

Inerrancy and Accuracy of the Bible / COB / 11.24.13

Introduction

- † **[slide 1: title]** As I wrestled with my sermon a few days ago, I had the thought that the time might be better spent if I worked on my rap technique. Last week, y'all seem to enjoy the image of me rapping. But I persevered with the sermon. It's not a bad sermon, but I it doesn't have the humor or the spunk of last week's, so I hope you will be satisfied with good content, even if the style suffers.

- † Usually, we go verse by verse through a Bible passage, and I try to help you learn how to see what the author is saying and how we can apply that to our lives. Every once in a while, it is useful to step back and see what the whole Bible says about one theological issue. That's what we will do today.
 - In our development classes after the worship service, we have been looking at what we believe about the Bible itself. When I was planning for those discussions, I decided to preach on two of the doctrines, because they would require more explanation and not be as easy to turn into discussions. The first of these was what we believe about inspiration, which we discussed a month ago, and today is the second, on inerrancy.

- † When we say the Bible is inerrant, what do we mean exactly? What do we mean by the term "inerrancy?" What specifically is inerrant? Is it a specific translation that is inerrant? Are there any English translations that are inerrant? Are any Greek and Hebrew manuscripts inerrant today?
 - The doctrine of inerrancy actually relates only to the original Bible manuscripts. So when we think about inerrancy, we also need to think about whether the texts we have today are accurate.
 - This morning, I will explain what we believe about inerrancy, why we believe in it, and then also a little about whether we can trust the texts we have.
 - First, let's pray...

What we believe about inerrancy

- † **[slide 2: definition]** What is the doctrine of inerrancy? We believe the Bible, as originally written, is without any falsehood or error in what it affirms when properly interpreted. Let me repeat that: We believe the Bible, as originally written [as God inspired it], is without any [intentional] falsehood or [mistaken] error in what it affirms [in what it intends to say] when properly interpreted.
 - Our belief in inerrancy does not address whether errors have crept into the text, just that the originals were without error. We will talk about whether errors have crept into the text later. For now, we are only stating that the originals were perfect.

- † When talking about inspiration, we said that we have a historical faith, that what we believe is based on the history in the Bible as much as the theology, because we derive our theology from our history with God.
 - Some believing scholars today try to separate out confidence in the theology from confidence about the rest of the text, and they call that infallibility, instead of inerrancy. But we know that if the history of the Bible is a lie, then we have nothing in which to believe.
 - If the Bible is wrong about God intervening in history, if Jesus was not resurrected, then we have nothing. That means it is incredibly important to believe in the accurate witness of the original biblical manuscripts and in the accuracy of how they have come to us today in their present form.

- † **[slide 3: lies]** Let me share with you six aspects of our belief in inerrancy, which will help you understand it and defend it.
- First, our belief in inerrancy recognizes that in the Bible there is accurate reporting of human and satanic falsehoods. In Genesis 3.4 [NET], the serpent lies to Eve, saying “You surely will not die.” The serpent lied, the Bible accurately reports what the serpent said.
- † **[slide 4: metaphor]** Second, our belief in inerrancy recognizes that the authors used common phrases. How many of you have ever seen the sun rise or the sun set? Are you saying you deny that the world is a spinning sphere? No, and neither is the Bible: from our perspective we describe the sun as rising or setting, and so did the people back then.
- Also, the authors of the Bible used literary styles such as metaphor and hyperbole. At the end of his gospel, John wrote in 21.25 [NET]: “There are many other things that Jesus did. If every one of them were written down, I suppose the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.” Obviously, that is an exaggeration, but this is a viable literary technique today and it was then: you make an obvious exaggeration to make a point: Jesus did many more miracles and said many more profound things, but John has chosen a few for his gospel narrative.
- † Third, our belief in inerrancy recognizes that not every human author of the Bible used the best Hebrew or Greek. Many of the books of the Bible are in elegant literary form, but many others are written as a common person would write. We previously learned that God used the human authors’ personality and abilities in the process of inspiration, and that includes their language education.
- † **[slide 5: paraphrase]** Fourth, our belief in inerrancy recognizes that there are cultural idiosyncrasies such as rounded numbers and paraphrasing. There were no quotation marks back then, and the accepted way of quoting someone was to accurately convey the meaning of what they had said.
- If you left here today and one of the children asked about the sermon, you might tell them, “Pastor Will says the Bible never lies and never makes mistakes.” That is not exactly what I said, but it conveys the meaning well enough.
 - So if Matthew and Luke quote Jesus in the same conversation but give his words slightly differently, this was still accurate representation for their day, so long as the meaning they conveyed was the same.
- † **[slide 6: science]** Fifth, our belief in inerrancy acknowledges that there are some apparent contradictions between the Bible and other sources of truth, but assumes solutions exist.
- For example, many scientists argue for an old earth, while the Bible seems to indicate a young earth. We acknowledge that discrepancy. All we can say is that we are confident that the Bible is true and we are confident that all truth is from God, so eventually we will understand that either we have misinterpreted the scientific data or we have misinterpreted the biblical data – both have happened in the past – but either way, the Bible itself is accurate.
 - Sometimes scientists are wrong. They told us margarine was better for you than butter, then decades later discovered that the fats in margarine were much worse than those in butter.
 - Sometimes the Bible scholars are wrong. The Roman Church persecuted the first scientists who argued for a round earth, because the Bible scholars had misinterpreted metaphors like there being a foundation of the earth to mean the earth was flat.
 - In the end we will know the truth, but the fact that there are contentious issues between science and theology is not a cause to doubt the accuracy of the Bible or nature, just to wonder whether we have interpreted both well.

- † **[slide 7: contradictions]** Sixth, our belief in inerrancy acknowledges that there are some apparent contradictions within the text but assumes solutions exist.
- For example, I have read in commentaries that the account of Paul’s ministry in Acts contradicts some of what he wrote in Galatians. But I wrote a paper on this in seminary, and I found that you could perfectly reconcile these two accounts. The commentators were struggling with some false assumptions that clouded their efforts to interpret the texts. I approached the problem in complete ignorance, so I had an advantage, but I also had guidance from scholars who were looking for answers instead of looking for problems.
 - I also have read in commentaries that Matthew was imprecise in his quotation of Hosea in v.2.15 of his gospel, but I had a professor who wrote a paper on this proving that Matthew had used Hosea correctly. The commentators again were struggling with some false assumptions.
 - By this day, there are very few remaining questions about the consistency of the content of the biblical text, but where they do exist, it is not cause for alarm. We will figure them out.

Why we believe

- † **[slide 8: inspiration]** Next let’s explore five reasons why we can believe in inerrancy. First, the theological reason we believe in inerrancy is because we believe God inspired the Bible.
- Psalm 18.30 NIV: As for God, his way is perfect: the Lord’s word is flawless; he shields all who take refuge in him.
 - The Bible teaches that God is without error or falsehood [John 7.28; Titus 1.2]. Thus we believe God’s word to be true, as was affirmed by Jesus [John 17.17] and elsewhere in the Bible [Psalm 119.160]. And if God’s word is true then his inspired words must be the same.
 - In John 17.17 NASB, Jesus was praying to God the Father about his disciples and said, “Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.”
- † **[slide 9: Clement]** Second, we believe in inerrancy because of tradition. The early church held strongly to inerrancy.
- Clement of Rome in the 1st century [*1st Clement* 45.2-3]: “You have searched the Scriptures, which are true, which were given by the Holy Spirit; you know that nothing unrighteous or counterfeit is written in them.”
 - **[slide 10: Irenaeus]** Irenaeus in the 2nd century [*Against Heresies* 2.28.2]: “[we] being most properly assured that the Scriptures are indeed perfect, since they were spoken by the Word of God and His Spirit...”
 - **[slide 11: Tertullian]** Tertullian in the early 3rd century [*Treatise on the Soul* 22]: “The statements, however, of holy Scripture will never be discordant with truth.”
 - **[slide 12: Hippolytus]** Hippolytus in the early 3rd century [*Fragments on the Song of Songs* 22]: “Let us mark the words of Daniel, and learn that the Scripture deals falsely with us in nothing.”
 - Generation after generation, orthodoxy in the church has always included inerrancy.
- † **[slide 13: reason]** Third, we believe in inerrancy because of reason.

- As theologian Alister McGrath said, “To affirm faith in Jesus is to affirm faith in the narrative of his birth, crucifixion, death, resurrection, and ascension – a continuous story, centering upon Jesus Christ, and casting light on his identity and his significance.”¹
 - If you are a Christian, by definition you base your salvation on your faith in who Christ is and what he did for you. To believe in who Christ is and what he did for you, you must ascribe truth to a narrative about it, and the only reliable contemporary narrative about who Christ is and what he did is the Bible, so you must trust in the accuracy of the Bible to support your Christian faith.
- † **[slide 14: Jesus & Noah]** Fourth, our confidence in the inerrancy of the Bible is consistent with the Bible’s account of itself.
- Jesus referred to historical biblical accounts as true, affirming as factual some details of even the more incredible stories, such as those of Adam [Matthew 19.3-5; Mark 10.6-8], Noah [Matthew 24.38-39; Luke 17.26-27], Moses [Matthew 8.4; John 5.46], and Jonah [Matthew 12.40].
 - For example, Jesus said in Matthew 24.38-39: “For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.” So Jesus affirmed the incredible story of Noah. We could go on and on showing verses that support the accuracy of the Bible itself.
- † **[slide 15: prophecy]** Another way the text verifies itself is in its documentation of the several hundred eye witness accounts to fulfilled prophecy.
- The Messianic prophecies about Christ’s first coming were written down centuries before Christ came and then were fulfilled by him, about which many eye witnesses testified.
 - E.g., the Jews knew Jesus would be born of a virgin [Isaiah 7.14], would be born in Bethlehem [Micah 5.2], would be heir to the throne of David [Isaiah 9.6-7; 11.1], would enter Jerusalem on a donkey [Zechariah 9.9], and would be pierced for our transgressions [Isaiah 53.5-6].
 - In the middle of a prophecy about the Messiah savior, Isaiah said [53.5-6; NIV]: “But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” The gospel writers centuries later would affirm that Christ fulfilled these prophetic words.
 - [share gospel?]
- † **[slide 16: Wadi el Hol]** Fifth, our belief in inerrancy is supported by archaeology – science itself! – which increasingly proves the truth of biblical details. There are many major finds which support the biblical frame of history, so let’s take a look at some of them.
- A. Skeptics argue Moses could not have been sophisticated enough to write the early books of the Bible, but the inscription found at Wadi el Hol, in Egypt, is dated to 1800BC, hundreds of years before Moses was educated in Egypt, and shows the use of the regional alphabet in the time of Jacob and his sons in Egypt. Also, we have found complex legal treaties between Egypt and the Hittites dating to Moses’ time.
 - B. **[slide 17: tell el daba]** The excavation at Tell el-Daba appears to be the capital city Rameses of the Hyksos, who ruled Egypt 1730-1580BC. An Asiatic settlement from the time of Joseph was found there, possibly where Jacob and his family settled.²

¹ Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* [Oxford, England: Blackwell Publishing; 2001], 169.

² See Merrill, 98.

- C. **[slide 18: Khirbet el-Maqtir]** The ruins at Khirbet el-Maqtir appear to be the ruins of Ai from Joshua's conquest as detailed in the book of Joshua, with evidence favoring the early date of the Exodus,³ which would match up with biblical dating from 1 Kings 6.
- D. **[slide 19: pharaoh]** A granite statue pedestal dating to about 1400BC, recently rediscovered in Berlin museum, appears to list Israel among the military victories by the Pharaoh.⁴ This would be the earliest extra-biblical mention of Israel that we have. Again, this would support the early dating of the exodus as presented by the biblical text.
- E. **[slide 20: Merenptah Stele]** The Merenptah Stele, dated to 1209BC, details Egyptian military victories against nearby people groups. It previously was the earliest known extra-biblical reference to Israel. Interestingly, it marks all the other people groups with a symbol indicating they are a city state or foreign country, but indicates Israel is not considered that politically organized, which is consistent with the time of the Judges, which the Bible dates to this period.
- F. **[slide 21: Khirbet Qeiyafa]** The Khirbet Qeiyafa inscription, dating to about 1000BC, mentions a ruler of Gath and possibly the governor of Gaza, which matches up with the historical and geographic details in the Bible about the trouble with the Philistines at this time.⁵ It also shows Israel had scribes writing literary texts at this time.
- G. **[slide 22: city of David]** The massive building stones found in the City of David portion of Jerusalem date to 1000-950BC, the time of David, giving evidence of the might of David as accounted in the Bible.⁶
- H. **[slide 23: ain dara]** The Ain Dara Temple in Syria is a tenth century BC structure with a layout and size about the same as the Solomonic temple in scripture, as described in 1 Kings, proving such structures were in use in that time period.⁷
- I. **[slide 24: bubasite portal]** The Bubastite Portal in Karnak details the military adventures of Egyptian king Sheshonq [the biblical Shishak], including forays into both Israel and Judah, while Rehoboam was king of Judah. The date and accounts match up well with the biblical account of Rehoboam paying tribute to Shishak to save Jerusalem and Shishak taking several towns in Judah as given in 1 Kings 14.25-26; 2 Chronicles 12.4.⁸
- J. **[slide 25: kurkh monolith]** The Kurkh Monolith records a battle between Assyria and Ahab of the northern kingdom in the mid-ninth century. Though this battle is not mentioned in the Bible, the dating for Ahab is consistent. This monolith indicates the northern kingdom was very powerful at the time of the battle, as does the stabling complex discovered at Megiddo.⁹ This is consistent with the depiction of Ahab in 1 Kings 16-22.
- K. **[slide 26: mesha stele]** The Mesha Stele, found in Jordan and dating to the early ninth century BC, commemorated the king of Moab's victories over Israel. It mentions King Omri of the northern kingdom, the name of Yahweh, and the military battle recorded in 2 Kings 3.
- L. **[slide 27: tel dan]** The Tel Dan Inscription, found in northern Israel, is thought to be from an Aramean ruler, dating to the mid-ninth century BC, and discusses military interaction with both

³ See Merrill, 101.

⁴ See Herschel Shanks, "When Did Ancient Israel Begin?" in *Biblical Archaeology Review* 38, #1 [January/February 2012], 59-62, 67.

⁵ See Merrill, 100.

⁶ See Merrill, 101.

⁷ See Merrill, 98.

⁸ See Yigal Levin, "Did Pharaoh Sheshonq Attack Jerusalem?" in *Biblical Archaeology Review* 38, #4 [July/August 2012], 42-52.

⁹ For the stabling complex, see Bryant G. Wood, "Israelite Kings in Assyrian Inscriptions," at www.biblearchaeology.org.

the northern and southern kingdoms. It refers to the southern kingdom as the “House of David,” which was a cultural way of saying the “Davidic Dynasty.” This is the only extra-biblical mention of David, and it shows that a couple of centuries after the Bible says David reigned, the neighboring nations regarded David’s legacy in Judah to be real just as the Bible indicates.

- M. **[slide 28: black obelisk]** The Black Obelisk, found in the former Assyrian capital of Nimrod, dates to the first half of the ninth century BC, and mentions Jehu of the House of Omri paying tribute to the Assyrian king. Jehu is mentioned in 2 Kings 9-10.
- N. **[slide 29: Arad]** The worship alter at Arad, from the mid-ninth century BC, has an inscription of “Yahweh and his Asherah,” showing the pagan syncretization [blending] and idolatry that is depicted in the Old Testament for this time period before the exile.¹⁰
- O. **[slide 30: tell al rimah]** The stele found at Tell al-Rimah, in Iraq, mentions the Assyrian king’s collection of tribute from “Jehoash the Samarian” around 800BC. Jehoash is mentioned in 2 Kings 13-14.
- P. **[slide 31: tiglath annals]** Tiglath Pileser III’s annals, from the eighth century BC, mention accepting tribute from Menahem of Samaria [the northern kingdom]. The tribute paid by Menahem is mentioned in 2 Kings 15.
- Q. **[slide 32: tiglath inscription]** Tiglath Pileser III’s Summary Inscription, dating from the eighth century BC, mentions the northern kingdom’s exile and the death of Pekah and installation of Hosea. Again, the northern kingdom is referred to as the House of Omri. These events are mentioned in 2 Kings 15.
- R. **[slide 33: Sennacherib]** In the Annals of Sennacherib, giving events begun in 701BC, there are details of the Assyrian encirclement of Jerusalem and the amount of tribute recorded as paid from Hezekiah which match that of 2 Kings 18.
- S. **[slide 34: ashurbanipal]** The Assyrian kings Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal mention Manasseh, king of Judah, in their 7th century writings.¹¹ 2 Kings 21 details the reign of Manasseh.
- T. **[slide 35: katef hinnom]** The Katef Hinnom silver scrolls, dating to the late 7th or early 6th century BC, contained an abridged version of Numbers 6.24-26, proving the priestly part of the Pentateuch was written hundreds of years earlier than liberal scholars currently attest.¹²
- U. **[slide 36: Babylonian chronicle]** The Babylonian Chronicle gives details of the battle of Carchemish, in which Josiah died. It mentions taking captives in Judah, with a sixth century BC date consistent with the biblical account in 2 Kings 33.
- V. **[slide 37: Jerusalem seals]** In Jerusalem, a team found two seals from the fifth century BC, belonging to Jehucal, son of Shelemiah, and Gelaliah, son of Pashur, two of Jehemiah’s antagonists in Jeremiah 38.¹³
- W. **[slide 38: cyrus cylinder]** The Cyrus Cylinder, from the sixth century BC, details the Persian decrees of freedom for exiled peoples, consistent with biblical accounts in Ezra and 2 Chronicles.

¹⁰ See Merrill, 99.

¹¹ Bryant G. Wood, “Israelite Kings in Assyrian Inscriptions,” at www.biblearchaeology.org.

¹² See Merrill, 99-100.

¹³ See advertisement on p.2 of *Biblical Archaeology Review* 38, #1 [January/February 2012].

- † **[slide 39: timeline]** That might have been overwhelming. That's ok with me. I am not hoping you will remember any of those details, but I am hoping that you will remember that there is overwhelming archaeological evidence in support of the biblical account of history. There's much more we could discuss, I just got tired of searching for pictures.
- If we look at a timeline of biblical history, we have all these points of contact with extra-biblical sources from archaeological finds. All these sources support the Bible's account, sometimes down to minute detail, like of the specific tribute paid by a certain king.
 - There is no evidence of which I am aware that proves any aspect of the Bible to be incorrect in its historical record. Since we can prove a framework of the biblical record correct, we have confidence that the whole is correct.
 - The sources to verify the New Testament are also impressive, including Jewish and Muslim writings about Jesus, Roman historical accounts of what occurred in the Holy Land during the time of the gospels and Acts, and ample evidence that Jesus' followers believed he had been resurrected from the dead, which empowered them to suffer for their faith and convert much of the Roman empire to Christianity.

Accuracy of transmission

- † **[slide 40: scrolls]** We have already had development classes on the manuscript record supporting the accuracy of our Bibles today, so I will just touch on it here. If you want more information about this, please let me know.
- One of the greatest archaeological finds of the last century was the "Dead Sea Scrolls," near Qumran. Until that time, our oldest Hebrew Old Testament manuscripts were from about a thousand years after Christ's ascension. At Qumran, they found scrolls of books of the Old Testament dating to the time of Christ, and those scrolls showed incredible likeness with the Hebrew texts we already had, proving the accuracy of transmission over many centuries, and tying our Hebrew Old Testament text to the one in use during Jesus' day.
- † Our confidence in the New Testament is based on consistency of the text in the great number of manuscripts that have been preserved from the earliest days of the church.¹⁴
- We have over 5700 ancient manuscripts containing parts of the Greek New Testament and about 8000 of other language versions, some of which date to just a few decades after they were first written. This is an incredible body of evidence compared to what is known of other ancient texts.
 - And we have the quotations of the text from the early church authors, using which we could recreate the entire New Testament.
 - There are variants in the ancient manuscripts of the New Testament, errors have crept into the text. But less than 1% of the variants are both meaningful and viable, usually it is just a matter of spelling a word differently or something like that. Even those that are significant are not a threat to our faith: e.g. you might have some manuscripts that read in a certain verse "Christ Jesus," and others that read "Lord Jesus"; they differ, but this difference does not change anything. There is not one major Christian doctrine that is threatened by any of these variants.
- † From careful analysis of the existing Hebrew and Greek manuscripts, we find that the current English translations of the Bible are accurate enough to be wholly sufficient for God's intentions.

¹⁴ For the facts in this paragraph, I have relied on teachings of Daniel Wallace of Dallas Theological Seminary; see also D.A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan; 2005], 26.

Conclusions

- † **[slide 41: respond]** So we are not saying that we think our English Bibles are perfect. But we believe that God inspired human authors to write an accurate account of God's history with mankind, and because we believe in that inspiration, we believe the original manuscripts of the Bible were without error. And we believe the transmission of this information to us has been accurate enough that we can have confidence in it. I hope you have more confidence in the text as a result of this study.
- † If we do believe in the text, if scripture is the inerrant and inspired Word of God, should we not work a little at studying it? Should we not try to understand what God is revealing to us?
- Can you give God twenty minutes each morning, ten to read a page of Scripture and ten to think about what you read? If you will do this, you will be amazed at how much more you understand God and his revelation, and how it has changed you, just one year from now. Take the challenge, make this your new resolution.
- † **[slide 42: resources]** We have some resources that might help you.
- Howard and William Hendricks' *Living by the Book*: forty-five short learning exercises to help you learn how to study the Bible.
 - Ryken's *How to Read the Bible as Literature*, will help you interpret literary clues in the text, like we did when studying Ruth this past month.
 - Anders' *30 Days to Understanding the Bible* will help you get an overview of the whole history in the Bible with fun learning exercises.
 - Wilkinson and Boa's *Talk thru the Bible* gives you a brief introduction, summary, and outline of each book in the Bible. I have bought copies of all these for the church, so you can look them over and even borrow them, if you don't want to buy your own copy yet.
 - Steinmann's *From Abraham to Paul* gives a chronological history of the Bible. I have not read this one yet, but professors at DTS recommended it.
- † So at least, please learn to be disciplined to spend time in scripture daily, but if you want to go deeper or you need to reinvigorate your study time, you might try one of these books or I can recommend a commentary about any specific biblical book.
- † In a world that doubts everything, that isn't even sure there is absolute truth, it should comfort us to have God's inspired and inerrant revelation to guide us. Let's not neglect to benefit from that blessing.
- † Let's pray...