

The Inerrant Word of God

In the last two decades, the topic of biblical inerrancy has separated the evangelical camp into those who are inerrantists and those who are not. Inerrantists believe “that when all facts are known, the Scriptures in their original autographs and properly interpreted will be shown to be wholly true in everything that they affirm, whether that has to do with doctrine or morality or with the social, physical, or life sciences.”¹

Those who reject inerrancy believe there are original errors in certain areas the Bible touches outside doctrine and morality, e.g., in science and history. But if Scripture contains errors in those areas we *can* test on the basis of historical, archaeological, and scientific fact, on what logical basis can we assume it doesn't contain errors in those areas we *cannot* test such as theology and ethics (the nature of God, salvation, morality? The truth is that no error can be proven in the autographs since we don't have them. In His wisdom God has seen fit not to preserve them. The original God-breathed manuscripts would of certainty have become items of worship, and, as with the Koran of Islam, translations would likely have been prohibited or rejected as causing a “perverting” of the pure Word of God. This eventually might have kept Scripture from all but those studied in Greek and Hebrew.

Regardless, an error can't logically be suggested in the autographs because our copies strongly support inerrancy. Dr. Gleason L. Archer was an undergraduate classics major who received training in Latin, Greek, French, and German at Harvard University. At seminary he majored in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic and in post-graduate study became involved with Akkadian and Syriac, teaching courses on these subjects. He has had a special interest in middle-kingdom Egyptian studies. At the Oriental Institute in Chicago he did specialized study in Eighteenth Dynasty historical records as well as studying Coptic and Sumerian. In addition, he obtained a full law degree and was admitted to the Massachusetts Bar. He has also visited the Holy Land where he inspected most of the important archeological sites and spent time in Beirut, Lebanon, for a specialized study of modern literary Arabic. He holds a B.D. from Princeton Theological Seminary and a Ph.D. from Harvard Graduate School.

This background enabled him to become expert in the issue of charges of alleged errors and contradictions in Scripture:

In my opinion this charge can be refuted and its falsity exposed by an objective study done in a consistent, evangelical perspective....I candidly believe I have been confronted with just about all the biblical difficulties under discussion in theological circles today-especially those pertaining to the interpretation and defense of Scripture....As I have dealt with one apparent discrepancy after another and have studied the alleged contradictions between the biblical record and the evidence of linguistics, archeology, or science, my confidence in the trustworthiness of Scripture has been repeatedly verified and strengthened by the discovery that almost every problem in Scripture that has ever been discovered by man, from ancient times until now, has been dealt with in a completely satisfactory manner by the biblical text itself—or else by objective archeological information.²

Given the fact that Dr. Archer has graduated from Princeton and Harvard, done extensive studies in archaeology and other areas, become fluent in 15 languages, received full training in legal evidences, etc., the above statement can hardly be summarily dismissed.

But there are many similar testimonies by other competent scholars. Dr. Robert Dick Wilson (Ph.D., Princeton), an Old Testament authority and author of *A Scientific Investigation of the Old Testament*, could read the New Testament in nine different languages by the age of 25. In addition, he could repeat from memory a Hebrew translation of the entire New Testament without missing a single syllable and do the same with large portions of the Old Testament. He proceeded to learn 45 languages and dialects and was also a master of paleography and

¹ Paul D. Feinberg, “The Meaning of Inerrancy” in Norman L. Geisler, ed., *Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishers, 1980), 294.

² Gleason Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishers, 1982), 11-12.

philology: "I have made it an invariable habit never to accept an objection to a statement of the Old Testament without subjecting it to a most thorough investigation, linguistically and factually," and "I defy any man to make an attack upon the Old Testament on the grounds of evidence that I cannot investigate." His conclusion was that no critic has succeeded in proving an error in the Old Testament.³

Theologian, philosopher, and trial attorney John Warwick Montgomery, holding nine graduate degrees in different fields, observes, "I myself have never encountered an alleged contradiction in the Bible which could not be cleared up by the use of the original languages of the Scriptures and/or by the use of accepted principles of literary and historical interpretation."⁴

John W. Haley examined 900 alleged problems in Scripture and concluded, "I cannot but avow, as the [conclusion] of my investigation, the profound conviction *that every difficulty and discrepancy in the scriptures is...capable of a fair and reasonable solution.*"⁵ Dr. William Arndt concluded in his own study of alleged contradictions and errors in the Bible, "[W]e may say with full conviction that no instances of this sort occur anywhere in the Scriptures."⁶

Clearly the evidence lies in favor of biblical inerrancy. This is in harmony with what the Bible itself teaches. (Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture in this section are from the NASB). If what God says is true by definition, note God's description of His own Word.

1. The Old Testament

Eternal: "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever" (Isaiah 40:8); "Forever, O LORD, Thy word is settled in heaven" (Psalm 119:89).

Perfect and trustworthy: "Every word of God is tested;...Do not add to His words, lest He reprove you, and you be proved a liar" (Proverbs 30:5,6); "The words of the LORD are pure words; as silver tried in a furnace on the earth, refilled seven times" (Psalm 12:6).

True: "the word of truth"; "Thy law is truth"; "all Thy commandments are truth"; "the sum of Thy word is truth" (Psalm 119:43,142,151,160).

Holy and righteous: "For He remembered His holy word with Abraham His servant" (Psalm 105:42); "Thy righteous word" (Psalm 119:123); "Thy word is very pure, therefore Thy servant loves it" (Psalm 119:140).

Good: "I will fulfill the good word which I have spoken" (Jeremiah 33:14).

Vital (and verbal): "'And as for Me, this is My covenant with them,' says the LORD: 'My Spirit which is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your offspring, nor from the mouth of your offspring's offspring,' says the LORD, 'from now and forever'" (Isaiah 59:21).

2. The Gospels (Jesus' view of God's Word)

Eternal: "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words shall not pass away" (Matthew 24:35).

Trustworthy: "the Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35); "For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me commandment, what to say, and what to speak Therefore the things I

³ R.D. Wilson, *A Scientific Investigation of the Old Testament*, 13, 20, 130, 162-63; David Otis Fuller ed., *Which Bible?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Grand Rapids International Publications, rev. 1971), 44.

⁴ John Warwick Montgomery, *The Shape of the Past* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1975), 176.

⁵ John W. Haley, *Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1982), rpt., vii.

⁶ William Arndt, *Does the Bible Contradict Itself?* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1955), rpt., XI.

speak, I speak just as the Father has told me" (John 12:49,50); "But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of a letter of the Law to fail" (Luke 16:17).

True: "Sanctify them in the truth; Thy word is truth" (John 17:17).

Holy: "My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me" (John 7:16; see also 12:49,50).

Vital (and verbal): "But He answered and said, 'It is written, "MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD"' (Matthew 4:4).

3. The Rest of the New Testament (the inspired apostles' view of God's Word)

Eternal: "'But the word of the Lord abides forever.' And this is the word which was preached to you" (1 Peter 1:25).

Inspired: "All Scripture is inspired by God" (2 Timothy 3:16; see also 2 Peter 3:2,15,16); "no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (2 Peter 1:21).

Living and imperishable: "For the word of God is living and active" (Hebrews 4:12; cf. Acts 7:38); "for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and abiding word of God" (1 Peter 1:23).

True: "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15).

Not human: "And for this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received from us the word of God's message, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe" (1 Thessalonians 2:13); "he who rejects this [instruction] is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you" (1 Thessalonians 4:8).

Holy: "from childhood you have known the sacred writings" (2 Timothy 3:15).

Vital (and verbal): "All Scripture is...profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3: 16,17); "I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God shall add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city; which are written in this book" (Revelation 22:18,19); "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God... [in words] taught by the Spirit" (1 Corinthians 2:12,13); "they have been entrusted with the very words (Greek: *logia*) of God" (Romans 3:2, NIV).

Although a great deal could be said about each of the above Scriptures (and there are many others), let us simply ask some questions. What did God mean when He called His word perfect, true, holy, righteous, good, trustworthy, and pure? Is perfection really imperfection? or truth really error? or good really something not good? or the trustworthy the doubtful? or the pure impure? Is it proper to call *errant* writings holy? How is inspiration *divine* if it merely guarantees the presence of truth and error? If God's Word is eternal, is it possible for the church to be content with a certain amount of *eternal* error? Dr. E.J. Young observes,

God has revealed to us His Word. What are we to think of Him if this Word is glutted with little annoying inaccuracies? He, of course, tells us that His Word is pure. If there are mistakes in that Word, however, we know better; it is not pure. If the autographa of Scripture are marred by flecks of mistake, God simply has not told us the truth concerning His Word. To assume that He could breathe forth a Word that contained mistakes is to say, in effect, that God Himself can make mistakes. We must

maintain that the original of Scripture is infallible for the simple reason that it came to us directly himself.⁷

Charles Spurgeon once wrote of the rudeness of those who question the inerrancy of God's Word when he stated, "This is the book untainted by any error, but is pure, unalloyed, perfect truth. Why? Because God wrote it. Ah! charge God with error if you please; tell Him that His book is not what it ought to be."⁸

Christians are to accept the teachings of Jesus because He is their Lord and Savior. But Jesus Himself never expressed any doubts about Scripture—at any time, in any manner. To the contrary, He accepted Scripture as God's inerrant word. Indeed, the strength of the case for a strict view of inerrancy can only be properly understood by a detailed study of Jesus' absolute trust in and use of Scripture.⁹ For us, this alone is proof of scriptural inerrancy.

The weight of Jesus' words is impressive when we consider what they teach in more detail. In Matthew 5:17-19, e.g.,

The jot [KJV] is the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet and the tittle [KJV] is the millute horn or projection that distinguishes consonants of similar form from one another. It would be impossible to think of any expression that would bespeak the thought of the meticulous more adequately than precisely this one used here by our Lord.¹⁰

In John 10:35, e.g.,

[W]hen he says the Scripture cannot be broken, he is surely using the word Scripture in its most comprehensive denotation as including all that the Jews of the day recognized as Scripture, to wit, all the canonical books of the Old Testament. It is of the Old Testament without any reservation or exception that he says it cannot be broken. He affirms the unbreakableness of the Scripture in its entirety and leaves no room for any such supposition as that of degrees of inspiration and fallibility. Scripture is inviolable. Nothing less than this is the testimony of our Lord.¹¹

If it is easier for heaven and earth (i.e., the universe) to pass from existence than for the least stroke of a pen to be lost, can we possibly believe Jesus thought there were genuine errors in Scripture? And if Jesus, God incarnate, said, "Thy word is truth," how can Christians think otherwise? Montgomery observes, "The weight of Christ's testimony to Scripture is so much more powerful than any alleged contradiction or error in the text or any combination of them, that the latter must be adjusted to the former, not the reverse."¹²

Dr. Montgomery comments on another statement by Jesus found in Matthew 4:4 (KJV). Christ tells us simply; quoting the God of the Old Testament, that "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." "One must therefore operate with every word and consider every word as significant. Had God intended otherwise, the text would (by definition) be different from what it is!"¹³

⁷ Edward J. Young, *Thy Word Is Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970), 86-87.

⁸ In Harold Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishers, 1977), 67.

⁹ See, e.g., Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1948); John Wenham, *Christ and the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1973), chs. 1-2, 5, and his chapter in Geisler, ed., *Inerrancy*, 3-38; Pierre Ch. Marcel, "Our Lord's Use of Scripture," in Carl F.H. Henry, ed., *Revelation and the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1969), 119-34; and Rene Pache, *The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), ch. 18.

¹⁰ John Murray in N .B. Stonehouse and Paul Woolley, eds., *The Infallible Word: A Symposium*, 3d rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1967), 22.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 26-27.

¹² John Warwick Montgomery, "Biblical Inerrancy: What Is At Stake," in John W. Montgomery, ed., *God's Inerrant Word* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1974), 31.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 38

Finally, the character of God Himself proves the inerrancy of Scripture:

1. *Sovereign*: A sovereign God is able to preserve the process of inspiration from error.
2. *Righteousness*: A righteous God is unable to inspire error
3. *Just*: A just God could not be untruthful in asserting His word is inerrant. He would be unjust if He bore witness to errant Scripture as holy and true.
4. *Love*: A loving God would adequately provide for the spiritual health and safety of His people by inspiring an inerrant Word.
5. *Eternal*: An eternal God has had forever to determine the canon and means of inspiration (e.g., verbal, plenary) for His Word.
6. *Omniscient*: An omniscient God knows every contingency that might arise to inhibit inerrancy.
7. *Omnipotent*: An omnipotent God can effectively respond to every contingency and also preserve the transmission of His Word.
8. *Omnipresent*: An omnipresent God can initially reveal and inspire His Word and later illuminate it.
9. *Immutable*: An immutable God could never change His Word.
10. *Veracity*: A truthful God would not lie when He testifies about the inerrancy of His Word.
11. *Merciful*: A merciful God would not be unmerciful inspiring both truth and error and then having His people vainly attempt to find the parts that are true. He would not leave His people to such subjectivism and uncertainty.
12. *Personal*: A personal God can inspire verbally, with words, to insure effective communication.

We close by citing the appropriate words of Dr. Paul Feinberg:

I have never been able to understand how one can be justified in claiming absolute authority for the Scriptures and at the same time deny their inerrancy. This seems to be the height of epistemological nonsense and confusion. Let me try to illustrate the point. Suppose that I have an Amtrak railroad schedule. In describing its use to you, I tell you that it is filled with numerous errors but that it is absolutely authoritative and trustworthy.¹⁴

¹⁴ Feinberg in Geisler, ed., *Inerrancy*, 285.