

# INERRANCY

## INERRANCY

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### Definition

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- The Scriptures are totally without error in the original.
- Ryrie's Syllogism:
  - God is true (Rom 3:4)
  - The Scriptures were breathed out by God (2 Tim 3:16)
  - Therefore, the Scriptures are true (since they came from the breath of God who is true)

"Inerrancy means that when all the 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."

Paul D. Feinberg, "The Meaning of Inerrancy," in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman L. Geisler

"The inerrancy of Scripture means that Scripture in the original manuscripts does not affirm anything that is contrary to fact"

Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 90.

### Complete vs. Limited Inerrancy

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- Complete – "The Bible is fully true in all it teaches or affirms. This extends to the areas of both history and science... Apparent discrepancies, therefore, can and must be harmonized" (*Charts of Christian Theology and Doctrine*, House, 24)
- Limited – "The Bible is inerrant only in its salvific doctrinal teachings. The Bible was not intended to teach science or history, nor did God reveal matters of history or science to the writers. In these areas the Bible reflects the understanding of its culture and may therefore contain errors" (*Charts*, House, 24)

"Only willful ignorance or intellectual dishonesty can account for the claim that the Bible is inerrant and infallible. No truth-loving, God-respecting, Christ-honoring believer should be guilty of such heresy. To invest the Bible with the qualities of inerrancy and infallibility is to idolatize [sic] it, to transform it into a false god."

Robert Bratcher, "Inerrancy: Clearing Away Confusion" (*Christianity Today* 25/10 (May 29, 1981).

### Biblical Basis for Inerrancy

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- Although no single passage may be referenced in support of the doctrine of inerrancy, it is a biblical truth which arises from the doctrine of inspiration and the character of God Himself.

#### 1. The Biblical Teaching on Inspiration

**2 Timothy 3:16** ~ *All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness*

**2 Peter 1:19-20** ~ *But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God*

- Inspiration has to do with the text of Scripture as the very breathed out words of God
- The Bible is the communication of God given through the superintending of the Holy Spirit
- Thus, as the very breathed words of God, no Scripture teaches any error

## 2. The Bible's Teaching Concerning its Own Authority

**Matthew 5:17-20** ~ *Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.*

**John 10:34-35** ~ *If he called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken)*

## 3. The Way in Which Scripture is Used by Scripture

- There are instances where the whole argument rests on a single word

**John 10:34-35** ~ *If he called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken)*

- There is an instance where the entire argument depends on the tense of a verb

**Matthew 22:32** ~ *I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? He is not the God of the dead but of the living.*

- There is an instance where the point depends on the singular as opposed to the plural

**Galatians 3:16** ~ *Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, "And to seeds," as referring to many, but rather to one, "And to your seed," that is, Christ.*

## 4. The Biblical Teaching Concerning the Character of God

- God the Father, who breathed out the Scriptures, is Truth

**Exodus 34:6** ~ *Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth"*

**Numbers 23:19** ~ *God is not a man that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent...*

**Titus 1:2** ~ *in the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago*

**John 17:3** ~ *This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent*

**Heb 6:18** ~ so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us.

**1 John 5:20** ~ And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding so that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.

- God the Son, who brought truth to the remembrance of the New Testament writers, is Truth

**John 14:6** ~ Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.

- God the Spirit, who was the agent in inspiration, is Truth

**1 John 5:6** ~ It is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth

- The Scriptures, breathed out by God, are said to be Truth

**John 17:17** ~ Thy word is truth

## **Further Explanation of Inerrancy**

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### 1. Inerrancy applies to all parts of Scripture as originally written (the autograph)

#### a. Any copy will contain some weaknesses, even errors due to transmission and translation

- How copies of NT made (taken from Bruce Metzger's book, *The Text of the New Testament*):
- As Christianity spread, Christians and churches wanted copies of Scriptures
- Early on they were just copied by individuals
- In the 4<sup>th</sup> century, scriptoriums were used in which scribes would copy Scripture as it was dictated to them
  - Problems:
    - Scribe loses attention
    - Cough blocks person dictating's voice
    - Some words sound alike (there, their, they're)
- Later monks copied Scripture not by dictation but by reading it to themselves
  - Problems could occur anywhere along here:
    - Reading to oneself
    - Retaining material in memory
    - Dictating material to oneself
    - Actual writing of material

#### **Examples of some numerical discrepancies in historical books:**

2 Samuel 10:18 vs. 1 Chron 19:18

2 Chron 36:9 vs. 2 Kings 24:8

1 Kings 4:26 vs. 2 Chron 9:25

1 Chron 11:11 vs. 2 Sam 23:8

Response: There is no proof that these discrepancies existed in original manuscripts. It was probably difficult to make out numerals when copying from earlier worn-out manuscripts. Ancient systems of numerical notation were susceptible to mistakes, e.g., leaving off or adding zeros. (*Charts of Christian Theology and Doctrine*, Wayne House, 26)

- b. But if the critics position that errors in a copy negate inerrancy is true, two other opinions must also be true:

- Textual criticism is useless
  - Textual criticism is the science of reconstruction the original manuscripts of Scripture
  - 2 steps:
    1. Recension – selection of the most accurate manuscripts
    2. Emendation – attempt to eliminate errors
  - When the most accurate version is determined, then it’s translated
  - Examples of disputed texts:
    - John 7:53-8:11
    - Ending of Mark

“With this wealth of biblical manuscripts in the original languages and with the disciplined activity of textual critics to establish with almost perfect accuracy the content of the autographs, any errors which have been introduced and/or perpetuated by the thousands of translations over the centuries can be identified and corrected by comparing the translation or copy with the reassembled original. By this providential means, God has made good His promise to preserve the Scriptures. We can rest assured that there are translations available today which indeed are worthy of the title, The Word of God”

John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Bible Handbook*, page xxii

- The Greek texts available are too corrupt
- c. Copies and translations partake of inspiration by derivation: Derived Inspiration
- God has not chosen to extend miracle to copy and translation
  - Translations are therefore not technically inspired (technically it only goes to the original texts)
  - But copies and translations are inspired to the extent that they reproduce the original
- d. Therefore, the critical view is significantly different from the conservative evangelical position
1. They are arguing that an error filled original is the basis of error filled copies and translations
  2. We are arguing that an errorless original, coupled with careful textual criticism, has produced near-perfect copies today

For most practical purposes, then, the *current published scholarly texts* of the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament *are the same as the original manuscripts*. Thus, when we say the original manuscripts were inerrant, we are also implying that over 99 percent of the words in our present manuscripts are also inerrant, for they are exact copies of the originals. Furthermore, we *know* where the uncertain readings are...Thus, our present manuscripts are for the most purposes the same as the manuscripts and the doctrine of inerrancy therefore directly concerns our present manuscripts as well

Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 96.

- Proof:
  - When Dead Sea Scrolls were found in 1947, the earliest copy of Isaiah was 980 AD. But the copies of Isaiah found at Qumran were dated almost 1000 years earlier. They were nearly identical, differing in less than 5% - slips of pen
  - One scholar has estimated that the points where there is uncertainty as to precise wording of the original is less than 1/1,000 of the New Testament
  - New Testament textual scholars have generally concluded that 1) 99.99 percent of the original writings have been reclaimed, and 2) of the remaining one hundredth of one percent, there are no variants substantially affecting any Christian doctrine.
  - Example: 1 Samuel 13:1
- We are also insisting that ultimately, to charge the Scriptures with errors, is to charge God with being a God of error and falsehood

Thus, if we have mistakes in the copies (as we do), then these are only the *mistakes of men*. But if we have mistakes in the *original manuscripts*, then we are forced to say not only that men made mistakes, but that *God Himself* made a mistake and spoke falsely. This we cannot do.

Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 97.

## 2. The Bible can be inerrant and still speak in the ordinary language of everyday speech

### a. Inerrancy does not demand historical precision...i.e. Numbers can be rounded off

*Isaiah 37:36* ~ Then the angel of the LORD went out and struck 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians; and when men arose early in the morning, behold, all of these were dead.

*1 Chronicles 5:21*~ They took away their cattle: their 50,000 camels, 250,000 sheep, 2,000 donkeys; and 100,000 men.

### b. Inerrancy does not demand the technical language of modern science

- i.e. Sun rises/sets – we know sun doesn't move, earth does but this does not destroy inerrancy

### c. Inerrancy does not exclude the use of figures of speech (personification, hyperbole, metaphors, similes)

## 3. The Bible can be inerrant and still include loose or free quotations...it does not need to be verbatim

In our culture we consider it a terrible sin to misquote another person so that precision in quoting a person's exact words is of tantamount importance. The Greek language, at the time the New Testament was written, had no quotation marks or similar construct. What was considered of utmost importance was to accurately represent the *content* of what a person said. There was no expectation that a writer needed to transcribe the speaker's exact words when quoting him. Thus the Bible is inerrant if it accurately and truthfully describes the content of what a speaker said. Whether the actual words Jesus spoke are "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life," or "I am The Truth, the Way and the Life," the Bible is still inerrant in how it transcribed these words, for the content remains intact.

Tim Challies, *The Inerrancy of Scripture (part 2)*, <http://www.challies.com/articles/the-inerrancy-of-scripture-part-2>

4. Inerrancy allows for variety in style

- Luke vs. John

5. Inerrancy allows for a variety of details in explaining the same event

- Inerrancy does not guarantee the exhaustive comprehensiveness of any single account – some details may be left out

6. Inerrancy allows for problem passages

1. Who led David to take the census? – 2 Samuel 24:1 vs. 1 Chronicles 21:1

Response: The Bible tells us that God may permit a believer who is out of fellowship with Him to take an action that is unwise or displeasing to God in order that, after that person reaps the bitter fruit of his misdeed, he will undergo appropriate disciplinary judgment and thereby be brought back, chastened in the Spirit, to a closer fellowship with the Lord...In the latter part of David's reign, he and the nation began to be confident in their increasing numbers and material resources to such an extent that they needed disciplinary judgment to bring them back to proper dependence on God. The Lord therefore permitted Satan to encourage David to undertake the census, which resulted in severe discipline by God. So, both accounts are true, for both God and Satan influenced David. (*Charts of Christian Theology and Doctrine*, Wayne House, 28)

2. How did Judas die? – Matthew 27:5 vs. Acts 1:18

Response: Apparently the tree on which Judas chose to hang himself (Matt. 27:5) overlooked a cliff. Likely, the rope or branch broke (or the knot slipped) and his body was shattered on the rocks below. (MacArthur Study Bible, Acts 1:18)

3. How many rooster crows? – Matthew 26:34, 74-75; Luke 22:34, 60-61 vs. Mark 14:30, 72

Response: Matthew and Luke at best merely imply only one crowing, while Mark specifically mentions two crowings of the rooster. Exegesis confirms that Matthew and Luke do not specify how many times the rooster would crow, and therefore there is no contradiction. (*Charts of Christian Theology and Doctrine*, Wayne House, 28)

4. Don't the Genealogies of Christ contradict each other? - Compare Matthew 1 with Luke 3

Response: It was understood by church fathers that Matthew gave the line of Joseph, the legal father of Jesus, whereas Luke gives the lineage of Mary, his mother. (*Charts of Christian Theology and Doctrine*, Wayne House, 26)

5. What was the number of angels at Jesus' tomb? – Matthew 28:25; Mark 16:5; Luke 24:4; John 20:12

Response: A careful comparison of the accounts shows that two angels were involved, although the one angel that performed the miracles of the earthquake, rolled back the stone, frightened away the guards, and spoke to the three women at their first approach was probably the more prominent of the two, thus leading Matthew and Mark to refer to him specifically... "One" is different from "one and only one." (*Charts of Christian Theology and Doctrine*, Wayne House, 27)

## How about those who say there are clear errors in the Bible?

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- The question is: Where?
- True, there are difficult passages to understand, but no errors

But while we must allow the *possibility* of being unable to solve a particular problem, it should also be stated that there are many evangelical Bible scholars today who will say that they do not presently know of any problem texts for which there is no satisfactory solution... The present writer, for example, has during the last twenty years examined dozens of these ‘problem texts’ that have been brought to his attention in the context of the inerrancy debate. In every one of those cases, upon close inspection of the text a plausible solution has become evident.

Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 99.

## Problems with Denying Inerrancy<sup>i</sup>

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First, if we deny inerrancy, we make God a liar. If there are errors in the original manuscripts, that were breathed out by God, one of two things must be true: either God purposely lied or he mistakenly lied. This indicates that God is capable of making errors or of producing errors. We might conclude from this that we are likewise able to intentionally lie, even if only in small matters.

Second, if we deny inerrancy we lose trust in God. If there are errors in Scripture, even if in the smallest detail, and these were placed there intentionally by God, how are we to maintain trust that He did not lie in other matters? When we lose trust in the Scriptures, we lose trust in God Himself and we may consequently lose our desire to be obedient to Him.

Third, if we deny the clear testimony of Scripture that it is inerrant, we make our minds a higher standard of Truth than the Bible. At the outset of this series I indicated a concern I felt towards those who deny inerrancy is when they indicate that the doctrine does not “feel right.” But nowhere does the Bible appeal to our feelings or our reason for its authority or inerrancy. We must submit to the Word, for it will not submit to us.

Fourth, if we deny inerrancy, and indicate that small details are incorrect, we cannot consistently argue that all the doctrine the Bible contains is correct. Admitting error in even the smallest historical detail is the thin edge of the wedge, for we then allow the possibility that there may be error in doctrine as well.

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<sup>i</sup> Taken from Tim Challies, *The Inerrancy of Scripture (Part 3)*, <http://www.challies.com/articles/the-inerrancy-of-scripture-part-3>