M04A1 Canon, Part 2: Inerrancy

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Inerrancy means that the Bible, the word of God, is without error. The Holy Spirit inspired and directed the Bible writers to accurately convey the intended message of God. The Bible’s enemies know to try to point out imagined errors to influence the less than steadfast Christian to so doubt the accuracy to actually give up their Christian faith.

If we can be convinced that God errs then we cannot rely on Scriptural truth. And we cannot rely on His promises. Apologetics can help reaffirm our faith. We benefit by remembering the overwhelming evidences of God’s being, his loving character, the Bible’s amazing preservation and accuracy. Inerrancy is fundamental to our Christian faith.

“About 3,808 times the Biblical books claim to be transmitting the words of God. After the giving of the law, Moses declared: "Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish from it.” (Deut. 4:2) -lecture/article

Christ himself consistently quotes from and argues his points based on the only scriptures of his time, the Old Testament. Jesus says in Matthew 5:18

“Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.” He says in John 17:17 “Thy word is truth." James describes the Word as "the perfect law, the law of liberty" (James 1:22-25) It is liberty that’s misunderstood. James affirms the law, teaching not the liberation from the law but instead liberation from the penalty of the law.

John in the concluding chapter of the Bible says, “If any man shall add unto them (the things which are written), God shall add unto him the plagues which are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life." (Rev. 22:18-19)

Detractors of the Bible pounce on the fact that different Bible writers share details that don’t always entirely match. In contemporary courts, if each witness testifies exactly the same as another, then collusion is suspected. Each sees and focuses somewhat differently regarding details. Uniformity suggests unreliable. Since we don’t have original sources, uniformity would suggest plagiarism.

Inerrancy does not require strict adherence to literal interpretation. Inerrancy doesn’t preclude symbols or figurative language. Hebrew poetry repeats ideas, not ending sounds as in English. Successive repeated ideas don’t mean literally doubling counts or instances. In another example, Jesus’ parable about the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16 doesn’t teach eternal hell or purgatory. It points to the need to make faithful life choices, to recognize what is important in terms of eternity. Perhaps it could suggest generosity. It’s certainly not heaven that Lazarus is symbolically speaking from since he is represented to be held at the bosom of Abraham, not held near to God. The Bible must be understood in context.

I personally struggle with the book of Revelations. I’d find it easier if the prophecy were chronological throughout the series of chapters. I think the order is poetically expressed, the same prophecies repeated non-sequentially. My English major in college didn’t focus on rhyme of ideas, although I did take a course named Literature of the Bible. I was taught that the book of Job was an ancient legend. I’m no longer sure of that rational.

Critics of scripture want to impose a literal word by word understanding on the Bible, something not imposed on other books. They push an exact word inspiration. That’s not inspiration, it would instead be dictation. To my knowledge, God only wrote two things in the Bible. (1) the Ten Commandments written twice in stone. (2) The words on the Babylonian wall that frightened the king and which Daniel interpreted.

I believe God presented much of scripture through dreams and visions. The writers then recalled what they’d vicariously experienced and put it into expressions understood in their day. Ezekiel’s description of God as wheels within wheels was an attempt to explain what he saw. I doubt that God is made of spokes and rims. For one thing, they break and collapse. God remains eternally and powerfully capable.

Critics attempt to impose unnatural literalness on the Bible. In genesis man is made in the image of God. We know we as humans look nothing like wheels. Preposterous! Preposterous idea to impose and preposterous idea to imagine God literally being wheels within wheels.

Critics impose modern scientific, technical ideas. Then and now we talk of the sun rising and setting. Even scientists capture images of beautiful sunsets. But of course the critics think God would speak instead of the earth revolving around the sun instead of permitting natural language. It wasn’t until 1543, when Nicolaus Copernicus detailed his radical theory of the Universe in which the Earth, along with the other planets, rotated around the Sun. <https://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/features/OrbitsHistory>

Historical perspective would recognize that when Joshua records that the altar of stones in the midst of the Jordan river “are there unto this day” that he spokes in his own timing, not still standing in 2021. Conflicting dates in Biblical history are presented as inaccuracies, ignoring the differing calendars in different cultures. A previous lecture/article pointed out that northern Israel’s calendar differed from Judah’s calendar.

The Hebrew calendar (along with the Chinese, Tibetan and Hindu calendars) is a lunisolar calendar; it functions in harmony with both the solar and lunar cycles, whereas, our current (Christian) Gregorian calendar is purely a solar calendar. The Islamic calendar is purely a lunar calendar and is very effective at beginning each and every month with a new moon. Even today we use different calendars. <https://www.newstimes.com/news/article/Hebrew-calendar-is-one-of-the-most-accurate-on-238110.php>

Archaeology and ancient history, as discovered and confirmed, display the extraordinary exactitude of Scripture. Still, the Bible doesn’t claim to a science or history text. It’s a book of salvation intended to lead us to God and show us how to best live on earth so that we can know how to live in eternity in heaven. Yet while not a book of science and history it does not err in science or history. Even it’s prophecies of future history foretold events accurately.

Jesus himself confirms some events in the Old Testament that critics deride as preposterous. God created a man and woman and committed marriage. (Matt. 19:3-5; Mark 10:6-8) Jesus speaks of the worldwide deluge where only Noah and those in the ark survived. (Matt. 24:38- 39; Luke 17:26-27) Jesus confirmed the story of Jonah and the whale (Matt. 12:40). He speaks of Isaiah’s prophecy of salvation extended to the gentiles (Matt. 12:17), Daniel’s prophecy, and others in the Old Testament. Jesus quotes from the then known scriptures as statements of belief and fact.

In Matthew 4:4 Jesus says “It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” Some translations clarify “It is written in scripture…” The MSG version further clarifies “Jesus answered by quoting Deuteronomy…” The text quoted is Deuteronomy 8:3. Jesus quotes the existing scriptures that all scripture is valid and reliable and spiritual food to feed the soul.

In Matthew 5:17-18 Jesus says, “not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law until all is accomplished.” Jesus asserts here that every prophecy, every promise in scripture is valid. In Isaiah 65:17 we read “For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind.” And John says in Rev 21:1 “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.” We still live on the same earth, deteriorated and not yet new. This promised prophecy has not yet been fulfilled. Again, Matthew 5:17-18, “I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away…” The entire scriptures he asserts remain entirely valid still today.

I like the lecture example of Hebrew jot and tittle. “If we spell a word one way, it is that word; if we spell it another way, even with only a single letter differently, it is a different word. For example, "Tough" means strong. One letter changed spells as "touch". One letter added makes it "though". Single letters are enough to change words. Thus our Lord promised that not one jot would fail. Every promise will be fulfilled exactly as it has been spelled out.”

Jesus affirms that all of the promises will be fulfilled precisely as they were spelled out, in their minutest details. He affirms all scripture. We can’t feel free to adjust the laws of the Bible to accommodate the changing cultural norms of the age.

I struggle to quite understand the lecturer’s explanation of John 10:30, “I and my Father are one.” I understand the intention, but not the Hebrew language distinction. I agree, Jesus and the Father are in full agreement. Not everyone wants to call them entirely separate persons. But at Jesus’ baptism Jesus would not have personally said “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” (Matt 3:17)

I think verses 26-28 apply: “But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life.” Not all apologetical discussions will convince all persons. But “He said unto them, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.” (Mark 4:9) My paraphrase would be, “He or she who permits the Holy Spirit to facilitate full understanding will accept what they are privileged to understand.” Or simpler, “They who listen eagerly to the Lord will understand and believe.”

4-THE EVIDENCE OF MATTHEW 22:23-33. Whoa! “I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” — Lecture: “That proves, the Lord went on to say, that God is the God of the living, which means that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were still alive though they had died long before.”

I understand the truth of the text “I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” I disagree with the conclusion. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob died while believing God. They chose to follow God. In Genesis 15:6 we read “And he [Abraham] believed in the Lord; and he [God] counted it to him for righteousness.” Paul in Galatians 3:6 quotes this in refuting salvation by obedience to the law. Christians are saved by faith. Abraham was saved by faith. He largely obeyed, but he was saved by faith.

Jesus teaches that the dead sleep. (Matthew 9:24, Mark 5:39, John 11:11) In John 11:14 Jesus explains that Lazerus sleeps in death. In verse 24 Martha expresses her faith “I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” Jesus answered Martha, “I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.”

Jesus says to her that he can resurrect to life at any time, not just at the resurrection at the last day. And even after “he stinketh”, verse 39, he prays “Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me.” And Jesus calls out, “Lazarus, come forth.” (John 11:39-44)

We who die by faith, which differs from simple belief in that it is an activating belief changing our motivations and actions, die assured of the resurrection. Thus committed to Jesus “he shall receive…in the world to come eternal life.” (Mark 10:29-30) After sleeping in death for minutes to millennia, we as his committed, steadfastly and faithfully committed followers will again have life, eternally ever afterward living with Jesus and the Father.

Going on… in Matthew 22:41-46, Jesus challenges the Pharisees, “About the Christ, whose son is He?” (Matt. 22:24) They of course, seeking a king, answered “The Son of David". Jesus countered with Psalm 110:1. "the Lord (that is, the Father) said to my Lord (the Messiah who was David's Lord): 'Sit at My right hand (the Father's)

until I (the Father) put Thine (the Messiah's) enemies beneath thy feet'.”

Jesus sought to point them to the unique condition that Christ the Messiah is both the son of David (human) and also the Son of God. The lecturer points out Jesus' reliance on a Hebrew jot, YODH, representing our English pronoun “my”. His argument for the divinity of the Messiah relies on a jot. Matthew 5:18 - “one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.”

The Messiah expected would be from the line of David, human king of Judah and Israel. But it seems few if any contemporaries of Jesus in awe recognized what king David in praise acknowledged, that the Messiah is also the son of God. My descendent and “My Lord!” Psalm 110:1

God’s word is alive and powerful today. It is infallible and inerrant. The word’s of the 40 Bible writers were not dictated by God but they were inspired by the Holy Spirit. Jesus defends even the words and doesn’t hesitate to make spiritual arguments using them. The inerrancy applies only to the originals. Nevertheless, the ten thousands of manuscripts found so closely match that we can be confident we are very close to the originals from the actual first editions.

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Date: 12-12-2021