

Foundations for a Biblical Eschatology

Total Inerrancy of Scripture

What we believe about the future directly results from how we view the Scripture. In order to study this doctrine correctly, we must agree as to where we will go for our information and to what degree we will accept this information.

1. Inerrancy Defined

This forces us to begin by affirming the authority of the Bible. Paul Feinberg defines inerrancy of the Scriptures as follows:

"Inerrancy is the view that when all the facts become known, they will demonstrate that the Bible in its original autographs and correctly interpreted is entirely true and never false in all it affirms, whether that relates to doctrine or ethics or to the social, physical or life sciences."

Several points must be highlighted:

- Inerrancy cannot be proven at the present time. The reason is because we do not know all truth at this time. However, inerrancy has yet to be disproven also.
- The Bible in its entirety is inerrant.
- The Bible is only affirmed to be inerrant in the original writings. While these do not appear to exist, we do possess thousands of handwritten copies. By examining these copies, the inconsistencies among them become identifiable and can then compile a text that allows a great deal of confidence.
- Inerrancy takes into account the normal language of Scripture, including figures of speech, free quotations and approximations.

2. Arguments for Inerrancy

The Biblical Argument

- The Bible claims inspiration (2 Timothy 3:16).
- The criteria for distinguishing whether God is communicating to man is total and absolute truthfulness (Deuteronomy 13:1-5; 18:20-22).
- The Bible uses itself in a way that supports inerrancy. At times an argument rests upon a single word (John 10:34-35), the tense of a verb (Matthew 22:32), and the difference between the singular and plural (Galatians 3:16). These arguments would be considerably weakened if the Bible contained errors.
- The Bible teaches its own authority. "It is written" (Matthew. 4:4,7,10), it is unbreakable (John 10:35) and it is imperishable (Matthew 5:17-18).

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- The Scripture is equated with God's authority - what the Bible says, God says and vice versa:

<u>God Said</u>	<u>The Bible</u>
Genesis 12:3	<u>Said</u>
Exodus 9:16	Galatians 3:8
	Romans 9:17
<u>The Bible</u>	
<u>Said</u>	<u>God Said</u>
Genesis 2:24	Matthew
Psalm 2:1	19:4-5
Psalm 2:7	Acts 4:24-25
Psalm 16:10	Hebrews 1:5
Psalm 95:7	Acts 13:35
Psalm 97:7	Hebrews 3:7
Psalm 104:4	Hebrews 1:6
Isaiah 55:3	Hebrews 1:7
	Acts 13:34

The Scriptures teach that God cannot lie (Numbers 23:19; Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18). Since the Bible is from God and His character is behind it, it must be without error.

The Historical Argument

Biblical inerrancy has been the view of the church throughout church history. For example,

- Augustine: "I most firmly believe that the authors were completely free from error."
- Luther: "At times they [the fathers] have erred as men will; therefore I am ready to trust them only when they prove their opinions from Scripture, which has never erred."

The Epistemological Argument

If the Bible is not inerrant, then any claim it makes may be false. Not all its teachings would then be false but some might be. Only inerrancy assures the reader of truthfulness.

As Jesus put it in, "If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how shall you believe if I tell you heavenly things?" (John 3:12)

If God's teaching in some areas is suspect, His credibility becomes questionable in all areas.

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The Argument from Analogy

Both Christ and the Scripture have human and divine aspects. In both the human side is without error or imperfection (Hebrews 4:15; John 17:17).

If the human element requires imperfection to exist then we would have to say the not only is the Bible errant, so was Jesus Christ.

A Consistently Literal Method of Interpretation

In addition to accepting the authority of the Bible, a student of prophecy must use a proper system of Bible interpretation (called "hermeneutics"). This proper system is called the literal method of interpretation.

The Literal Method of Interpretation Defined

The literal method is also known as the normal method. It employs the following elements into its system of interpretation:

- Historical - the cultural background and circumstances of the writer are considered.
- Grammatical - the words are taken in their normal sense unless it is evident that a figure of speech or symbol is used.
- Contextual - the words are considered in light of their immediate and broad context.
- Rhetorical - noting the special features of the particular type of literature used.

The literal method of interpretation allows for symbols and figures of speech and adheres to the golden rule of interpretation, "if the plain sense makes good sense, seek no other sense".

This concept is better understood when compared with its opponent, the allegorical method of interpretation. Under this system, the words are often understood in a symbolic sense that results in a different meaning of the text.

If the allegorical method was applied consistently, the Bible would be reduced to fiction, with the meaning of the text replaced by whatever representation the reader gives to the words.

Evangelicals who use this allegorical hermeneutical system do so usually in the area of prophecy while using the literal or normal hermeneutical system for the rest of Scripture. It may be accurately regarded as inconsistent.

The Literal Method of Interpretation Defended

Why should we first seek the plain, literal sense of the prophetic text?

1. Linguistic Reason

The purpose of language requires the literal method of interpretation. If God originated language for the purpose of communication, it follows that the normal use of language will accomplish that purpose.

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The Bible does not seem to demand a deeper or hidden sense of language which deviates from its normal use. To employ such as unique linguistic device for the Bible would not aid communication but only add to misunderstanding.

2. Biblical Reason

All of the well over 300 OT prophecies concerning the coming of Jesus Christ were all fulfilled literally in the NT. In none do we find the allegorical method of interpretation. Of the rest of the prophecies that have been fulfilled all were fulfilled literally.

3. Logical Reason

All objectivity is lost when the literal method of interpretation is not consistently applied. Literal interpreting limits the reader from making assertions without a clear support from the text itself. To deviate from the literal approach opens a Pandora's box of possible meanings of the text.

In summary, how you approach reading the Bible will dictate what you understand the Bible to teach. Differing views of eschatology are rooted in differing systems of interpretation.

Observing a Distinction Between the Church and Israel in Scripture

Seeing a difference between the Church and the nation of Israel is the all-determinative conviction on which Dispensationalism is based. This distinction is based upon the normal, literal method of interpretation.

What does a distinction between the Church and Israel mean?

Simply put, whenever the Bible speaks of the nation of Israel it means Israel and whenever the Bible speaks of the church it means the church. Israel is not the church and the church is not the nation of Israel.

Why do we believe in a distinction between the Church and Israel?

1. The church did not exist prior to Acts 2

- a. Jesus said "I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18)
 - o Therefore, the church was at that point future.
- b. The church began on the day of Pentecost
 - o Acts 1:5 gives the promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit.
 - o Acts 11:15-16 shows this promise was fulfilled in Acts 2.
 - o 1 Corinthians 12:12-13 shows that the baptism of the Holy Spirit forms the union of the believer into the body of Christ.

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- Ephesians 1:22-23 and Colossians 1:18 shows the church is called the body of Christ.

In summary, the church began on the day of Pentecost. It did not exist prior to the coming of the Holy Spirit.

2. Israel will be restored

A great deal of OT prophecy teaches that Israel will one day be restored to the land since the covenants can not be fulfilled apart from a regathering - Isaiah 27:12; 43:5-7; Jeremiah 12:15; 24:6; Ezekiel 20:42; 28:25-26; Hosea 12:9; Joel 3:1; Amos 9:14-15; Micah 4:6; Zephaniah 3:20; Zechariah 10:10.

The disciples ask Jesus in Acts 1:6 when the kingdom will be restored to Israel. Jesus answers not that Israel will not be restored but that the timing of the restoration will remain hidden.

Finally, Paul affirms that Israel has not be rejected forever but will be restored in Romans 11.

In conclusion, it is essential that Israel and the Church not be confused. God has made promises to Israel that He will fulfill and to attempt to claim that the church is fulfilling all of these promises requires non-literal interpretation.