

## Theology 101 – An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine

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### Inerrancy and Authority

#### I. The Inerrancy of Scripture

##### A. The Concept of Inerrancy

1. If our view of inspiration is that all the words of the Bible are the actual words of God and that the resulting words are exactly what God intended them to be, then our view of Scripture must be consistent with our understanding of inspiration
2. If the Bible is literally God's word, then our understanding of God will also affect our understanding of Scripture
3. What does our understanding of inspiration and of God tell us about Scripture?
  - a. Inspired Scripture is the word of God because the Spirit moved the human authors to produce God's desired result to such a degree that the writings of these inspired men can be called the very word of God
  - b. Scripture is produced in the vernacular of the human author and uses ordinary human language in ordinary ways, including figures of speech and approximations
  - c. God does not lie or mislead
  - d. God's words are pure and reliable
  - e. Therefore, inspired Scripture in the autograph, as God's word, is wholly true, pure, and reliable according to the normal understanding of human language
4. Questions about Inerrancy and Authority
  - a. Is all of the Bible equally inspired?
  - b. Does the Bible always tell the truth?
  - c. Does the Bible tell the truth concerning everything it talks about?
  - d. Does the Bible tell us every fact about any given subject?
  - e. How does our view of inerrancy affect our view of the Authority of Scripture?

##### B. Different Views of Inerrancy

1. The Bible is an 'infallible' authority for matters of 'Faith and Practice'
  - a. The Bible is authoritative and true only in areas directly related to religious practice and ethical conduct
    - 1) This position allows for error or unintentionally false statements in the parts of the Bible not directly related to 'faith and practice' of religion or ethics

- 2) Errors or false statements may occur in areas related to history or science, for example, because they do not impact our faith and practice and do not impact how we are to live. (How does this view affect our view of inspiration?)
  - 3) This view usually refers to the Bible as 'infallible' rather than 'inerrant'
  - 4) Some points of support
    - i. The main point of the Bible is teaching about God, salvation, and sanctification – history and science aren't the main point
    - ii. The Bible will not fail to make people wise for salvation 2 Tim. 3:15
    - iii. There are some apparent 'errors' – the bronze laver's circumference isn't accurate; the mustard seed isn't the smallest of all seeds (Mt. 13:31-32); questions about the ark and Red Sea (Reed Sea), etc.
    - iv. Many scientist's question the order of creation in Genesis, etc.
    - v. Many archeologist's and historians question the size of the Israelite camps during Exodus, etc.
    - vi. Proponents include Stanley Grenz, Donald Bloesch, and Jack Rogers
- b. Common criticisms of this view
- 1) The NT affirms that all of Scripture is profitable and God-breathed. 2 Tim. 3:16 and Dt. 8:3 and Mt. 4:4 indicate that every word of God is important.
  - 2) If all of Scripture is the Word of God, then all of Scripture must be pure (Ps. 12:6), perfect (Ps. 19:7), and true (Prov. 30:5; 2 Sam. 22:31)
  - 3) The Bible itself places no limitations on its own reliability
    - i. Acts 24:14 – believing everything
    - ii. Lk 24:25 – believe all that the prophets wrote
    - iii. Rom. 15:4 – whatever was written was for instruction
    - iv. 1 Cor. 10:11 – written down for our instruction
    - v. Dt. 4:2; 12:32; Rev. 22:18-19 – warnings against taking away words from Dt/Rev or all Scripture depending on view
  - 4) The NT writers trusted the historical details of the OT narrative
    - i. There is no discernable effort to separate out 'faith and practice' passages
    - ii. Paul refers to the historical narrative of Genesis as "Law" in Gal. 4:21ff
  - 5) Some NT examples of using OT historic details as fact
    - i. Mt. 12:3-4 – David ate the bread of Presence

- ii. Mt. 12:40 – Jonah was in the whale
- iii. Mt. 12:41 – the men of Nineveh repented
- iv. Mt. 12:42 – the queen of the south came to hear Solomon
- v. Lk. 4:25-26 – Elijah was sent to Zarephath
- vi. Lk. 4:27 – Naaman was cleansed of leprosy
- vii. Lk. 17:29 + 32 – Sodom and Gomorrah destroyed; Lot's wife
- viii. Jn. 3:14 – Moses lifted up the bronze serpent in the wilderness
- ix. Jn. 4:5 – Jacob gave a field to Joseph
- x. Acts 13:17 – Several details from the history of Israel
- xi. Rom. 4:19 – Abraham's age
- xii. 1 Cor. 10:6-11 – Several details from Israel's history
- xiii. Heb. 11:3 – Abraham gave a tenth to Melchizedek
- xiv. Jas 2:25 – Rahab received the spies and sent them another way
- xv. 1 Pet. 3:20; 2 Pet. 2:5 – 8 persons were in the ark
- xvi. 2 Pet. 2:6-7 – God destroyed Sodom and G. but saved Lot
- xvii. 2 Pet. 2:16 – Balaam's donkey spoke

2. There are limitations to the Bible's inerrancy due to cultural accommodation
  - a. All that the Bible teaches about God and salvation are true, but the bible may be untrue in what it teaches about science and history due to its reflection of contemporary thought and primitive beliefs
    - 1) True in the whole, but not necessarily in the parts
    - 2) True spiritually, but not necessarily scientifically or historically
    - 3) There are no truly significant errors in the Bible and zero redemptive errors
  - b. Support for this view
    - 1) It would have been difficult for the biblical writers to communicate with people of their time if they had taught contrary to the false historical and scientific beliefs of the day
    - 2) Therefore, in some cases it is necessary for the sake of effective communication to affirm the false beliefs of the time period.
    - 3) These untruths never affect the main point of any biblical teaching
    - 4) The false information affirmed by the Bible is not frequent, false statements are not numerous – the vast majority of the Bible is entirely true.

- 5) Most of the false beliefs affirmed by the Bible are merely incidental to the larger point made by the biblical writers
  - 6) This accommodation is not significantly different from other kinds of accommodation in the Bible, such as Moses allowing divorce or Bible translators adding words to make the message more understandable
  - 7) Daniel Fuller; Howard Marshall
- c. Criticism of Limited Inerrancy / Cultural Accommodation
- 1) If we believe that all Scripture is God-breathed, then certainly God could communicate effectively without affirming false ideas of the day
  - 2) How can God accommodate His message in ways that would appear to affirm untrue statements or beliefs without action contrary to His own character?
    - i. Num. 23:19; Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18 – God does not lie
    - ii. 2 Sam. 7:28; Jn. 17:17 – God’s words are true
    - iii. Scripture never implies that God would do anything contrary to His nature, even for the sake of accommodation
    - iv. If God affirms the untrue, then He would have the appearance of lying
  - 3) This theory of accommodation appears to validate the use of falsehoods in order to make a point or convey a message
    - i. No where does Scripture ever teach the use of guile or misleading statements in evangelism
    - ii. This theory of accommodation would seem to contradict the NT teaching regarding truth
    - iii. Eph. 4:15 – speak truth in love
    - iv. Eph. 6:14
    - v. Jn. 16:13 – the spirit of truth will guide you into all the truth
    - vi. Prov. 12:22 – lying lips are an abomination to the LORD
    - vii. Prov. 16:13 – Righteous lips are the delight of a king, and he loves him who speaks what is right
    - viii. 1 Jn. 3:18 – talk in deed and in truth
    - ix. Ps. 12:6 – The words of the LORD are pure words
  - 4) This theory of accommodation seems to contradict the Bible’s own truth claims
    - i. Jn. 17:17 – Sanctify them in truth; your word is truth
    - ii. 2 Tim. 2:15 – rightly handling the word of truth

- iii. Ps. 119:160 – The sum of your word is truth
- iv. Prov. 30:5-6 – Every word of God proves true
- v. 2 Tim. 3:16-17 – All Scripture is... profitable for teaching...
- vi. 1 Jn. 4:6 – We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.
- vii. Dt. 13:1-5 – the standard for prophets was complete truthfulness.  
Should we expect a lesser standard for the Bible?

### 3. Absolute Inerrancy

- a. All that the Bible teaches is truth from God. It is wholly true in all its affirmations.
  - 1) Scripture speaks with precision
  - 2) All accounts are exact
  - 3) Language is technical and precise
  - 4) Jesus fed 5000, not 15,000, not 4,999
  - 5) The measurements of the bronze laver was 30 cubits around, not 31.4 cubits
  - 6) Any apparent discrepancies must be explained.
  - 7) Harold Lindsell, John R. Rice
- b. Criticism
  - 1) Ignores the possibility of accurate approximations, etc.
  - 2) Pushes the idea of inerrancy beyond the normal use of language
  - 3) Assumes a level of precision that is not necessarily implied by the text

### 4. Full Inerrancy / Total Inerrancy

- a. All that the Bible teaches is truth from God. It is wholly true in all its affirmations.
  - 1) The Bible can use ordinary language of everyday speech and still be inerrant
  - 2) The level of precision in the Bible is implied within the context of the passage
    - i. Peter's sermon in Acts 2 reads like a summary
    - ii. The genealogy of Gen. 5 sounds precise
  - 3) The Bible contains phenomenal language, summaries, and approximations
  - 4) The Bible does not affirm untrue statements or beliefs; the Bible does not deny every false belief or seek to correct every scientific or historical misconception
- b. Support for Full/Total Inerrancy (see following):
- c. The Bible can speak of the sun 'rising' or 'setting' without speaking a scientific untruth

- 1) This is phenomenological language as it is commonly used and understood
  - 2) From the standpoint of the observer, the sun does rise and set, which is why this language is still used today, even in scientific settings
- d. The Bible can give statistics in round numbers and still be inerrant
- 1) Read the newspaper or watch CNN and a reporter will say 8,000 people were affected by an earthquake
  - 2) The reporters are not concerned with whether the actual number is 7,825 or 8,236 – the round number of 8,000 gets the point across and can be considered truthful
  - 3) Likewise, the Bible can speak in terms of round numbers or approximations and be truthful
- e. The Bible can approximate distances or measurements and still be inerrant
- 1) I live 7 or 8 miles from church
    - i. According to Bing maps the actual distance is 6.5 miles
    - ii. But '7 or 8 miles' is accurate enough to understand the kind of distance and commute involved
  - 2) My koi pond is round, and 10 feet across and 30 feet in circumference
    - i. Mathematically, we know that the circumference of a circle is determined by  $\pi \times \text{diameter}$
    - ii. So, the actual circumference of my Koi pond is actually 31.4 feet
    - iii. But, 30 feet is a reasonable approximation and accurately conveys the size of my koi pond
    - iv. 2 Chron 4:1-2 – the bronze laver
    - v. Alternatively, the diameter may be an outer measurement while the circumference is a measurement of the inside of the bowl
- f. The Bible can use vague and imprecise approximations and still be inerrant
- 1) The Bible uses language the same way we do – including using vague and imprecise approximations and estimates
  - 2) Even the estimates and approximations are inspired and appropriate for the context and intended purpose of the text
  - 3) The product can still be inerrant even if it contains approximates or estimates (engineers use estimates and approximations too)

- 4) Inerrancy has to do with truthfulness, not with the degree of precision in which events or facts are reported (engineers deal with this in technical writing too)
- g. The Bible can use summaries and paraphrased quotations and still be inerrant
- 1) Direct word-for-word quotations are a product of the modern era of voice recordings, copyrights, and partisan fact checkers
  - 2) On most occasions, a quotation is really a paraphrase of the original speech
  - 3) When the prophets tell us what God said to them, this is expected to be a word-for word quote
  - 4) When the Bible tells us what “the Pharisee’s” said, it is a paraphrase because that is what the context requires
  - 5) The gospels may in fact paraphrase the quotes slightly differently as one would expect when a quote is not recorded word-for-word
  - 6) A paraphrase can still be accurate and the content of the paraphrase can be inerrant
- h. The Bible can have unusual or uncommon grammatical construction and still be inerrant
- 1) Some of the language of the Bible is rough – clearly written by ordinary people
  - 2) Some of the authors were quite proficient in their language – but none of the authors were professional linguists
  - 3) Regular people sometimes break the normal conventions of language for various reasons – for style, preference, personal habit, etc.
  - 4) Regular people sometimes misspell words - sometimes because the spelling of a word isn’t standardized (grey vs gray – savior vs saviour) sometimes on purpose (like to rhyme or to convey a regional pronunciation)
  - 5) However, even bad grammar or questionable spelling can be inerrant because the statements they make are true. This also means that even bad grammar or questionable spelling is inspired by God
- i. Criticism
- 1) See the other views
  - 2) Some argue that this view is too quick to dismiss apparent errors
    - i. However, in many cases critics are unwilling to accept a reasonable explanation that harmonizes conflicting biblical reports

- ii. Critics are also impatient, in many cases we simply don't have all the data necessary to know for sure, this is particularly true in apparent historical conflicts. As archeological evidence is collected, some of these problems may be resolved
- 3) What about large discrepancies like 2 Sam. 10:18 and 1 Chron. 19:18?
- i. Examples like this are rare, but they do exist.
  - ii. The most likely explanation is a simple copyist error. We must remember that inspiration and inerrancy apply to the autographs, copyists may introduce error, though they are very rare.
  - iii. Also, it is worth noting that the authors of Scripture often used written records – counts, census records, etc. Inspiration doesn't necessarily correct mistakes in these other records. Therefore, if the source has an error, the Scripture writer may have recorded the error, just as it was in the source.
- 4) The Bible contains real and insurmountable errors. Instead of explaining them away, we should just acknowledge them, accept the fact, and revise our doctrine of inspiration accordingly. (Dewey Beegle)
- i. There may be some apparent conflicts or errors, but rather than merely accepting them, it is appropriate to look for reasonable explanations within the available data.
  - ii. If there is a fault, it is more likely to be in our understanding rather than in God's ability to inspire the authors of Scripture
  - iii. Therefore, it is reasonable to seek a resolution for problem passages, but we also ought not to force a premature resolution of the problems.
  - iv. As relevant data becomes available, the resolutions may become apparent.

### **C. Problem Passages**

1. Numbers 25:9 and 1 Cor. 10:8 – 24,000 or 23,000?
  - a. Num. 25:9 indicates that 24,000 died in the plague that followed Israel's worship of Baal and Peor.
  - b. Paul, in 1 Cor. 10:8 says, "We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and 23,000 died in a single day."
  - c. Critics point out this discrepancy and claim it is a clear error in Scripture

d. Explanations:

- 1) Paul's context is the golden calf incident in Ex. 32
    - i. 1 Cor. 10:7 specifically quotes Ex. 32:6 and Paul's words in verse 8 seem to be referring to the events of Ex. 32.
    - ii. Ex. 32:35 says, "Then the LORD sent a plague on the people, because they made the calf, the one that Aaron made."
    - iii. Given the context, it seems reasonable that Paul is indicating that the actions of the Israelites included sexual immorality (32:6 – indulge in revelry, 32:19 – dancing) and the resulting plague caused 23,000 to die
    - iv. Supporting this, is the fact that 1 Cor. 10:9 refers to events of Num. 21 – therefore, if 10:8 were a reference to Num. 25, then Paul would be jumping around in his chronology.
  - 2) However, many commentators believe 1 Cor. 10:8 to be a reference to Num. 25:9 because of the reference to sexual immorality and the similarity in numbers killed by the plague. So, then what can explain the difference?
    - i. Both numbers, 24,000 and 23,000 are clearly approximations, indicated by the round numbers.
    - ii. One number is rounded up, the other rounded down. They both accurately convey the scale of death, to within  $\pm 500$ . Not bad.
  - 3) A third logical explanation is that 23,000 died in one day, and that the 24,000 in Num. 25:9 include subsequent deaths as well.
2. 2 Sam. 24:1 and 1 Chron. 21:1 – Who caused David to number Israel?
- a. 2 Samuel 24:1 says the LORD incited David, while 1 Chron. 21:1 says Satan incited David to number Israel. Critics consider this an irresolvable conflict.
  - b. However, why must this be an either/or situation? In His sovereignty, God has used Satan in other situations.
    - 1) In 2 Cor. 12:7-10, Paul explains that God sent a messenger from Satan to be a thorn in Paul's flesh, to keep Paul from becoming conceited.
    - 2) In Gen. 50:20, Joseph explains that God is able to bring about good through the evil actions of Joseph's brothers.
    - 3) Satan entered Judas to betray Jesus, and through this God's will for Jesus to die in our place was fulfilled.

- 4) In Acts 2:23 Peter says, "...this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men." There are then clearly two parties involved – God and lawless men. Yet without conflict, it all was according to the definite plan of God.
  - 5) God frequently uses evil, even Satan himself, to judge others. In 1 Sam. 16:14 the LORD sends an evil spirit to torment Saul as a judgment on him.
3. Different census numbers used in 2 Sam. 24:9 and 1 Chron. 21:5
- a. 2 Sam. 24:9 says 800,000 were numbered in Israel and 500,000 in Judah; while 1 Chron. 21:5 says 1,100,000 in Israel and 470,000 in Judah.
  - b. The chronicler had access to the accounts in Samuel and Kings, therefore an actual discrepancy is doubtful. There is an explanation, but it is not readily evident.
    - 1) For Israel, one possible explanation is that the 800,000 'valiant men' listed in 2 Samuel did not include the heads of households, commanders, and officers listed in 1 Chronicles 27:1-15. Including the heads, commanders, and officers would provide a total of 1,088,000 military men. The Chronicles specifically says the count is "all Israel," which implies a more complete count.
    - 2) For Judah, the 1 Chronicles count of 470,000 does not include Levi and Benjamin. The Samuel count may include the count that Joab initially omitted.
    - 3) It is also possible that the count in 2 Samuel is simply rounded up, and the count in Chronicles is more precise.
4. The dimensions of the bronze laver in 2 Chronicles 4:2
- a. The circumference of the laver is given as 30 cubits and the diameter 10 cubits.
    - 1) However, the formula for circumference is  $\pi \times \text{diameter}$
    - 2) The circumference should be 31.4 cubits
    - 3) Critics point this out as an irreconcilable error
  - b. However, the 10 cubit diameter was the outside diameter, from one outside edge of the brim to the other outside edge. 2 Chron. 4:2a – brim to brim
  - c. Then, verse 5 states that the thickness of the edge (brim) was a hand width, or about 4 inches. So if the circumference is measured on the inside, where the water would actually be stored, then the inside diameter would be 10 cubits (180 inches) minus two hand widths, for an actual inside diameter of 172 inches and a circumference of  $3.14 \times 172 = 540$  inches or exactly 30.004 cubits (1 cubit = 18")

5. Mt. 10:9-10, Mk. 6:8 and Lk. 9:3 – Staff or no staff?
- a. Mark records that Jesus allowed the disciples to take a staff, while Matthew and Luke say he did not allow them to take a staff
  - b. Critics argue that there is no way to reconcile these three accounts
  - c. All three use the same word for staff – ‘rhabdos’
  - d. Mark says, “...take nothing for the journey, except one staff...”
  - e. Matthew seems to be saying, do not acquire a staff, or a bag, or sandals...
    - 1) Matthew specifically talks about acquiring things for the journey
    - 2) However, Matthew does not forbid taking things the disciple already has in his possession – if he was forbidding taking things already in possession, then he would also be forbidding sandals
  - f. Luke says, “Take nothing for your journey, neither staff, nor bag...”
    - 1) Luke uses a different word than Matthew (airo – take, vs ktaomai – acquire)
    - 2) Unlike Mark, Luke actually uses the definite article with ‘journey’ – Luke literally says, “Take nothing into the journey, neither staff, nor bag...”
    - 3) Also, Luke, Matthew, and Mark are all providing summary statements and the precision of these instructions reflects their summary nature
    - 4) The point Luke makes is to make no **special** preparation for the journey, to travel light and be reliant upon God for provision
    - 5) With this in mind, Luke may lack nuance, but he still has similar intensions as Matthew – “Don’t take anything extra or anything special just for this journey.” In other words, don’t take two staffs and don’t take any staff if you don’t already have one.
    - 6) This would be consistent with both Matthew (don’t acquire something you don’t already have), and Mark (take a staff if you have one).
    - 7) Luke 10:4 does something similar when the 72 are sent out – he says, “Carry no sandals...” – however, it is assumed that they will be wearing sandals, so this is a prohibition against bringing an extra pair, even though it is not spelled out in so much detail.
6. Mt. 13:32 – Mustard seed not the smallest seed?
- a. Critics point out that Mt. 13:32 contains a scientific error because there are other seeds, such as certain orchid seeds or poppy seeds, that are smaller.

- 1) Daniel Fuller cites this text specifically as part of his basis for rejecting factual inerrancy of the Bible
  - 2) And with Daniel Fuller's influence, Fuller Seminary moved away from their original inerrancy position in the 1960s
- b. The first point to make about this criticism is context
- 1) Jesus' full statement is (13:31-32), "The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants..."
  - 2) Jesus never says that he mustard seed is the smallest of all seeds in the world
  - 3) Jesus does say that the mustard seed is the smallest of all seeds that a man sowed in his field
  - 4) Jesus then compares the mustard plant to other plants that arose from seeds spread by the farmer
- c. However, even if one is inclined to reject the contextual limitation of verse 32, there is another explanation for Jesus' comment that "It is the smallest of all seeds."
- 1) The adjective translated "smallest" in the ESV is the Greek word mikros that means 'little or small' (English word 'micro')
  - 2) This word is not a superlative, but a comparative – it is probably more correct to translate this word as 'smaller' instead of 'smallest'
  - 3) The phrase could be translated, "It is the smaller of all the seeds..."
  - 4) This places the mustard seed in the class of small seeds, but is not a declaration that it is definitively the smallest seek in existence
- d. Due to its smallness, the mustard seed was used as a common illustration of something very small, therefore the mustard seed has an idiomatic meaning of "something small and insignificant"
- 1) This is why Jesus used it in his illustration
  - 2) God can take something small and insignificant and make it something great
7. Mt. 27:5 and Acts 1:18 – How did Judas die?
- a. Matthew says Judas hanged himself and Luke says he fell headlong and burst open
  - b. The most likely explanation for this apparent disagreement is that both accounts are factually correct
    - 1) Judas did hang himself
    - 2) As a result he fell headlong (or swelled up) and burst open in the middle

- c. The word translated 'fell headlong' is Greek prenes (prnhhs)
- 1) Traditionally, this was understood to mean 'fall head first'
  - 2) 20<sup>th</sup> century studies of ancient papyri indicate that this word had a different emphasis in koine Greek
  - 3) Prenes also commonly means 'swelling up'
  - 4) With this understanding, it is easy to see how a body left hanging for some time would eventually swell up and burst open