

“The Bible is Full of Errors, So Why Do You Trust It?”

Dr. Michael Gleghorn

As a Christian fundamentalist group you believe the Bible is the Inerrant word of God and this highly prized book of canonized scripture is your infallible authority and source of truth. (Please correct me if I’m wrong.) Now, with that thought in mind, read what Christian scholars are publicly saying about the sacred canon of biblical scripture, and not just a few. [Link to document called “The Apparent Inerrant Word Of God” included in letter] (Understand, as a Christian Latter-day Saint, I strongly value the Bible too.) Here, you have some serious credibility issues to overcome in making the Bible everything you want and clam it to be. Christian scholars are now reaching the same conclusion about the Bible that faithful Latter-day Saints have known all along and they are finally speaking out. The truth is, the Holy Bible has errors – lots of them! Obviously, God did not intervene and “supernaturally” protect the sacred canon of biblical scripture, as some people erroneously believed.

Our primary focus for understanding these errors in the biblical record is the result of discovering ancient manuscripts, like the Dead Sea Scrolls, that have recently been found in our time. These ancient biblical and historical texts, lost in antiquity, have recently come forth from out of the dust and date back in time to around the Common Era, (CE). All of these early documents predate any of the canonical writings of the New Testament by hundreds of years. There are NO original autographs existing from the New Testament record. All that remains today are generational copies of earlier manuscripts that were handed down throughout the centuries.

So, as I understand the common biblical record, the early Christian Saints should never have been separated or divided from their original apostolic teachings. Nevertheless, through the centuries of time and by a multitude of religious concepts that crept into the early church, this apparent division among the early Christian believers actually happened and today's Christian religious world is deeply divided.

But, whenever the Bible is being presented as authoritative, infallible, or Inerrant, I scratch my head and think to myself — Hold On — Now wait just a minute! From everything that we know and with the myriads of scientific and archeological evidence, your particular views on biblical authority, inerrancy, and infallibility don't exactly add up with all the facts. Infallible or Inerrant? Well, that's hardly the case, because errors exist in the copied manuscript records! And, as for biblical authority? Just look around the Christian community and you will see a staunch Bible expert standing on nearly every street corner. Only, which one is right?

The common thread running through the biblical Christian community is the canonized Holy Bible and that's where the problem is. So, if the Bible is guilty of doing all that, I would strongly suggest that the highly prized biblical canon is anything but authoritative.

Christian scholars have sufficiently demonstrated that you have reached the wrong conclusion for your erroneous "supernatural" biblical beliefs and who among you can dispute the facts? Anyone attempting to believe such nonsense is going to eventually look like an idiot and that's not good for the image! But, the choice is freely yours to believe whatever you want; although, truth will be truth and error will be error, regardless of the disguise or package it comes in.

Thanks for your letter. Although your comments about the Bible are definitely weighted toward the moderate to liberal perspective of biblical scholarship, I

would generally agree with much of what you wrote. Indeed, while I would disagree with some of the specifics in your letter, the general ideas expressed therein are well known to all of us here at Probe.

When conservative Christian theologians speak of “inerrancy,” they are speaking with reference ONLY to the original writings—not the copies. Of course there are many variants in the copies we possess, but this can give a misleading picture of biblical reliability. Part of the reason there are so many variants is simply because we have so many copies. And this wealth of manuscript evidence allows us, through the science of textual criticism, to accurately reconstruct the original documents with a high degree of accuracy. New Testament textual critics maintain that we can reconstruct the original documents to about 95-99% accuracy. The Old Testament is slightly less than this, but it can still be reconstructed with a high degree of accuracy.

It’s important to realize how variants are counted. If a particular “error” occurs in 3,000 manuscripts (e.g. a definite article written twice rather than once), this counts as 3,000 errors. Most of these variants are quite insignificant (e.g. spelling differences, a word left out, an extra word inserted, etc.) and can be easily corrected on the basis of many other manuscripts which have the correct reading. None of these variants affects a significant doctrine of Scripture. Discoveries like the Dead Sea Scrolls actually reinforce the notion that the Masoretic scribes were very faithful copyists. The manuscript evidence for the NT is far, far superior to any other book from the ancient world (e.g. Tacitus, Livy, Pliny, Herodotus, etc.).

Archaeological evidence has repeatedly verified the reliability of the biblical accounts. And no responsible scholar would say otherwise. Although there may still be questions about some issues, archaeology has overwhelmingly served to confirm the Bible, not disconfirm it.

Thus, while I generally agree with what you’ve written, I certainly don’t think your letter gives the whole picture concerning biblical reliability. An excellent,

comprehensive resource on this issue (from a conservative Christian standpoint) is *A General Introduction to the Bible: Revised and Expanded Edition* by Norman Geisler and William Nix (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986). This text has numerous chapters and delves into great detail on such issues as the inspiration of the Bible, canonization, transmission of the text, and translation. Conservative scholars have repeatedly responded to the charges of those who would like to discredit the general reliability of the Bible. I hope you'll give such scholars a chance to offer you another perspective on this crucial issue.

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn

“Is the Bible Wrong About the Cleansing of the Temple?”

Dr. Michael Gleghorn

In John 2:13-25 is the story of when Jesus cleansed the temple. It immediately follows Jesus turning the water into wine, and immediately precedes the conversation with Nicodemus. In Matthew 21:12-16 is the same story immediately precedes the cursing of the barren fig tree. In Mark 11:15-18 the cleansing of the temple takes place immediately after the cursing of the fig tree.

Now, as I see it, there are only three possibilities.

1. The text in either Matthew and Mark or in John is in error about the time of the cleansing of the temple. And either the text in Matthew or Mark is

- wrong about the time of the cursing of the fig tree.
2. The gospels were not written in chronological order.
 3. The same incident happened more than once (highly unlikely).

What is your take on this? Did I overlook something?

Thanks for your question! You have raised an important (and relatively common) difficulty in interpreting the gospels. Let me first say that the gospels were not necessarily written in chronological order. In fact, it is generally accepted that many of the incidents recorded in the gospels were NOT written in chronological order. As a general rule, the only exception to this is Luke's gospel, in which he specifically states his intention "to write it out...in consecutive order" (Luke 1:3).

A good book which you may want to consult about some of these issues of gospel interpretation and harmonization is Craig Blomberg's *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1987). Since this is not an area of personal expertise for me, I will simply give you Blomberg's observations on possible ways in which the difficulties you have noticed might be resolved.

Concerning the cursing of the fig tree, Blomberg believes that Matthew has simply telescoped the events of two days "into one uninterrupted paragraph which seems to refer only to the second day's events." He points out that Matthew's introduction, "Now in the morning," does "not specify which day is in view, and there is no reason to exclude an interval of time between verses 19 and 20." He continues by noting, "Mark does not deny that the fig tree withered immediately, only that the disciples did not see it until the next day." He concludes by pointing out that the gospels leave out a wealth of detail (indeed, John states this explicitly in 20:30), and such omissions simply become more evident when compared with a more detailed account in another gospel.

Blomberg offers a couple of solutions to the problem of the cleansing of the temple. The first solution holds that John has simply woven this incident into his gospel thematically, rather than chronologically. In other words, there is only one

cleansing and John, for thematic considerations, has simply chosen to relay this incident in a manner unrelated to its actual chronological occurrence in the life of Christ. He offers a couple of reasons in support of this view. The second solution (which commends itself to my mind) actually acknowledges two separate cleansings, one at the beginning and one near the end of Jesus' public ministry. He offers six arguments in support of this second position (172):

1. The details of the cleansing given in John's account are completely different from those given in the Synoptics (i.e. Matthew, Mark, Luke).

2. If Jesus felt strongly enough about the temple corruption to cleanse it once at the beginning of His ministry, it is not really too difficult to believe that He might do it again at the end of His ministry.

3. Since cleansing the temple was an overtly Messianic act, about which some of the Jews would have approved, it is not surprising that He could get away with doing this once at the outset of His ministry. However, when the Jews began to realize that Jesus was not really the sort of Messiah they were looking for, a second cleansing would have almost certainly sealed His fate (see Mark 11:18).

4. In the Synoptics, Jesus is accused of having said that He would destroy the temple and rebuild another in three days not made with human hands (Mark 14:58). But a similar comment by Jesus is only explicitly mentioned in John 2:19. Furthermore, since the witnesses in Mark's gospel get the statement slightly wrong, and cannot agree among themselves (Mark 14:59), it may be a confused memory of something Jesus said two or three years earlier, rather than just a few days earlier.

5. Jesus' statement in the Synoptics is more severe than that in John. Only in the Synoptics does He refer to the Gentiles need to pray at the temple, and only in the Synoptics does He refer to the Jews as "robbers."

6. In John 2:20 the Jews refer to the temple rebuilding project having begun 46

years earlier. This would mark the date of the cleansing at around AD 27 or 28. But Jesus was almost certainly not crucified until at least AD 30. And it is most unlikely that John would have simply made up such a figure. Therefore, it is quite likely that John is describing a distinct (and earlier) cleansing from the one mentioned in the Synoptics.

When I approach the gospel narratives with the attitude that they are innocent until proven guilty, keeping in mind that they have been thoroughly demonstrated to be generally reliable historical sources, the six arguments listed above strongly incline me to the view that there were in fact two temple cleansings in the life of Christ—one at the beginning of His public ministry, the other at its conclusion. At any rate, that is my take on this particular issue.

Hope this helps!

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn
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