

# Biblical Inerrancy: The Evidence—Part 4

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## The Strength of Inerrancy from the Historic and Prophetic Accuracy of the Biblical Text

We have been attempting to show that the available data support a belief in inerrancy far more strongly than its opposite. This fact, coupled with the arguments from the nature of God and the teachings of Scripture, make its denial by evangelicals all the more perplexing. For example, note the following brief assessments by men of undoubted scholarship all of whom argue that the factual reliability of the biblical text itself is evidence of inerrancy:

Harold O. J. Brown

...if it were possible to point to undeniable, substantial errors in the present Hebrew and Greek texts of Scripture, it would certainly suggest the presumption that the originals had errors. The fact that it is still possible today to claim the autographs were inerrant is an indication that no one has yet succeeded in showing there is even one substantial, undeniable error or contradiction in our present copies. If such an error could be found, it would wreak havoc within the ranks of the inerrantists.<sup>1</sup>

J. I. Packer

...no compelling necessity springs from modern knowledge to conclude that Scripture errs anywhere: possibilities of its statements being all true and harmonious still remain open, and can often be shown to be likelier possibilities than that of their falsity.<sup>2</sup>

Charles Ryrie

After all, the Bible has proved its reliability in many ways and in many areas, and it is worthy of our trust. Man's knowledge has often proved unreliable and at best it is limited.... Even though the problems connected with apparent discrepancies, parallel passages, manner of quotation, absence of original autographs, etc., may not yet have been fully solved, neither have they ever been conclusively demonstrated to contain errors.<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, in spite of the wealth of confirmation for 2,000 years, even in light of 200 years of recent skeptical attack, the advice of Dr. J. Barton Payne is still sound:

While evangelicals, however, can and do receive encouragement from the relatively few discrepancies that remain unanswered by today's increased knowledge, it is still important to caution that Christian commitment to Scripture does not depend on their infrequency. It is not as though the discovery of additional problems would thereby alter the basis for the evangelical's belief, namely Christ's authentication of Scripture.<sup>4</sup>

Methodological analyses of inerrancy have been very effectively and successfully argued by Sproul,<sup>5</sup> Montgomery,<sup>6</sup> Feinberg,<sup>7</sup> and others.<sup>8</sup> Our own brief illustration of the methodological approach is as follows.

We have established that inspiration implies inerrancy; indeed sufficient evidence exists to show the Bible is divinely inspired. What are some of the things we would expect to be true for the Bible if it were the inspired and inerrant Word of God?

- 1) It would be accurate in historical, archeological, and scientific matters; thus, no fact of history, science or archeology would contradict it.
- 2) It would stand the test of time. Its authors would be proven trustworthy over the centuries, i.e., they would be shown to have not been deceived or to have lied.
- 3) The book would be without contradiction or other error and would be unified in terms of its themes in spite of comprising 66 books with 40 authors who would write it over a period of 1,500 years.
- 4) It would claim to be the Word of God and its origin, transmission and preservation would be unlike any other book in history.
- 5) It would not be unexpected for it to make accurate predictions about the future all of which would be fulfilled.
- 6) It would have a unique message. Since assuming there is only one God, its message would be different from all false claims to divine revelation.
- 7) It would be logical to expect that those who spoke or wrote the Word of God would have their messages confirmed by miracles.
- 8) Its prophecies about the Messiah would all prove true; it would be clearly Christ-centered.
- 9) It would have the impact in people's lives one would expect from a divine message, e.g., in terms of its transforming power for individuals and cultures.
- 10) It would not be unexpected for the greatest Man who ever lived to have authenticated it as the Word of God.<sup>9</sup>

For purposes of illustration relevant to the inerrancy issue, let us briefly examine prophecy. Genuine prophecy would probably be the most difficult phenomenon to produce, but also the most evidential for substantiating the Bible's claim to divine inspiration.

The late J. Barton Payne (Ph.D. Princeton Theological Seminary), professor of Old Testament at Covenant Theological Seminary, is the author one of the most comprehensive texts on the subject, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy: The Complete Guide to Scriptural Predictions and their Fulfillment* (Baker, 1989). In his preface, he makes the following statement:

We live in an uncertain world. Men of today are casting about eagerly, and almost pathetically, in search of meaningfulness. For while we have amassed knowledge, we seemed to have missed truth. Indeed, apart from God and from His revealed words that constitute the Bible, mankind and life and time do seem to be essentially purposeless.... Evangelical Christianity has consistently recognized that the Bible is mankind's only valid source of truth in respect to God and the future.

Anyone who fairly reads Payne's book will be unable to logically account for the many prophecies in the Bible apart from concluding that the Bible must be the inspired Word of God. This text shows how unique the Bible is in comparison to all other religious Scripture. On page 681 he has a statistical appendix, "Statistics of Particular Interest" in which he shows that the amount of predictive matter in the Bible is 8,352 verses out of its total 31,124. This means that the portion of the Bible that is predictive is 27% (28.5% in the Old Testament and 21.5% in the New Testament). The amount of predictive matter in the Bible, not including types is 5,457 verses or 17.5%; the number of separate matters predicted is 737. And the total number of predictions counting subjects which are repeated in various books of Scripture are 1,817.

Further, the books that are most highly predictive according to the proportion of verses involving predictions of the future include Zephaniah (89% predictive); Obadiah (81% predictive); Nahum (74% predictive); Revelation (63% predictive); Hebrews (45% predictive), and 2 Peter (41% predictive).

The books with the greatest number of separate predictions include Isaiah with 111, Jeremiah with 90, Matthew with 81 (26% of the book, the greatest of any New Testament book), Zechariah—78 and Genesis—77.

The books with the most material directly anticipatory of the Messiah Jesus Christ include 101 verses in 13 Messianic Psalms and 59 verses in Isaiah.

For the divided kingdoms of Israel, there are 139 predictions involving 1,421 verses and for the life of Christ there are 127 predictions involving 3,348 verses. For the millennium there are 46 predictions involving 614 verses.

Anyone who considers the above material, especially in light of the information in Payne's text, will have a difficult time concluding that the Bible is anything other than the inspired Word of God. It is simply impossible to account for books like Zephaniah, Obadiah and Nahum that are over 70% predictive, apart from an omniscient God who knows the future. All it takes is one undeniable false prophecy and inerrancy is undermined.

What must also be stressed is the absolute uniqueness of the Bible at this point. There is no other Scripture on the face of the earth, nor has there ever been, which even comes close to this kind of predictive ability. In fact, if we give the Bible a score of 100 in terms of known fulfilled predictions, we must give the other world's scriptures, collectively, a score of about 1 or less. The difference is that great.

Thus, among many possible converging lines of evidence for the historic and prophetic accuracy of Scripture, we have selected the two which we feel are most relevant. First, the existence of supernatural prophecy documenting the divine interpretation and hence inerrancy of Scripture cannot be denied except on the basis of anti-supernatural bias. For example, the internal and external evidence clearly supports a pre-neo-Babylonian composition for Isaiah and a neo-Babylonian composition for Daniel.<sup>10</sup> Yet Isaiah predicts, e.g., King Cyrus by name before he lived (Isa. 44:28–45:6), the virgin birth (Isa. 7:14), the exact nature of the person and death of the Jewish Messiah (Isa. 9:6; 53:1-12), and the Babylonian captivity of Judah (Isa. 39:5-7). Indeed the Assyrian captivity is hinted at as early as Deuteronomy 28:64-66. Similarly, the prophet Daniel (Matt. 24:15) predicts the Medo-Persian, Greek and Roman empires so clearly that antisupernaturalists are forced, against all the evidence, to date this book at 165 BC and thus imply it is a forgery (Daniel chs. 2, 7, cf., ch 11:1-35) in light of subsequent Persian and Greek history and the dynasties of the Egyptians and Syrians.<sup>11</sup> 1 Kings 13:1-2 predicts King Josiah 300 years before he was born and Micah 5:2 predicts the very birthplace of Jesus 400 before He was born. How are we to account for such things if the Bible is not a divine book?

Second, historically the person and resurrection of Jesus Christ proves the inerrancy of Scripture. Jesus did rise from the dead—this must be accepted as factual by the accepted canons for evaluating historical writings.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, when even a Jewish scholar who rejects Jesus' Messiahship accepts his bodily resurrection "as a historical event" and "a fact of history," we can be certain the event is at least worth our unbiased investigation.<sup>13</sup> But if Jesus rose from the dead, then His claims about Himself must be true. If so, then He must be God incarnate (John 5:18, 21-26; 1:30-38; 11:4, 25; 14:9), and thus His teaching on an inerrant Scripture must be accepted—unless we are to suppose that God lies or contradicts Himself which He Himself

denies (Heb. 6:18; Titus 1:2; 2 Tim. 2:13; Nu. 23:19).

Following Montgomery and Sproul,<sup>14</sup> a logical defense of inerrancy may be constructed based on historical argument centering on Christ's resurrection.

1. On the basis of accepted principles of historic and textual analysis, the New Testament documents are shown to be reliable and trustworthy historical documents. That is, they give accurate primary source evidence for the life and death of Jesus Christ. In fact, in 2000 years the New Testament authors have never been proven unethical or dishonest, or to have been the objects of deception.
2. In the Gospel records, Jesus claimed to be God incarnate (John 5:18; 10:27-33); He exercises innumerable divine prerogatives, and rests His claims on His numerous and abundantly testified, historically unparalleled miracles (John 10:37-38) and His forthcoming physical resurrection from the dead (John 10:17-18).
3. In each Gospel, Christ's resurrection is minutely described, and for 2000 years it has been incapable of disproof despite the detailed scholarship of the world's best skeptics. The simple truth is that the historic fact of the resurrection proves His claim to deity. The Resurrection cannot be rejected *a priori* on antiscientific grounds for miracles are impossible only if so defined. The probability of miracle is determined by the cumulative weight of the evidence, not philosophical bias.
4. Because Jesus is the Son of God, He is an infallible authority. In this role He taught that Scripture originates from God and is inerrant since that which originates from an utterly trustworthy God must be utterly trustworthy itself.

Thus, having noted the Gospels are reliable primary source material; having shown the literary evidence that these documents declare that Christ claimed to be God incarnate and having given philosophical-scientific evidence (being the point of verification) that Christ performed the acts of God on earth, including unique miracles but principally conquering death in a physical resurrection, we have, thereby verified Christ's claim to deity. If Jesus is God, what God says is by definition true and therefore His unqualified teaching on the inerrancy of the Scriptures proves the validity of the inerrancy position.

In their segment showing how Jesus confirms the authority of the Old Testament, Dr. Norman Geisler and Ron Brooks indicate in summary fashion what Jesus believed about, e.g., the Old Testament:

#### What Jesus Taught about the Old Testament

1. Authority—Matthew 22:43
2. Reliability—Matthew 26:54
3. Finality—Matthew 4:4, 7, 10
4. Sufficiency—Luke 16:31
5. Indestructibility—Matthew 5:17-18
6. Unity—Luke 24:27, 44
7. Clarity—Luke 24:27
8. Historicity —Matthew 12:40
9. Facticity (scientifically)—Matthew 19:2-5
10. Inerrancy—Matthew 22:29; John 3:12; 17:17
11. Infallibility—John 10:35<sup>15</sup>

Our conclusion is that both the miraculous nature of the Bible itself, which speaks for its inspiration (and hence inerrancy) and the infallible pronouncements of God incarnate on an inerrant Scripture are sufficient reason to accept the proposition that the Bible is inerrant.

### Notes:

- <sup>1</sup> Harold O. J. Brown, "The Arian Connection: Presuppositions of Errancy" in Gordon Lewis and Bruce Demarest, *Challenges to Inerrancy: A Theological Response* (Chicago: Moody, 1984), p. 389.
- <sup>2</sup> James I. Packer, *Beyond the Battle for the Bible* (Westchester, IL: Cornerstone Books, 1980), p. 43.
- <sup>3</sup> Ryrie, *The Bible Truth Without Error*, p. 10.
- <sup>4</sup> John Wenham, "Christ's View of Scripture," in Geisler (ed.), *Inerrancy*, p. 453.
- <sup>5</sup> R. C. Sproul, "The Case for Inerrancy: A Methodological Analysis" in Montgomery (ed.), *God's Inerrant Word*, pp. 242-262.
- <sup>6</sup> J. W. Montgomery, *The Shape of the Past* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany, 1975), pp. 138-152.
- <sup>7</sup> Charles Feinberg in Geisler (ed.), *Inerrancy*, pp. 269-287.
- <sup>8</sup> E.g., Warfield, Arthur Holmes, and J. I. Packer. See Geisler's comments in Geisler (ed.) *Inerrancy*, p. 242 who sees some validity in each approach—inductive, deductive, adductive and retroductive.
- <sup>9</sup> These ten factors are discussed to varying degrees in our book, *Ready With An Answer* (Harvest House, 1997).
- <sup>10</sup> Gleason Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago: Moody, Rev. Ed., 1974), chs. 23-24, 28-29.
- <sup>11</sup> Cf., John Walvoord, *Daniel: The Key to Prophetic Revelation* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1960), ch. 11.
- <sup>12</sup> See, e.g., William Lane Craig, *The Son Rises* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981) especially pp. 88, 124, 133-141.
- <sup>13</sup> Pinchas Lapide, *The Resurrection of Jesus* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1983), pp. 92, 144, 149-150, although he also equivocates on the bodily resurrection (pp. 126-131).
- <sup>14</sup> J. W. Montgomery, *The Shape of the Past* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany, 1975), pp. 138-139; R. C. Sproul, "The Case of Inerrancy: A Methodological Analysis" in Montgomery (ed.), *God's Inerrant Word*, p. 248, cf., 248-260.
- <sup>15</sup> Norman Geisler, Ron Brooks, *When Skeptics Ask: A Handbook of Christian Evidences* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1990), p. 143.