

The Inerrant Bible Reader

By [Ted Wise](#)

As it was in the past, one of the big theological issues today is the inerrancy of the Bible. One would think after all these years the unbelieving reading public would throw up its hands and shout, "Who cares!?". Yet there is currently a very popular book about the Bible that concerns itself with assigning numerical values to the letters, words, verses and books of the Bible and then cranking it through a computer to produce mysterious and phantasmal coincidences. This moldy old idea is actually not very new. It's a mixture of high-tech digital science and ancient Hebrew heresy. We certainly live in a most peculiar age.

Personally I believe Bible inerrancy is really in the heart of the beholder or reader because of the very things written in it, "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (Rom 10:17). Unless God gives one His Spirit, it is impossible to understand the Bible, let alone determine if it has errors. We suffer from the old log in the eye syndrome carried to the most extreme point. Humanity wants to help God Himself see things a little more clearly.

My family didn't go to church so I knew very little about the historical Jesus. I became a Christian after reading the New Testament. At first, I only liked part of it. Jesus was a wonderful discovery for me but I had doubts about the other writers. I soon learned that I wasn't the only one. There are many sects whose founders were troubled by what they perceived as contradictions between the Bible's four accounts of Jesus' life and the letters of the Apostles. In fact Church history abounds with cultic attempts to reconcile the apparent differences between the Epistles and the Gospels. Even among believing Christians there are a lot of us who have thought, "I like what Jesus said, but who is this Paul guy?"

I suspect that most of us at some point in our new life have wondered about the accuracy of the Bible, but this is different. This is more of a comparative kind of doubt wherein one wonders about the veracity of one or more of the various authors rather than the entire Bible (usually pertaining to some part or all of Paul's writings). It is not exactly a concern about the inerrancy of scripture but a questioning of whether Jesus and Paul actually taught the same message about God and human behavior during their earthly lives. Did they speak the exact same message or was some of it added later from other sources?

To put it simply, no. Paul and Jesus did not speak alike. This may sound unconventional but let me explain. For instance, Paul could not command the wind and waves to calm down. Jesus our Lord could. He walked the earth as Lord and as a man without sin. "For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin" (Heb 4:15). Paul said he was chief among sinners.

We know that Jesus' words were spoken without error and had the power to effect change. People who were present at the time remarked on how He spoke, "And they were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (Mark 1:22). Obviously those who were present at the time Jesus spoke were impressed. They heard Him directly rather than through the Bible as we do. We can only imagine what that must have been like. James writes that only when we are perfect can we speak perfectly. "For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well" (James 3:2). Paul made no claim that he was perfect. He only boasts of his weakness. So it is true, that at the time they lived, Paul and the other Apostles didn't speak as Jesus did. Jesus was Perfect.

Actually this particular kind of questioning of the accuracy of one or more parts of the Scriptures doesn't make a lot of sense because comparisons of Jesus, Paul and the others can only be made by those who were alive

and present when Jesus spoke. Everything we know about both Jesus and Paul was passed on to us by men and women just like us (and like Paul). Incidentally, we don't have the original stone tablets of the Law either.

One might ask, "are the Book of Romans and the four Gospels equally inspired?" The answer to that is yes. The writers of the Old and New Testament were chosen and gifted by God with the Holy Spirit so they could live and write what eventually became the Bible. They did not go into trances and take heavenly dictation like a bunch of new age channelers might. Nor did they recklessly speak off the top of their heads as some do today in the mistaken belief that words spoken in known or unknown languages are automatically spiritual if one doesn't bother to think before speaking. The writers of the Bible were quick to listen and slow to speak. They knew false prophesying was a capital offense. God gave them Himself and His Word.

Jesus has not changed over the years. He offers Himself to us in our age just as He did in the days He walked the earth. He will do great works through us too. We won't get the same kind of press coverage that the Apostles did, but that's not so bad because according to Jesus it's better to have one's recognition in Heaven rather than on earth. Will the same Holy Spirit be given to those who accept Him as Lord today? Yes, just like those who came before us, present day Christians are gifted with the Spirit of God. As Paul writes, "However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him (Rom 8:9). Only our work will be different. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them (Eph 2:10).

One might ask, "Did Paul know as much as Jesus?" The answer to that is no, that would make Paul almost the Messiah. If it were not for the living Christ and the gift of His Spirit, we wouldn't know anything at all. This is the spooky part of Christianity: His indwelling presence. "And as for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him" (1 John 2:27). Isn't Jesus wonderful? His Spirit inside of us, bearing witness with our spirit that we indeed belong to Him, and because we are His beloved children, He gives, has given and will continue to give us everything that we need for life and godliness.

One could more correctly ask, "Is the copy we have of a letter Paul wrote to the Romans as inspired as the copy we have of what John wrote about Jesus?" The answer is yes. Plus the surprising revelation that because the Holy Spirit indwells us we need no teacher other than the Spirit of God. However, just as we are glad for His Word in our language, we are glad that He gave us gifted teachers and not just professional ones. Think of the first century Church. Almost all of the people in the early Church were Gentiles. They were without the Scriptures for hundreds of years. How glad they must have been for gifted teachers.

Consider Paul, even before he was a Christian he could do some amazing things. As a Pharisee, he could recount the entire book of Moses along with The Law and The Prophets. He could give a verbal account of Israel's history and could recite his family's genealogy back as far as Abraham. On top of that, he knew all of the six hundred or so Hebrew religious traditions. Paul, more than any other New Testament writer, has the background to claim greater authority than all the others yet he says this about his former life, "More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ..." (Phil 3:8).

If one asks, "Does God's Word have higher teachings in one book by virtue of who wrote it?" the answer is no. There is only one Holy Spirit. He is a person not a quantity. Most Christians are thankful for those who were gifted and given the job of compiling the Bible. I am very grateful for the book. I don't believe that the writers were especially spiritual even though the fruitful yield of their labor is huge. We are all part of His body no matter what age we live in. No one in the first century of the Church was more chosen than we are in ours. According to the Bible, we have each been chosen to do what God has spiritually gifted and given us to do. However, I don't believe any of us will be writing any Scripture.

One can ask, "Because of his proximity in time to Jesus, did the Apostle John know more truth than Paul?" The surprising answer to that is yes. But he didn't say what it was. John said, "And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not

contain the books which were written" (John 21:25).

God "breathed" His word through men and women like us, not special folks or saints, and that's fine because it is read by the same kind of people. Understanding the Bible is another matter. The Word of God can not be understood without the Holy Spirit teaching its reader what it means. That makes the Bible's accuracy not quite the same sort of problem that scientists faced when they had to abandon Galileo. Some people think they see contradictions between books of the Bible that render it untrue. But in these days of rapid learning, the cosmos itself seems filled with many strange contradictions and possibilities. In science a contradiction implies a false premise or hypothesis. This is also true in theology. Perhaps what appears to be a contradiction is simply a truth in need of good exegesis. We can choose to let Christ renew our minds. Check out the Book of Romans, chapter twelve.

One can ask, "Is the Bible perfect?" The answer is no. And it isn't God's fault, unless you count His way of revealing Himself as a fault.

According to the book of Haggai, the Jewish people had some questions about God's Word and why their repentance and subsequent work on the rebuilding of the Temple wasn't going as well as they expected. Part of God's answer goes like this:

"Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'Ask now the priests for a ruling: 'If a man carries holy meat in the fold of his garment, and touches bread with this fold, or cooked food, wine, oil, or any other food, will it become holy?' And the priests answered and said, 'No.' Then Haggai said, 'If one who is unclean from a corpse touches any of these, will the latter become unclean?' And the priests answered and said, 'It will become unclean.' Then Haggai answered and said, 'So is this people. And so is this nation before Me,' declares the LORD, 'and so is every work of their hands; and what they offer there is unclean....'" Haggai is only a two page book and it is well worth reading. Incidentally, they were told to keep working anyway.

This Old Testament story illustrates the impossibility of perfection.

We indeed have the Holy Spirit but we still live in a fallen body. The problem is kind of like pure water flowing through a dirty filter. The water starts out just fine but as it passes through the filter it picks up contaminants. "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves". (2 Cor 4:7)

This means that when it comes to the question of the Bible's spiritual inerrancy, both writer and reader are on equal ground. Without God's Spirit writing it, the Bible would not be God's Word. Without God's Spirit intervening, the reader, according to the Bible, wouldn't know if it was God's Word or not.

One can ask, "Can the Bible can be trusted over other books or religious opinions?" The answer is yes and it's a tangible piece of evidence. There is a written monument to one of secular history's biggest disappointments. It is a copper scroll of Isaiah on display in Israel's Museum of the Dead Sea Scrolls. It shows us that the Bible is the most accurate of all books. There are no errors in our current Bible's version of Isaiah, despite the passing of more than 2000 years. Isaiah lived in about 750 B.C.

One can certainly ask, "Did Jesus and Paul preach exactly the same message?" The answer is no. Jesus, in the gospel accounts, doesn't say the same thing to everyone He talks to. He still doesn't. He has a way of speaking to each one of us about our deepest needs. It probably has to be experienced to be believed.

I guess that is really the essence of what believing the Bible is all about. One can't know the truth of it without God's help. Read what Paul wrote, "For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe" (1 Cor 1:21). The inerrancy problem existed before the New Testament was in book form. Paul wrote to the Corinthians about mankind's rejection of the spoken Word of God.

"For indeed Jews ask for signs, and Greeks search for wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the

called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men."

"For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong,

and the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are, that no man should boast before God. But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, that, just as it is written, "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord" (1 Cor 1:22-31).

Where does that leave us? I believe that the Bible's credibility is not in its text but in the reader's heart, and the contradictions are not in the pages of the Bible, but in the mind of man. "And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil". (John 3:19).

The Bible is a very unique book to a desperate soul.

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