

## LECTURE I: The Inerrancy of Scripture: What Do We Mean? Is it Important?<sup>1</sup>



JOHN DOUGLAS MORRISON  
*Professor of Theological Studies*  
*Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary*  
*Liberty University*  
*Lynchburg, VA*  
*Montkidsinva@verizon.net*

Herein we continue to celebrate the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the finalization of the numerous historical, political, sociological as well as spiritual and theological processes that led to the “Authorized Version,” or as it is more commonly known, the “King James Version,” because of the particular king of England who had ordered its production in 1604. The two greatest influences on the shaping of the English language, and hence so much of English and Western culture are the works of William Shakespeare and the Authorized Version that appeared in 1611. The KJV is not only an obvious Christian spiritual classic; it is universally regarded as a literary classic. Literary scholars continue to heap praises upon it. Nineteenth century literary critics declared it to be the “noblest monument of English prose.” More recently, in a series of lectures at Cambridge University, Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch acclaimed the KJ translation the ‘very greatest’ literary achievement in the English language. The only possible challenger being, again, the complete works of William Shakespeare. The audience acknowledged the propriety of that statement. It has become the accepted wisdom of the recent centuries.<sup>2</sup>

The King James Bible has been and continues to be not only a landmark, a beautifully authoritative unifier, former and portrayer of the Eng-

---

<sup>1</sup> This lecture and the following one were originally presented in Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary Chapel on October 4-5, 2011, as part of our King James Version Anniversary Celebration.

<sup>2</sup> Alister McGrath, *In the Beginning: The Story of the King James Bible and How It Changed a Nation, a Language, and a Culture* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2001), 1.

lish language as such, the effects being much like that of Luther's translation for the unification and nationalization of the German language. But, it has also been an inspiration to poets, artists, dramatists, and politicians. Indeed, the cultural influence of this work of English translation in almost every sphere is incalculable. While the King James Bible was not the first English vernacular translation, it was the translation that broke from "the pack" of other translations in the late eighteenth century, and for many years it was the only English translation of the Bible available. Many families could afford only one book, a KJ Bible. Therein innumerable persons met the gospel truth, the exhortation and the comfort of Jesus Christ. Many learned to read by it and many memorized its passages, its gospel message, and found their written and spoken English shaped by the language and imagery of the KJV. Had there been no KJ Bible there would have been no *Paradise Lost*, no *Pilgrim's Progress*, no Handel's *Messiah*, no African-American spirituals, no "Gettysburg Address"; and that is but the tip of the huge iceberg. These and almost numberless other works were directly and indirectly given form, content and, indeed, life by the language and the message given in that fresh 1611 translation. Without this English translation, the culture of the English-speaking world, and thereby Western culture more broadly, would have been incalculably impoverished.<sup>3</sup>

Yet the KJ is obviously far, far more than a work of literature. For Christians it has long told us the truth of God's redemptive-kingdom message, the story of God's personal action for, in and on behalf of the world—of God's creation of the world; his sustenance, active relation to and redemption of the world by the incarnate life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. These were issues of concern for King James himself and for those scholars chosen to engage in the translation process. The KJ has, for four hundred years, declared to us the words of hope in the midst of human suffering and death, and of the New Jerusalem in which pain, sorrow and death will be no more. The KJ allowed Christians to read for themselves about that message and truth of God, and this gave distinctive shape to the elements of English-speaking Christianity in a period that has come to be recognized as one of amazing, even unprecedented growth, as the exceedingly fruitful missionary endeavors of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries advanced throughout much of the world. In significant measure, many of the ideas, language and vision for ministry of the churches of, e.g., African nations and people groups throughout the continent, and likewise across Australia have been and are strongly shaped by that 1611 English translation of the Bible. Clearly it should be

---

See remark by Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, cited in McGrath, *In the Beginning*, 1.

added here that refugees fleeing religious persecution in England in the seventeenth century brought copies of the KJ with them, giving them encouragement on the dangerous voyage, wisdom and guidance as they settled in the New World and, centrally, the divinely authoritative gospel message for all new contexts of ministry—the gospel of the love and truth of God for that New World.<sup>4</sup>

## II. PLACE AND CURRENCY OF THE ISSUE OF “INERRANCY”

But now, as we come to our primary issue for today, I must assert at the outset that, in terms of proper order, the divine *authority* of Holy Scripture ought to *precede* the affirmation and discussion of biblical “inerrancy,” rightly understood, defined and applied. There are undoubtedly many “inerrant” books, e.g., mathematics textbooks, etc., but these do not have divine authority, they are not the written Word of God. And, with brothers and sisters in Christ who perhaps have various perceived problems with “inerrancy” or complete biblical truthfulness, one gets nowhere arguing with them directly from inerrancy. There are, as is well known, problem passages about which none have a completely sure and final solution that they can point to and discussion goes nowhere—except to unsanctified outcomes. No! No! Rather, as the late Carl F. H. Henry, whose real claim to fame was that he loved my wife’s lasagna, pointed out repeatedly, one must start with the divine authority of the Scriptures, a position, however nuanced, that all evangelicals all but surely hold, if they claim in any way or shape to be orthodox.<sup>5</sup> That foundation of authority has levels of implications that follow from it, which these brethren can, perhaps, slowly, lovingly be led to see.

One of those implications is, to use a modern term, “inerrancy.” According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the English term “inerrancy” is of very recent origin and, as applied to Scripture, the term has a history of usage of about one hundred and fifty years. I don’t doctrinally live and die with *the term*, but I am committed to what the term means and intends, when carefully and properly understood.

It is probably contextually and autobiographically noteworthy that the first “theological” book I ever read was *The Battle for the Bible* by the late Harold Lindsell.<sup>6</sup> As a new Christian, toward the end of my un-

---

<sup>4</sup> McGrath, “Introduction,” in *In the Beginning*, 1–4, and especially chapters 7, 8, 11.

<sup>5</sup> Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority: God Who Speaks and Shows* (Vol. 4; Word: Waco, TX, 1976), Thesis eleven.

<sup>6</sup> Harold Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1976).

dergraduate studies at a state university out West, I was not aware of the issue as an issue within Christian circles. At that state university, various assertions regarding problems with the Scriptures, within a larger frame and culture of anti-Christian sentiment, was everywhere, directly and indirectly. I assumed it and put up with it as a matter of course. But as a young Christian I unconsciously assumed that the truthfulness of Scripture, properly understood, was the position of all Christians. While I didn't (and still don't) like some elements of what Lindsell said—or the way he said it—it was an “eye-opener” at multiple levels. The title of that book embodied, for many Christians, the heart of the controversy and struggle in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s for the sound bases of “the faith once for all delivered to the saints,” and so of Jesus Christ and hence the gospel message and the necessity and the viability of our mission to a lost world—a world bound in “untruth.”

It is noteworthy, then that Dr. Gregory Beale, professor of NT and Biblical Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary, recently wrote *The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism*. Beale is responding, on the one hand, to recent postmodern efforts to challenge and redefine traditional Protestant orthodox or evangelical doctrines, especially with regard to the truthfulness or inerrancy of Scripture, and also to prevalent contemporary unconcern regarding that issue among evangelicals who are often weary of the earlier “battles.”<sup>7</sup>

### III. PRESENTING INERRANCY TO HESITANT BRETHERN

Herein today, I am presenting and asserting afresh the nature and importance of the doctrine of biblical inerrancy because it is a doctrine that has suffered much at the hands not only of its challengers and opponents but, too often as well, at the hands of its ill-prepared, uninformed, but well-meaning, friends. Too often we wrongly attempt to answer questions without first clarifying what the precise question is that needs to be answered. And, further, at the center of clear understanding herein is the need for a careful definition, and hence understanding of that definition, including the crucial terms and elements that make up the question/issue.

First, just to remind all here of just a few representative affirmations of Scripture about itself and its truthfulness, directly and indirectly—and, of course, these reflect but the tip of the tip of the tip . . . of the many and varied ways in which Scripture affirms the truthfulness of its own teaching, its message, its gospel.

---

<sup>7</sup> Gregory Beale, *The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism: Responding to New Challenges to Biblical Authority* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008).

- A. The Nature of God.
  - “...and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and *true* God...” 1 Thess 1:9
  - “Let God be true though everyone were a liar.” Rom 3:4
- B. God speaks the Truth.
  - “The Word of the Lord proves true” 2 Sam 22:31
  - “Your commandments are true.” Ps 119:151
  - “The sum of your word is true.” Ps 119:160
  - “I the Lord speak the truth.” Isa 45:19
  - “God, who cannot lie...” Titus 1:2
  - “Thy Word is Truth” John 17:17
- C. Scripture is God’s Word written (including as message)
  - “I have stored up your Word in my heart that I may not sin against you” Ps 119:11
  - “My soul longs for your salvation, I hope in your Word” Ps 119:81
  - “Your Word is a lamp to my feet” Ps 119:105
  - “Sweet are your Words to my taste.” Ps 119:103
- D. And to Satan Jesus three times responded to temptation with the authority of Scripture.
  - “It is written”... “It is written”... “It is written,” including “It is written” – “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every Word that comes from the mouth of God.” Matt 4:4

I must stop there, for direct and indirect references to Scripture as God’s authoritative and truthful Word are so numerous we would be here for days, and still we would not have exhausted the topic and the teaching of Scripture about itself.

Before seeking in my next section to unpack what I believe to be a faithful, helpful, and instructive definition of “biblical inerrancy,” let me very briefly add here two ways or approaches I have learned from others to coherently present biblical evidence for its own truthfulness or inerrancy that may beneficially enable brothers and sisters in Christ who are hesitant in this area to more effectively think through the issues beyond mere surface claims or questions. The first approach, in its barest of bones form, has five elements:

### *1. The implications of the Biblical Teaching on Inspiration.*

“All Scripture (*graphe*) is breathed out by God (*theopneustos*) and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness.” 2 Tim 3:16 “...knowing this first of all that no prophecy of Scripture (*graphe*) is the result of someone’s own interpretation (or private human thoughts, *epiluseos*, ‘unloosing’), for no (true) prophecy (i.e., prophecy of Scripture”) was ever produced by the will of man (i.e., humans and human ideas are not the ultimate source) but rather men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” 2 Pet 1:20–21

Herein it is so important to note well that inspiration refers especially to the *text* of Holy Scripture and not only, merely, or primarily to the Spirit’s “confluent” relationship and enablement, guidance and superintendence of the human writers, prophets and apostles, et al.

### *2. Scripture’s Emphasis on the Spirit’s “Accreditation” of Both God’s Message and Messenger.*

Scripture says much to distinguish the true prophet from the false prophet, the true apostle from the false apostle. There is a good parallel between the true prophet and Scripture. The prophet’s message, while first oral, was often then written down, and in both cases not only the divine element but also the human element is an essential ingredient. But I would here point especially to Deut 13 and Deut 18 where essentially three criteria for “accreditation” are stated: the true prophet will not speak in the name of another god, the true prophet will not speak a word that is not true, i.e., not in accord with what God has already revealed. Finally the true prophet must not speak what does not actually occur (this reflects the element of a predictive word of the prophet). Hence the prophet (and later apostles) is *accredited* by the *truthfulness* of their words.

### *3. Scripture’s Emphasis on Its Own Authority*

Those who align themselves within Protestant orthodoxy generally, and so evangelicals of all brands and forms, must and do, one way or another, affirm the real and substantial authority of Scripture, an authority which goes beyond any mere human authority, whatever their position on inerrancy. This is a point I will return to later. In each case, evangelicals are invariably quick to strongly acknowledge that this is an important consideration both theologically and in terms of ministry, at the very least. Again, obviously, many OT and NT contexts could be cited, but here are two well-known examples, both from the teaching of Jesus. In

referring to the enduring character and divine authority of Scripture, in the face of questions about the nature of true righteousness, he says, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away not the smallest letter or stroke of the pen (jot or tittle) shall pass away from the Law until all is accomplished” (Matt 5:17–18).

And in another context of typically heated disputation, Jesus says, in reference to Ps 82:6 and thereby to all of Scripture . . . “Jesus answered them, ‘Is it not written in your Law, “I said, you are gods” (referring, if I recall to the Judges)? If he called them gods to whom the Word of God came – *and Scripture cannot be broken* – do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the World, “You are blaspheming” because I said, “I am the Son of God”?’ ” (John 10:34–36).

Here, too, the Lord Jesus Christ speaks of the absolutely binding and divinely authoritative character of Scripture, thereby affirming that from which any proper recognition of inerrancy must arise and that which any definition of inerrancy must include.

*4. The Method and Significance of the Way in Which Scripture is Used by or Referred to Authoritatively by Scripture itself.*<sup>8</sup>

It is important, I believe, to carefully observe the way in which many Scripture passages make use of other Scriptures in authoritative argumentation. Clearly, this is intertwined with the crucial hermeneutical issue of the use of the OT in/by the NT. As B. B. Warfield has helpfully pointed out not too long ago, and others have advanced yet further, there are basically three groupings or forms of such authoritative usage in Scripture: where the entire argument of the context rests on the truth of a single quoted biblical word, where the argument depends on the truth of the tense of a verb, and third where the whole point of the passage rests on, e.g., the singular or plural form of the word. For example, in Matt. 22:43–45, Jesus’ argument rests on the one word “Lord” from Ps 110:1 in support of his deity. “(Jesus) said to them, ‘How is it then that David, in the Spirit, called him Lord, saying,

“The Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet.” If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son?’ ”

---

<sup>8</sup> Still very profitable with regard to this and other elements of these “arguments” are the classical essays by B. B. Warfield, “*The Biblical Idea of Revelation*” and “*The Biblical Idea of Inspiration*,” published and re-published in the earlier and later ISBE and, too, in *The Words of Benjamin B. Warfield*, volume 1.

In the same context as our previous passage, the same thing occurs via the word “god.” In Matt 22:32, we see an example of the second usage, i.e., Jesus’ argument depending on the tense of the verb in defending the truth of the biblical teaching of the resurrection. “...have you not read what was said to you by God: ‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not God of the dead, but of the living.”

And in Gal 3:16, we find an example of the third form of authoritative usage of one passage by another, i.e., dependence on the singular or plural form. In this case, where Paul’s point depends on this *singular* form of the word “seed.” “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 (to) Christ.”

And in fact, contrary to the allegations of some, study of these NT uses of the OT show that the writers here do not overly freely use the passages but, indeed, with care, thus directly and indirectly affirming the truthfulness, the inerrancy of Scripture.

##### *5. Biblical Teaching with regard to the Character of God.*

I have alluded to this before, so I will refer to this crucial matter with even greater brevity. We are told in many passages of Scripture that God cannot lie, that God is true and that his truthfulness cannot be altered by the unfaithfulness of humans. Such assertions must refer to actual “speech acts” by God, oral by a prophet or written in Scripture, otherwise the problematic human response here make no sense. Jesus said to the Father, “Your Word is true.” If, via revelation and inspiration, the Scriptures are God’s written word, that they are ultimately and intimately from God, and if then God’s character is behind them—and this, coupled with all God’s attributes—then it all points toward biblical truthfulness, the inerrancy of Scripture.

But I want to add to this form of argumentation, taken primarily from internal evidence, a very brief overview of the apologetic approach to this question developed by my longtime friend and colleague, Dr. Gary Habermas. Dr. Habermas argues from the historical, probable verifiability, and thus historicity, of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the clear fact that Jesus repeatedly affirmed the truthfulness and divine authority of Scripture, finally to the inerrancy of Scripture. I am sure some of you have studied Gary’s method.



In his earlier work, *The Resurrection: An Apologetic* (1980)<sup>9</sup> and recently in his revision of that work, *The Risen Jesus and Future Hope* (2003),<sup>10</sup> interacting with more recent discussions, Habermas focuses especially on the question of the historicity of Christ's resurrection in the face of those, since the Enlightenment, who critically question the historicity, the actual "event" nature of these claims at the very heart of the Christian faith and gospel. Thus, methodologically (and given our concerns here), Habermas first focuses on reasons for taking the historicity of this miracle seriously. Then he very naturally moves on from this historical question to the foundational question of the reality of God. Can it be argued that God raised Jesus from the dead? What is God's connection to this event? Herein Habermas first carefully shows why a theistic, rather than a naturalistic, universe is more probable. Then Jesus' resurrection, by God's power, is shown to be inextricably linked to Jesus' claims about his own divine authority, and hence the nature of his own incarnate person and, thereby, the divine authority of his teachings. Jesus' resurrection, as probable historical event, confirms not only a theistic universe in which God personally and directly acts, but also the relationship of this event *as God's act* to Jesus' own divine power and authority for his miracles, message, and teaching. Not only did Jesus' many miracles confirm his person, ministry, and his message *as true*, but Jesus himself connected all he taught to his own coming death and resurrection. Given the probable historicity of the resurrection, Habermas consequently points not only to Jesus' many authoritative teachings about God, God's relation to the world and humanity and to the redemptive-kingdom purposes of God the Father through the incarnate life, death, and resurrection of the God-man, his Son, Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, *but* Jesus also taught much, directly and indirectly, about the divine authority and full truthfulness/inerrancy of Holy Scripture as God's written Word. I cannot give more details here but along with Habermas' own details, other books on this topic by John Wenham, Paul Barnett, William Lane Craig and Craig Blomberg go into great detail on this topic of Christ and Scripture as well, and I commend them to you.

#### IV: UNPACKING A CONSTRUCTIVE DEFINITION OF INERRANCY

But what does the term "inerrancy" mean when applied to Scripture? The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines *inerrancy* as "the quality or con-

---

<sup>9</sup> Gary Habermas, *The Resurrection: An Apologetic* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980).

<sup>10</sup> Gary Habermas, *The Risen Jesus and Future Hope* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003), see especially chapters 1, 2, 3, 10.

dition of being inerrant or unerring; freedom from error.” For *inerrant*, it says “does not err, free from error; unerring.” *Errant* is defined as “the action or state of erring; the condition of erring in opinions; the holding of mistaken notions or beliefs; something incorrectly done through ignorance or inadvertence; a mistake.” It is easy to see, then, why some equate *biblical inerrancy* with “absolute/precise errorlessness,” but I am sorry, that is *not* what the doctrine of “biblical inerrancy” means or intends. Because such problematic notions are often attached by some to biblical inerrancy, some (even many) do not like the *term* “inerrancy.” For example, “(some) who defend ‘inerrancy of the Bible’ mean by that word that the Bible contains *no error of any kind*.” Anything in any realm that can be construed to be an error, short of precise, exact correctness, is excluded. But this doesn’t fit at all with what we obviously and actually find in Scripture. Note or recall the following from “The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy,” “Affirmations and Denials”:

We affirm the propriety of using inerrancy as a theological term with reference to that complete truthfulness of Scripture. We deny that it is proper to evaluate Scripture according to modern standards of truth and error that are alien to its usage and purpose. We further deny that inerrancy is negated by biblical phenomena such as a lack of modern technical precision, irregularities of grammar or spelling, observational descriptions of nature (e.g., the sun “rising”), the reporting of falsehoods, the use of hyperbole and round numbers, the topical arrangement of material, variant selections of material in parable accounts, or the use of free citations.<sup>11</sup>

Others point out that *inerrancy* as a term is problematic because it is essentially the negation of a negative concept, i.e., a “double-negative,” others because it is not a biblical term, or that the word needs major qualifications, or it focuses one’s attention on minutiae and minor questions rather than on the primary and central truth Scripture intends to declare. And it is true that while scholarship has, over time, been able to alleviate many of the claims of critics regarding alleged biblical difficulties or problems, scholarship has not *yet* been able legitimately, and with complete historical and/or linguistic cogency, to clarify all of them.

Therefore, given all this, which must be honestly recognized, what do we properly mean by the controversial term “inerrancy”? It seems that what is properly intended by the term *inerrancy* is that the Bible is

---

<sup>11</sup> Article XIII, “Articles of Affirmation and Denial,” *The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy* (October, 1978).

“wholly true.” But then what does it mean to say that the Bible is “true?” It would be better to say that the Scriptures are “truthful,” or that they have the quality of “truthfulness.” Thus, the properly positive side or force of the negative term “inerrant” is that Scripture is wholly true or truthful. As a result, we can continue to make use of the term “inerrant,” while making clear that the term is always meant to be associated with truth, truth telling. In that light, I want to remind some and introduce others to the succinct but packed definition of inerrancy formulated by my late friend, my dearly missed colleague, Dr. Paul Feinberg, long-time professor of Biblical and Systematic Theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. This, I think, is necessary because, as I pointed out earlier, people so often heatedly debate this issue without first clarifying the question involved and properly defining the crucial term. After stating and repeating Feinberg’s dense one sentence definition, I will briefly “exegete” it portion by portion. As Dr. Feinberg concluded,

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 all that they affirm, whether that has to do with doctrine, or morality (ethics), or with the social, physical, or life sciences.<sup>12</sup>

Before examining much of this definition step by step, let me call preliminary attention to what, in some respects, is the core or heart of the definition, i.e., “...will be shown to be wholly *true in all that they affirm...*”. We will shortly examine at some length what is meant here, and some of the difficulties surrounding the complex issue of truth/truthfulness as used here. With that said, let us consider the first part of the definition: “Inerrancy means that *when all the facts are known...*”. Do we now have all the facts—with regard to Scripture or in any other domain of human investigation and processes of discovery and knowledge? Clearly not! This is an eschatological claim. Note again the following phrase, “*will be shown to be wholly true.*” Again, this is an eschatological affirmation. It reflects in particular a relation to God’s revealed, inspired Word, inscribed or written in and as Holy Scripture, that is found often throughout Scripture generally, i.e., that God and God’s redemptive Kingdom purposes *are true, are actual; are effective, and will be shown to be so in the eschaton*—God and God’s purposes in all the world *will be vindicated* “all in all.”

Important, then, Feinberg’s definition here emphasizes the clear reality that the present state of human knowledge is very limited and fallible.

---

<sup>12</sup> Paul Feinberg, “The Meaning of Inerrancy,” in *Inerrancy* (ed. Norman Geisler; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1980), 294.

As a result, inerrancy is not something that we can totally demonstrate now with regard to all the phenomena of Scripture. Either we trust Yahweh, the triune God, the living God, the loving God, omniscient and omnipotent who says that he effectively guides the human agents (*phenomenoi*, 2 Pet 1:21), and who has shown himself faithful to his Word, or we claim infallibility for ourselves and our assessments, while significantly claiming to curtail God's revealed capacities and promises. All that is asserted by this first "eschatological" element in our definition of "inerrancy" is that in Scripture's teachings or affirmations there will be *no final* opposition to the truth.

Some will object that a link between truth and the eschaton makes the inerrancy claim unfalsifiable and so meaningless. But that is not true, as pluralist John Hick has shown, contra "logical positivism," regarding potential verification of the existence of God in the afterlife. But, as previously mentioned, Scripture itself repeatedly links the *present truth* of God's Word and promises to his eschatological justification when, too, for us faith shall become sight—*now* we see in a glass darkly but *then* "face to face." But in addition, logically speaking, this assertion is not unfalsifiable *in principle*, i.e., there is no logical reason for our present limitation regarding "all the facts." And we can coherently conceive of a world like ours in which "all the facts" are known. In such a world, Scripture could be demonstrated to be wholly true or inerrant. But, again, such a reality will be realized in the *eschaton*. In God's good time, we will actually have "all the facts" and there will be "no final conflict."

"*The Scriptures in their original autographs...*". Inerrancy in the full sense applies in a unique way to the *autographs*, not in the *direct* sense to any particular copy or translation. Some object here that, first, we are not in possession of the "autographs" and, with that, that this is simply a useful way to avoid any disproofs of biblical truthfulness by reference to extant copies that can be checked. But this need not be so. This simply recognizes that any copy will, because of the processes of transmission, contain some errors. Beyond this, I believe, given the great advances over the decades in the science of textual criticism, that we are approaching, step-by-step, the original text. Also 2 Pet 1:21, at least implicitly, directs our attention to the original texts when it says that no prophecy, et al. of Scripture (cf. 1:20) was "even produced by the will of man, but men (the *prophets* and *apostles*) spoke from God as *they* were (*originally*) carried along by the Holy Spirit."

But let me add here a personal note of concern with those brethren who so emphasize "the originals" to the near exclusion from real importance of copies and translations that are obviously so crucial to the Kingdom purposes of God. Contra some religions for which there is an ideal,

even necessary, “holy language,” the Judeo-Christian faith has almost always been the faith spread in the vernacular—the Word is meant to be ever available in the languages of the peoples. It all started with the LXX, even the Koine Greek—the lingua franca of the Mediterranean—of the NT (in a sense) reflected this directive, Syriac, Latin, Luther’s German translation, Tyndale’s translation into English...and, of course, the KJV (1611), whose publication we rightly celebrate, all mark out this Spirit-given impetus within the faith “once for all delivered to the saints,” whereby the Word, the gospel, is intended for all the peoples of the world. When 2 Tim 3:16 refers to Scripture (*graphē*), “all Scripture is God-breathed,” what, in the context, is Paul referring to, or at least *including*, in the purview of his teaching here? Recall that in 3:15 Paul had just referred to the “Scriptures” or “sacred texts” from which Timothy had been taught since childhood. As the son of a *diaspora* Jewish mother, what form of the Scriptures would this take? The LXX! The Greek translation of the OT. Therefore, I am at least willing to say that good biblical translations (given, I know, all the *issues* surrounding translation theory, etc.), to the extent that they reflect well the intention of the original (human *and divine*) that we can properly refer to these, too, as the Word of God.

Further, Feinberg adds, “...and properly interpreted...”. Yes, inevitably, the inerrancy of Scripture is bound to the issue of hermeneutics, the science of proper and faithful biblical interpretation. Here several things must be said. First, we must acknowledge the necessary *distinction* between the truthful *text* of Scripture and our checkered interpretations of such. This seems obvious, but in practice it is often forgotten. Too often we oddly and wrongly link biblical inerrancy with our own interpretations of the Bible. No equation exists there, at least not until we see Him “face to face.” As an example, and with a touch of irony, I would ask is Liberty University’s doctrinal statement, and specifically as it affirms biblical inerrancy, inerrant? *In principle*, No. Scripture is inerrant, not our statements about it. No doubt Midwestern’s statement is an exception. This is not to say that the Church has gotten nothing essentially correct within our human limitations. Not at all. The Holy Spirit has been “leading us” more and more...“into all truth.” But even with core truths, the trinity of God, the full deity and humanity of Christ, Christ’s saving accomplishment on our behalf, etc., still much of that, for all that we, to an extent, “know,” is still (if I may borrow from Paul) *mysterion*, “mystery.” Second, there is a real sense in which the precondition of the full aims of biblical inerrancy includes the proper use of hermeneutics. If someone does not grasp what a passage means, they can never be warranted in declaring that it is false. Third, I would also remind us of the “analogy of the faith” (*analogia fidei*), which though previously used

since the Fathers, at least implicitly, was given explicit, developed clarity by the Reformers. The *analogia* includes the call to seek proper harmony between apparently conflicting biblical passages. If there is a legitimate means of interpreting a biblical text that is in harmony with the rest of Scripture, and one that contradicts it, then the way of unity is correct. Analogy is often needed because of the progress of revelation, as later revelation builds on (not falsifies) the earlier Word. Therefore, Scripture is true or truthful in the whole and its parts. This, by the way, is one of the hermeneutical implications of inspiration. Because “all Scripture is God-breathed,” then “author-ized intent” must include reference to the intention of the Holy Spirit. As an example, Matt 2:15, regarding the flight of Jesus’ family to Egypt, says “This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, ‘Out of Egypt I called my Son,’ ” from Hosea 11:1. The authorized intent of the prophet Hosea was contextually a reference to Israel, but clearly in Matt 2 the Holy Spirit’s intention, while including Hosea’s Israel, is found to be much wider and Christologically complete.

## V. SCRIPTURE AND THE QUESTION OF “TRUTH”

Let me close this unpacking of Feinberg’s definition with his core point “...will be shown to be wholly true in everything that they affirm....” The last part of Feinberg’s definition, the reference to “doctrine, morality, or with the social, physical or life sciences,” is crucial in solidifying and expansively specifying the complete domains of biblical truthfulness, i.e., not only “faith and practice.” But I must give all remaining discussion of the definition to the remaining difficult question: What do we mean here by “truth or truthfulness” as a proper quality of Holy Scripture? This is not the skeptical question of Pontius Pilate, “What is truth?” probably the most tragically ironic question ever posed! No! There is truth and, specifically, God, and so Scripture, speaks truthfully. And I would agree with Feinberg and others that defining *inerrancy* in terms of truth or truthfulness is faithful to the biblical data, as we noted earlier. In Ps 119, the longest continuous biblical statement on the Word of God, “truth” or “true” is used three times as predicate to God’s “law,” God’s “commands,” God’s “words.” “Every Word of God has proven true” (Prov 30:5), and recall Jesus’ assertion, “Your Word is truth” (John 17:17). These, as you know, are typical of like affirmations throughout Scripture. Thus, again, *truth or truthfulness* is reflective of our proper intention and usage of the term and the meaning of inerrancy.

But this is not enough. And Scripture does not give us a precise theological definition of its usage of the term and concept of truth. What we *can* perceive is, obviously, how the Bible often uses the term. Still,

“truth,” as such, is an abstract and often ambiguous term. Clarifying what we mean by truth here is, then, a complex issue. In terms of preliminary simplicity, we note that Aristotle defined true and false by stating, “To say what is, is and what is not, is not, is true. And to say what is, is not, and what is not, is, is false.”<sup>13</sup> In recent years, noted Polish philosopher and logician Alfred Tarski has given much clarity to “truth” by bringing it to the following essentials: (1) Truth is to be defined in terms of *language*; (2) Truth is further defined in terms of *sentences* (i.e., truth is a property of sentences), but not of individual words; and (3) more controversially, truth ought to be defined in terms of *correspondence*, essential agreement or conformity of the statement to the “object.”<sup>14</sup> Still one need not press Tarski beyond these basic elements in our concern for the relation of truth and God’s use of human language in his revelation, and so, consequently, in Scripture.

It seems evident to me, allowing for contextual distinctions, that Tarski’s “semantic theory of truth” compares most favorably to the substantial analytical essay on the biblical concept of “Truth” (especially *‘emet*, OT; *aletheia*, NT) by renowned NT and hermeneutical scholar Anthony Thiselton.<sup>15</sup> Initially Thiselton exposes the limits, prejudices and problems with much 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century biblical scholarship (Rudolph Bultmann is a classical example) which has falsely and dualistically tended to separate or contrast the so-called OT Hebrew notion of truth as “stability and faithfulness” from the so-called Greek notion of truth as something set “in contrast to mere appearance.” Thiselton makes clear that while there may be some limited validity here and there to this portrayal of distinction, in fact both OT *‘emet* and NT *aletheia* are regularly found to operate in both of these ways—notably with regard to the truth of the Word of God.

Hence regarding *‘emet* and so the OT notion of Truth, Thiselton says, “the truth of God proves itself ever anew...The God of Israel reveals his truth not only by words but also by deeds, and this truth (of God) is proved in practice.” So the truth of God in the OT means not only truth in contrast to the falsehood of mere appearance, but also that God keeps his Word; He *speaks* and *acts* faithfully/truly/reliably. God’s true word can be relied upon because it accords with reality. For the God of truth, his words and his actions are finally one, a unity, i.e., there is *agreement* between the sayings and doings of Yahweh. The clear point is

---

<sup>13</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1011b, 26ff.

<sup>14</sup> Alfred Tarski, “The Concept of Truth in Formalized Languages,” in *Logic, Semantics and Metamathematics* (trans. J. H. Woodgen; New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1956).

<sup>15</sup> Anthony Thiselton, “alētheia (truth),” *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* 4: 874–901.

that there is, properly reckoned, *correspondence* between God's Words and deeds, between God's words then and reality, and that this is not only the claim formed in Scripture but, also (as we have observed) *about Scripture*.

Thiselton advances his argument to point out that this agreement or correspondence, between God's Word and deed has special significance in the NT. In the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus' statements attacked hypocrisy, or any *discrepancy* between word and deed or word and reality. "Positively, Jesus' own words *always accord* with his deeds, and so with reality. He is Messiah in word, proclaiming the advent of the Kingdom of God; therefore he is also Messiah in deed, demonstrating the advent of the Kingdom by words of power." This correspondence, the truth, the integrity of Jesus' life, and more culminated in the cross and resurrection. Hence Jesus confirmed that God's Word, which he is, and God's OT and NT Word, which he always confirmed, is Yea and Amen. God's Word is true. But even more than the Synoptics, *aletheia*/"truth" is especially prominent in NT writings of Paul and John. In Paul, the gospel is true, God's revelation is true, and hence the OT Scripture as law is true. Indeed, Scripture is the written embodiment of God's truth. For Paul, as for all such testimony in Scripture (note for example the Hebrew prophets) the divine truth reflected in God's Word stands over against all lying, all deception, falsehood and idolatry. But again, bottom line, *aletheia*/truth, is a matter of *correspondence*, and so *faithfulness*, throughout the NT, between God's Word and deed. In bringing this argument to conclusion, Thiselton focuses our attention again on John 17:17, "Thy Word is Truth," reminding us that the contextual emphases here are on the distinctiveness of the Christian community as holy and as founded on and ever dependent on God's Word, which is also a word of commission sending the church out into the World (17:18). In these and all ways, God's Word is effective, faithful, accords with reality and is in no way false. Thus, Thiselton reinforces his point, as typical of both testaments, that God's "Word" is connected with the Scriptures, and the Scriptures are thus linked with the God of truth and the truth of God, whose written Word therefore corresponds with his deeds. It is faithful, its affirmations are in accord with reality at all levels to which it speaks, and it is, because of revelation and inspiration, itself God's true deed, God's true speech act, the written Word of God.

Yet as Thiselton and so many others, who have worked closely and carefully with the phenomena of Holy Scripture inevitably emphasize, the issue of the full truthfulness of Scripture is again a highly complex



one.<sup>16</sup> While the Bible contains what are said contextually to be the direct words of God, Scripture as a whole is not the result of divine dictation. Yet at the same time, we can in no way biblically affirm that Scripture is the final result of mere human religious opinion. Nor does Scripture merely witness to God's acts of revelation. Rather, as Scripture variously teaches and shows, the very text of Holy Scripture is simultaneously or "concurisvely" the work of the Spirit at one level and the work of human authors at another. As a result, the writers of Scripture, above all Christ himself, and the Church historically, have regarded the Scriptures as infallible, inerrant, i.e., truthful in all that they affirm. But if the Bible is a matter of language/sentences, and uses language in a multitudinous variety of ways then, again, the Bible's inerrancy is a highly complex issue. The amazing variety of ways, in which Scripture uses language, is well discussed in G. B. Caird's *The Language and Imagery of the Bible*.<sup>17</sup> In Scripture we find narrative, apocalyptic, poetry, wisdom, didactic, parabolic, religious ritual, legislative, and metaphoric forms of literature, and that is but a few of the many types of biblical genres. Is a narrative passage true in the same way or sense in which poetry is true? What of didactic and parabolic biblical contexts? In John 11:18 it says, "Bethany is fifteen stadia from Jerusalem." This is a statement of mere fact that can be readily verified geographically. In 11:39, Jesus says, "Take away the stone." This is a command. In what sense is a command true or false? Statements, not commands or questions, are, in the strict sense, true or false. It probably makes better sense to inquire whether the whole sentence, "Jesus said, 'Take away the stone,'" is true or false in the sense that it *historically* occurred, though that is something we cannot now wholly verify. No ancient recording devices in Palestine.

Further, Jesus told many illustrative stories or parables, for example, one that begins, "A certain man had two sons," thus uttering an invented story. If the story was not accurately based on an historical event, was Jesus lying to his audience, and so to us? Are parables then false, wrong by definition? If the story is not factually true, if it did not happen, how can it be true? But yes, the story, in terms of *genre*, is a parable, and the right question to ask about a parable is not whether the actions and words described actually occurred, but whether the core point made by the story is *truthful* in the sense of *valid*, i.e., that God the Father will deal with us in the way that the Father in the parable treated his sons.

Perhaps all this so far regarding the many genres in Scripture is obvious, and generally accepted at one level. Yet, as my friend Kevin Van-

---

<sup>16</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *Biblical Inspiration* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 49–59, especially 54–57.

<sup>17</sup> G. B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* (London: Duckworth, 1988).

hoozer puts it, most interpretive mistakes in relation to Scripture are *genre* mistakes. And far less properly recognized is the fact that the question and nature of truth is usually somewhat different for each genre. Factual truth statements are assessed one way, parables another way, apocalyptic literature another, etc. Parables do not need to be factually, historically true to be truthful, and this situation or literary condition is likewise the case for other non-factual, non-historical biblical genres or ways of stating or teaching. Surely we find no problem with metaphor, simile, analogy or other literary forms or imagery, as when we read that a sharp two-edged sword proceeded from the mouth of the Lord (Rev 1:16). We probably recognize the literary context of Revelation and so we do not take the description as literally true. But in what sense, then, is it truthful?<sup>18</sup>

A further related question regarding biblical truthfulness, rooted in particular literary forms and portions of Scripture, is “truthful for whom”? In portions of Exodus, and especially throughout much of Leviticus and Deuteronomy there is much religious legislation, e.g., discussing the distinction between clean and unclean foods, and so much more, which was true, authoritative and binding on the Israelites at the time when it was given by God through Moses. Yet Jesus through Mark (7:19) in the Gospels and God through Peter’s experience in Acts 10:15 declared these OT laws invalid or no longer true and binding for Christians now. They no longer give God’s commands to Christians; and in *that* sense they are *not* “true”, i.e., not valid for him/her. In fact, if anyone were to require that Christians keep these regulations now, he/she would be disobeying God’s command *now* for his people. If one now looks for a “deeper meaning” or sense in the OT food laws, they are implicitly recognizing that these laws can no longer be interpreted in the way their original readers were meant to take them. The same should be said regarding the laws for sacrificial ritual. They *were* God’s commands and *were* true and valid for their own time, and they may be interpreted also as “types” pointing to the one true sacrifice of Jesus, but the writer of Hebrews is clear about any present continuation of such by Christians. Hence, some passages of Scripture which once were God’s authoritative commands are no longer, in that sense, binding and valid for us—in *that* sense they are not true for us, though they were the true Word of God. The point is that they remain *true* as *records* of what God *did* say, but *not* as conveying God’s will for us *today*.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> Marshall, *Inspiration*, 57–59.

<sup>19</sup> Marshall, *Inspiration*, 57–59.

To gather together this portion of our discussion of the nature of truth/truthfulness, and specifically inerrancy as the truth/truthfulness of Scripture in all that it actually affirms, we have been able to show just a part of the complexity of the topic, and that truth's proper application is necessarily to be recognized as distinctive to each portion, especially each genre, in Scripture—truthful in the way appropriate to the distinctive communication form of each genre and its contextual usage. All of this also clarifies the broad and many-sided character of the Scriptures, which contain not only God's direct revelation, e.g., "Thus says the LORD!" but in addition the record of the historical setting in which revelation came to the human situation or condition, without which the direct revelation cannot be properly understood. And also that the truthful, inerrant Scriptures also present a *progressive* revelation, elements of which, though true when given by God, are now true as records of past revelation, which have now been superseded by what followed and fulfilled them.

Let us all more faithfully and properly hear, heed, and live out God's written and inerrant Word to the Glory of the triune God and the outworking of his redemptive-Kingdom purposes in all the world, in Jesus Christ's great and mighty Name and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.



**Figure 1: Dr. Morrison with an original Bishop's Bible and Chained Bible, two precursors to the KJV**