

Alleged Errors in the Bible

By Dr. Norman Geisler

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Critics claim the Bible is filled with errors. Some even speak of thousands of mistakes. However, orthodox Christians through the ages have claimed that the Bible is without error in the original text ("autographs"; see my book, *Decide for Yourself*). "If we are perplexed by any apparent contradiction in Scripture," Augustine wisely noted, "it is not allowable to say, 'The author of this book is mistaken'; but either the manuscript is faulty, or the translation is wrong, or you have not understood" (Augustine, 11.5). Not one error that extends to the original text of the Bible has ever been demonstrated.

Why the Bible Cannot Err.

The argument for an errorless (inerrant) Bible can be put in this logical form:

God cannot err.

The Bible is the Word of God.

Therefore, the Bible cannot err.

God Cannot Err.

Logically, the argument is valid. So, if the premises are true, the conclusion is also true. If the theistic God exists, then the first premise is

true. For an infinitely perfect, all-knowing God cannot make a mistake. The Scriptures testify to this, declaring emphatically that "it is impossible for God to lie" (Heb. 6:18). Paul speaks of the "God who does not lie" (Titus 1:2). He is a God who, even if we are faithless, "remains faithful; he cannot deny himself" (2 Tim. 2:13). God is truth (John 14:6), and so is his word. Jesus said to the Father, "Your word is truth" (John 17:17). The psalmist exclaimed, "The entirety of Your word is truth" (Ps. 119:160).

The Bible Is the Word of God.

Jesus, who is the Son of God referred to the Old Testament as the "Word of God" which "cannot be broken" (John 10:35). He said, "until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished" (Matt. 5:18). Paul added, "All Scripture is God-breathed" (2 Tim. 3:16). It came "out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). Although human authors recorded the messages, "prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:20-21).

Jesus said to the religious leaders of his day, "You nullify the word of God by your tradition" (Mark 7:13). Jesus turned their attention to the written Word of God by affirming over and over again, "It is written" (for example, Matt. 4:4, 7, 10). This phrase occurs more than ninety times in the New Testament, a strong indication of divine authority. Stressing the unfailing nature of God's truth, the apostle Paul referred to the Scriptures as "the word of God" (Rom. 9:6). The writer of Hebrews declared that "the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (Heb. 4:12).

Therefore, the Bible Cannot Err.

If God cannot err and if the Bible is the Word of God, then the Bible cannot err. God has spoken, and he has not stuttered. The God of truth has given us the Word of truth, and it does not contain any untruth. The Bible is the unerring Word of God. This is not to say that there are not *difficulties* in our Bibles. But God's people can approach difficult texts with confidence, knowing that they are not actual *errors*; God did not err.

Errors in Science and History?

Some have suggested that Scripture can always be trusted on matters of faith and life, or moral matters, but it is not always correct on historical matters. They rely on it in the spiritual domain, but not in the sphere of science. If true, this would render the Bible ineffective as a divine authority, since the historical and scientific is inextricably interwoven with the spiritual.

A close examination of Scripture reveals that the scientific (factual) and spiritual truths of Scripture are often inseparable. One cannot separate the spiritual truth of Christ's resurrection from the fact that his body permanently and physically vacated the tomb and walked among people (Matt. 28:6; 1 Cor. 15:13-19). If Jesus was not born of a biological virgin, then he is no different from the rest of the human race, on whom the stigma of Adam's sin rests (Rom. 5:12). Likewise, the death of Christ for our sins cannot be detached from the literal shedding of his blood on the cross, for "without the shedding of blood there is no remission" (Heb. 9:22). Adam's existence and fall cannot be a myth. If there were no literal Adam and no actual fall, then the spiritual teaching about inherited sin and physical and spiritual death are wrong (Rom. 5:12). Historical reality and the theological doctrine stand or fall together.

Also, the doctrine of the incarnation is inseparable from the historical truth about Jesus of Nazareth (John 1:1, 14). Jesus' moral teaching about marriage was based on his teaching about a literal Adam and Eve who were joined by God in marriage (Matt. 19:4-5). The moral or theological teaching is devoid of meaning apart from the historical or factual event. If one denies that the literal space-time event occurred, then there is no basis for believing the scriptural doctrine built upon it, or anything else, for all is then untrustworthy.

Jesus often directly compared Old Testament events with important spiritual truths. He related his death and resurrection to Jonah and the great fish (Matt. 12:40), his second coming to Noah and the flood (Matt. 24:37-39). Both the occasion and the manner of comparison make it clear that Jesus was affirming the historicity of those Old Testament events. Jesus asserted to Nicodemus, "If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how shall you believe if I tell you heavenly things?" (John 3:12). The corollary to that statement is that, if the Bible does not speak truthfully about the physical world, it cannot be trusted when it speaks about the spiritual world. The two are intimately related.

Inspiration includes not only all that the Bible explicitly *teaches*, but everything the Bible *touches*. This is true of history science, or mathematics—whatever the Bible declares is true, whether a major or a minor point. The Bible is God's Word, and God does not deviate from the truth. All the parts are as true as the whole they comprise.

If Inspired, Then Inerrant.

Inerrancy is a logical result of inspiration. *Inerrancy* means "wholly true and without error. And what God breathes out (inspires) must be wholly true (inerrant). However, it is helpful to specify more clearly what is meant by "truth" and what would constitute an "error".

Truth is that which corresponds to reality. *Error* is what does not correspond to reality. Nothing mistaken can be true, even if the author intended the true. Otherwise, every sincere utterance ever made is true, even the grossly mistaken.

Some biblical scholars argue that the Bible cannot be inerrant through some faulty reasoning:

1. The Bible is a human book.
2. Humans err.
3. Therefore, the Bible errs.

The error of this reason can be seen from equally erroneous reasoning:

1. Jesus was a human being.
2. Human beings sin.
3. Therefore, Jesus sinned.

One can readily see that this conclusion is wrong. Jesus was “without sin” (Heb. 4:15; see also 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Peter 1:19; 1 John 2:1; 3:3). But, if Jesus never sinned, what is wrong with the above argument that Jesus is human and humans sin, therefore, Jesus sinned? Where does the logic go astray?

The mistake is to assume that Jesus is *simply* human. Mere human beings sin. But, Jesus was not a *mere* human being. He was also God. Likewise, the Bible is not *merely* a human book; it is also the Word of God. Like Jesus, it has divine elements that negate the statement that anything human errs. They are divine and cannot err. There can no more be an error in God’s written Word than there was a sin in God’s living Word.

In the next article we will begin to look at how to approach Bible difficulties.