

Bible - Inspiration & Authority

How can a book as old as the Bible be accurate when it comes to matters of history and science?

By Dr. Paul M. Elliott

The Bible is as accurate and reliable as its Author.

The Nature of the Book

If the Bible were merely a book written by fallible men, we would have good reason to doubt its accuracy and reliability. But God is the Author of all Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16, 2 Peter 1:20-21). God the Holy Spirit used human penmen to write down the words of Scripture, and He did not obscure their personalities in the writing. And in many cases the human writers gathered data and testimony (e.g., Joshua 10:13, 2 Samuel 1:18, 1 Kings 21:8-11, Luke 1:1-4, Acts 1:1-3). But the end result was that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God" — in the Greek, *theopneustos*, literally, "breathed out by God." The words of the Bible are the very words of God, the thoughts of God, the sure testimonies of God (Psalm 93:5).¹

The Nature of Its Author

The God who is the Author of all Scripture is also the Creator of all things (Jeremiah 51:19, John 1:3), including the laws that govern the operation of the universe (Jeremiah 51:15, Psalm 119:90-91). He is also the Author of, and providential Mover in, all of history (Isaiah 48:3, Ephesians 1:11, Colossians 1:16-17). God knows all things, and His wisdom and knowledge are infinitely greater than human wisdom and knowledge (Amos 4:13, Romans 11:33-34). God cannot lie (Titus 1:2). Therefore, the Scriptures that He has given, being a written account of His actions, His ordinances,

and the out-workings of His providence, cannot lie — and this infallibility encompasses truths of science, history, and geography as well as spiritual truth.

Even Some Reputed Conservatives Are Embracing "Selective Inerrancy"

Increasing numbers of theologians, even some reputed conservatives, are teaching that God "accommodated" Himself to the supposed ignorance of ancient man by giving in Scripture an account of the past that is not absolutely true in every detail.² Therefore, they say, the accounts of the Creation, the Flood, the Tower of Babel, as well as other historical events, scientific facts, and geographical details in the Bible, cannot be considered inerrant.

But if this theory of "accommodation" were true, it would be contrary to God's nature and attributes. If the Scriptures are not inerrant and trustworthy in all respects, God would not be inerrant and trustworthy in all respects; God would be a liar. Therefore He would not be God, and the Bible would not be the Word of God.

Such theories of "selective inerrancy" cut at the very heart of the Gospel. Jesus Himself referred directly to the creation account and the writings of Moses. He did not contradict their authority, but rather based His teaching on their authority. If those writings are not inerrant, God made flesh would be a liar. He who was not a reliable authority on matters of history would be no fit authority on faith or morals — and furthermore, He would be disqualified as the Savior of men, since salvation required a sinless sacrifice to atone for their sins.

Paul H. Seely, a vocal promoter of the "accommodation theory," asserts that

2 Timothy 3:16 contextually limits the authority of Scripture to matters of faith and morals. When it says that Scripture is authoritative for "correction," it contextually is referring to matters of faith and morals, not the correction of geology, astronomy, or any other science....The absolute inerrancy of Scripture

(inerrant in science as well as in faith and morals) is not a necessary doctrine of Scripture. It cannot be proven from Scripture.³

Some time ago I wrote the following commenting on this statement:

The *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* defines science as "the observation, identification, description, experimental investigation, and theoretical explanation of phenomena." If the Bible is not "inerrant in science" — things empirically observed and investigated — then on what basis are we to trust the accounts of the plagues in Egypt, the parting of the Red Sea and the Jordan River, the presence of God's *shekinah* glory above the mercy seat, God's provision of manna for Israel in the wilderness, the miracles performed by Jesus and the apostles, the Transfiguration, or the Resurrection? Where does one draw lines in the pages of Scripture between the errant and the inerrant, and by whose authority?⁴

We Cannot Re-Make God and the Bible in Our Own Image

The fact is, fallible man has no such authority. "For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?" (Romans 11:34). But today, increasing numbers of people are falling into the trap of creating a "designer religion" where men re-make God and the Bible in their own image.

People do this at the peril of their souls. We must always remember that the Bible is the Word of the holy and infallible God, not the mere word of man, and we are neither to add anything to it nor take anything from it (Deuteronomy 4:2, 12:32; Joshua 1:7; Proverbs 30:6; Revelation 22:18-19). Truly we can — indeed, we must — say with the Psalmist:

The word of the Lord is right,
And all His work is done in truth.

He loves righteousness and justice;
The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord.
By the word of the Lord the heavens were made,
And all the host of them by the breath of His mouth.
He gathers the waters of the sea together as a heap;
He lays up the deep in storehouses.
Let all the earth fear the Lord;
Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him.
For He spoke, and it was done;
He commanded, and it stood fast.
The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to nothing;
He makes the plans of the peoples of no effect.
The counsel of the Lord stands forever,
The plans of His heart to all generations.
Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord,
The people He has chosen as His own inheritance.
Psalm 33:4-12

References:

1. For further discussion of the divine authorship of Scripture, see **[How Can the Bible be the Word of God When Human Beings Wrote It?](#)** on this website.
2. For examples of this kind of false teaching, see the following articles in *Westminster Theological Journal*, the magazine of Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, a reputedly conservative institution: Paul H. Seely, "The Firmament and the Water Above," Vol. 53, No. 2, Fall 1991, 227-240 and Volume 54, No. 1, Spring 1992, 31-46; Seely, "The Geographical Meaning of 'Earth' and 'Seas' in Genesis 1:10," Vol. 59, 213-255; Seely, "The Date of the Tower of Babel and Some Theological Implications," Vol. 63, No. 1, Spring 2001, 15-38; Seely, "Noah's Flood: Its Date, Extent, and Divine Accommodation," Vol. 66, Fall 2004, page 301; and

Peter Enns, "Apostolic Hermeneutics and an Evangelical Doctrine of Scripture: Moving Beyond a Modernist Impasse," Vol. 65, No. 2, Fall 2003, 263-288.

3. Paul H. Seely, "Re: Noah's Flood" on the Yahoo® Orthodox Presbyterian Church discussion forum, <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/presbyterians-opc/message/28105>

4. Paul M. Elliott, *Christianity and Neo-Liberalism* (Trinity Foundation, 2004), page 277. This book includes refutations of both Seely and Enns as well as a broader discussion of "designer" redefinitions of the doctrine of inerrancy, and is available in our online [Resource Store](#).

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