the Hittites, a people mentioned in the Old Testament... until evidence of their culture was found by archaeologists. Sir William Ramsay, an eminent archaeologist, was convinced, at one point in his life, that the book of Acts was actually written in the second century A.D. In his research of topography, antiquities and society of Asia Minor, he discovered that Luke was meticulously accurate in his record of Paul’s journeys.

If the Bible has contradictions, it cannot be the Word of God. An inerrant Bible, however, is of inestimable value.

– via the Hanceville Church of Christ  
Hanceville, Alabama  
April 23, 2015

372403