

Living with the inconsistencies in the Bible

Mariam Williams | Feb. 10, 2014 | At the Intersection

Last week, between poring over books by feminist theologians and taking a break to watch the evolution vs. creationism debate between Bill Nye, "the science guy," and best-selling Christian author Ken Ham at the Creation Museum right here in my home state, I had a text conversation with a friend about Christianity in African countries. Though I started the conversation and kept pressing points with questions, I was afraid of where the conversation might go.

"He's going to ask why I believe what I believe, why I'm a Christian at all. I can feel it," I thought. And I braced for what would happen when I didn't have an answer ready.

I'm out of order in this. Although I have to take the verse out of its context to recognize my own disobedience, I accept [the apostle Peter's instructions](#)* [1] that believers "always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have." Over the years since I first became aware of this verse, I've assessed my reasons in writing and tucked them away in journals and Bible study notebooks. My reasons have varied with time, from the very honest ("Because I don't know anything else") to the redundant ("Because the Bible says Christ died for me"); from the inexplicable ("miracle I wasn't hurt in that car accident" or "divine intervention") to the odd ("Because I prayed for an 'A' on this exam and received it"). But I hadn't done a reason-for-my-hope assessment in a while, and I was afraid of being caught unprepared.

Complicating the matter, I felt, was race. The text conversation was about Christianity in African countries, and my friend, who is African-American and not a believer, often becomes frustrated with Africans and people of African descent anywhere who are believers. It's not a new sentiment. [I've thought about it myself](#) [2], and for the past several weeks, I've been immersed in African-American literature written and set in the 1920s; every author considered Christianity a white man's religion that held black people back from progress.

The question I dreaded never came from my friend, but ironically, in the creationism debate, Ham gave a justification for my faith that I could've used. He brought up race as a social construct and challenged Darwin's findings that there were evolutionary differences among the races. If we believe the Bible's story of human origins, Ham said, we all come from one man and one woman. There is but one race, and we are all equal.

But I don't believe God created the world in six 24-hour periods and that the planet is only 6,000 years old. [According to Ham \(at about an hour and a half in\)](#) [3], that means I have a problem. "There's an inconsistency with what the Bible teaches," Ham said. "If you believe in millions of years, you've got death, disease and suffering [before man]. The Bible makes it clear: Death is the result of man's sin."

Oh, those pesky inconsistencies between what the Bible teaches and what I believe, between what I embrace about God's word and what I choose to ignore, between what I see as truth and what I see as parable, between the reason for my hope and the reason I hadn't assessed my rationale in quite a while.

I decided I believe in Christianity because I choose to accept most of the teaching I've received about the faith. The Bible's comforting verses about unconditional love and a God who will listen to me cry and take care of me

give me peace while its demands for justice and equality put an end to suffering in my hands and have given me and generations of activists before me some fighting spirit for the *present*. And even without using the Bible as a science textbook, I receive enough benefits from it to live with inconsistency.

**An earlier version of this column named the wrong Gospel account.*

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Links:

[1] <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Peter+3:15>

[2] <http://www.redboneafropuff.com/2014/01/31/what-didnt-survive/>

[3] <http://www.npr.org/blogs/thetwo-way/2014/02/04/271648691/watch-the-creationism-vs-evolution-debate-bill-nye-and-ken-ham>

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