



Apologetics 101

Week 5: Reliability of Scripture

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Class Objectives

After completing this class, you will understand:

- various views on the inspiration of Scripture
- various types of translations of Scripture
- basic facts of the New Testament and its transmission
- the historical case for the reliability of the New Testament (NT) (primary focus of class)
- the historical case for the reliability of the Old Testament (OT)
- the definition of biblical inerrancy



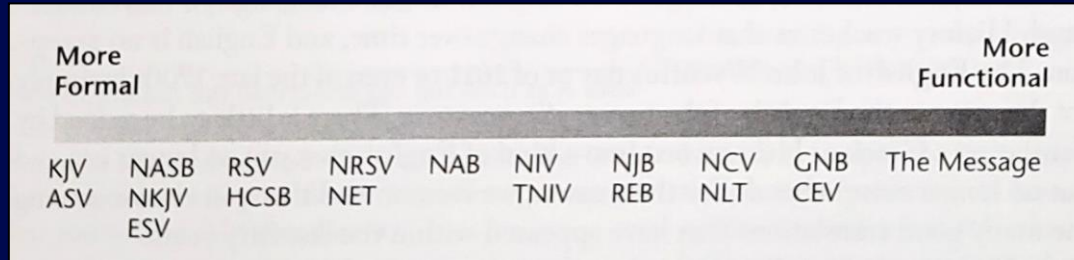
Views of Biblical Inspiration

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” -2 Tim. 3:16

5 Views of Inspiration

- **Natural Intuition** – those who wrote were naturally gifted with insight into spiritual matters. They had a special aptitude regarding spiritual things, and no special involvement of God is needed.
- **Special Illumination** – Inspiration is a divine intensification and exaltation of religious perceptions common to believers. The H.S. simply enhanced their giftings.
- **Divine Dictation** – Inspiration is the infallible superintendence of mechanical reproduction of divine words as the Holy Spirit dictated them to human authors.
- **Dynamic Guidance** – the Holy Spirit guided the authors on all spiritual matters recorded to ensure accuracy, but on any non-essential matters the authors were given liberty.
- **Verbal Plenary** – Inspiration is the combination of the writers’ natural human expression and the HS’s special initiation and superintendence of their writings. The HS oversaw even their selection of words, to ensure its accuracy and completeness.

Translation Theories



Formal Equivalence

- Literal
- Word-for-word, Keeps historical distance
- EXAMPLES: KJV, NASB, NKJV, RSV, NRSV, NASU

Functional Equivalence or Dynamic Equivalence

- Phrase-for-Phrase, Keeps historical distance
- Translates into precise equivalents
- Updates language, grammar, and style
- EXAMPLES: NIV, NAB, GNB, NLT, JB, NLB

Free

- Translates ideas
- EXAMPLES: Message Bible, Living Bible, Phillips



Reliability of the NT

What is the NT?

- The NT is a collection of 27 individual documents, or “books”
 - *“It’s important to understand that originally there wasn’t any such book called the “New Testament.” There were just these separate documents handed down from the first century, things like the Gospel of Luke, the Gospel of John, the Acts of the Apostles, Paul’s letter to the church in Corinth, Greece, and so on.”¹ -Craig*
- These were documents written by various authors (Paul, Luke, John, Peter, etc.) in various locations (Rome, Ephesus, Island of Patmos, etc.), during the first century that circulated across the ancient world.

1. William Lane Craig, *On Guard* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2010), 185.



Reliability of the NT

SO THEN, How did we get the NT?

- Jesus lives from ~4 BC to 30 – 36 AD (his ministry starts around 28-29 AD)
- the accounts of his life and ministry are passed on as oral traditions (some are written down, not yet in the form of the books of the NT)
- 27 books of NT are written ~50 – 100 AD
 - Paul writes his letters from the 50's to mid-60's
 - four canonical Gospels are written from the 60's – 90's
- NT canon is *recognized* by the church in the late 4th century based on 3 criteria:¹
 - **Apostolicity**: written early, connected to the apostles or those closely associated with Jesus
 - **Orthodoxy**: conformed to first century oral gospel traditions and cohered together
 - **Catholicity**: widely accepted and proved useful among many of the earliest churches

1. William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 178-180.



Reliability of the NT

How do we investigate the reliability of the NT? [Video: Is the NT Reliable - Sean McDowell - \(4.5\) min](#)

- Without presupposing the NT is divinely inspired, we can approach it the same way historians approach any other document of ancient history by employing 3 tests:
 - 1. Bibliographic Test:** Has the text been accurately transmitted over time? Has it been corrupted, either intentionally or accidentally?
 - 2. Internal Evidence Test:** What evidence and information can be derived from the document itself pertaining to its reliability?
 - 3. External Evidence Test:** What evidence and information can be found outside of the document to corroborate it?



Reliability of the NT

The Bibliographic Test

How can we know the text we have today is the same as what was written in the original copies (*autographs*)?

3 primary areas of evidence:¹

1. **Number of Greek Manuscripts:** how many manuscripts in the original Greek language are available to investigate?
2. **Dating of the Manuscripts:** how large of a time gap is there between the earliest manuscripts and when the original autographs would have been written?
3. **Textual Accuracy of the Manuscript Copies:** Are there many variants between the manuscript copies, and how significant are they?

In other words: the more manuscripts we have to compare, the smaller the time gap between those manuscripts and the original writings, and the less textual variants between the manuscripts, ***the more confident we can be that we can reconstruct the text of the original writings!***

1. Joseph Holden, "Were the New Testament Manuscripts Copied Accurately?," calvarychapel.com, last modified July 11, 2019. <https://calvarychapel.com/posts/were-the-new-testament-manuscripts-copied-accurately>.



Reliability of the NT

Bibliographic Test

1. Number of Greek Manuscripts

- “the average classical Greek writer has less than 20 copies of his work still in existence”¹
-Dan Wallace
- consider some classic works of antiquity:²
 - Homer’s *Iliad*: 1800+ (comes closest to NT)
 - Plato’s *Tetralogies*: 210
- There are **more than 5,800 surviving manuscripts** of the NT in the original Greek language! Over 23,000 if you count fragments!!

1. Daniel B. Wallace and Bart D. Ehrman. “Can We Trust the Text of the NT?” (video of debate, Southern Methodist University, October 1, 2011), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WRHjZCKRlu4>.

2. Josh McDowell and Clay Jones, “The Bibliographic Test,” August 13, 2014. <https://www.josh.org/wp-content/uploads/Bibliographical-Test-Update-08.13.14.pdf>.



Reliability of the NT

Bibliographic Test

2. Dating of the Manuscripts

- For most works of antiquity, *the time gap between the earliest manuscripts and the original writings is hundreds of years*
- consider some classic works of antiquity:¹ (again, unquestioned in their authenticity)
 - Homer's *Iliad*: 400 years
 - Plato's *Tetralogies*: 1,300 years
- The earliest manuscript of the NT *dates to less than 50 years of the original writing!*
 - The earliest NT manuscript is the *John Ryland fragment* (P52). This is a small portion of John found in Egypt which dates to around AD 125. (*Gospel of John was written AD 85-95*)
 - Many other manuscripts date to the 2nd through 4th centuries
 - The earliest *complete manuscript* of the NT is *Codex Sinaiticus*, written between AD 330-350

1. McDowell and Jones, "The Bibliographic Test," <https://www.josh.org/wp-content/uploads/Bibliographical-Test-Update-08.13.14.pdf>.



Reliability of the NT

Bibliographic Test

3. Textual Accuracy of the Manuscripts

- there are about 138,000 Greek words in the NT, and of these, only about 1,400 are uncertain (about 1%). The variants accounting for this 1% are trivial and do not affect any essential theology or doctrine¹
- *“Textual critics of almost all theological stripes agree that we can reconstruct somewhere upwards of 97 percent of the New Testament text beyond a shadow of reasonable doubt. And it is certainly the case that no Christian belief or doctrine depends solely on a textually disputed passage. All these factors set the New Testament books off from every other known work from the ancient world in terms of our ability to have confidence that we know what the original authors wrote.”²*
–Douglas Groothuis

1. William Lane Craig, “William Lane Craig on Bart Ehrman (1 of 6),” April 26, 2010, <https://youtu.be/zANI-OcPnfl>.

2. Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2011), 469.



Reliability of the NT

Bibliographic Test

Conclusion of Bibliographic Test

- *“The New Testament is different from all other ancient literature in that it is by far the best-attested book in antiquity.” -Kostenberger, et. al.*
- *The evidence for our New Testament writings is ever so much greater than the evidence for many writings of classical authors, the authenticity of which no one dreams of questioning . . . If the New Testament had been a collection of secular writings, their authenticity would generally be regarded as beyond all doubt.” -F. F. Bruce*
- *“If I’m going to be skeptical of the NT, and apply that skepticism to other ancient Greco-Roman literature. . . We immediately go back into the dark ages. We’ve eclipsed all knowledge within the last 500 years.” -Dan Wallace*



Reliability of the NT

Internal Evidence Test

What can be learned from within the NT itself? What does it claim, or attest to? What information does it provide?

5 main points:

1. The authors claim to be telling of true events
2. The authors were in an excellent position to accurately report the accounts of Jesus
3. The authors wrote their accounts down early, shortly after the events occurred
4. The authors were willing to be persecuted and martyred for their testimonies
5. The NT (and OT) exemplifies unity and consistency, a high ethical standard, and fulfilled prophecies

[Video - Are the Gospel Narratives Legendary or Historically Reliable? – Craig \(5 min\)](#)



Reliability of the NT

Internal Evidence Test

1. The authors claim to be telling of true events¹

- *“Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, **that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.**” –Luk 1:1-4 ESV*
- *“For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, **but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.**” –2 Pet 1:16 ESV*

1. Sean McDowell, “Is the New Testament Reliable? Sean McDowell.org” (video) March 1st, 2018, https://youtu.be/bs4s2i_bWEw.



Reliability of the NT

Internal Evidence Test

2. The authors were in an excellent position to accurately report the accounts of Jesus

- **First-hand eyewitness testimony**

- As three of the twelve disciples, Matthew, John, and Peter walked with Jesus and *were first-hand eyewitnesses to his ministry* (Luk 6:13-16; 1 Joh 1-4; 2 Pet 1:16-18; Act 10:36-43)
- Paul was also a first-hand eyewitness to the resurrected Jesus per his encounter with him on the Road to Damascus (Act 9:3-5, 26:13-18; 1 Cor 15:8)

- **Second-hand testimony**

- Mark, who was a disciple and interpreter of Peter the apostle, drew on Peter to write his gospel, and *was therefore a second-hand witness*
- Additionally, Luke, who was an associate of Paul, compiled accounts from first-hand eyewitnesses of Jesus to write his gospel, and was therefore also a second-hand witness (Luk 1:1-4)



Reliability of the NT

Internal Evidence Test

3. The authors wrote their accounts down early, shortly after the events occurred¹

- When assessing the reliability of historical documents, it is irrelevant how much time has passed between when the events occurred and the present day. Rather, *what is important, is how much time has passed between when the events occurred, and when the earliest accounts of them were written down! The question then, is how close the sources for Jesus' life are to the time he lived.*
- Here the gospels stand out in stark contrast to other Greek and Roman works of their time
 - *“The sources for Greek and Roman history are usually biased, and usually removed one or two generations, or even centuries from the events that they record, and yet Greco-Roman historians reconstruct with confidence the course of Greek and Roman history.” –William Lane Craig*
 - *The gospels were all written down and circulated within the first generation after the events while the eyewitnesses were still alive who could have falsified erroneous accounts.* This served as a significant restraint to prevent embellishments of the oral traditions, or accounts of Christ. *There simply was not enough time for legendary influences to expunge the hard core of historical facts*
- the passage of oral traditions was also a highly developed skill in this time and culture (memorization)

1. William Lane Craig, “Are the Gospel Narratives Legendary or Historically Reliable?” (video) April 24th, 2011, https://youtu.be/RmbA_b-xl44.



Reliability of the NT

Internal Evidence Test

4. The authors were willing to be persecuted and martyred for their testimonies

- What did the apostles have to gain by evangelizing and perpetuating knowingly false testimonies *to the point of intense physical torture and persecution?*
 - Scripture tells that James was put to death by the sword by King Herod (Acts 12:1-2)
 - Additionally, church tradition holds that Paul was beheaded by Emperor Nero in Rome (*why would Paul, an educated and zealous Jew who had power and standing give these things up to join the Christian movement which was facing severe hostility and persecution?*), Peter **was** crucified upside-down in Rome, Matthew died by the sword in Ethiopia, Andrew was crucified in Greece, and Thomas was stabbed with a spear in India
- If the authors were lying, *“how can we account for the origin and rapid spread of Christianity across the face of the ancient world? How did the same disciples—who could not pray one hour for their Lord before his crucifixion and who scattered after his capture—be the same evangelists who braved persecution and martyrdom for a resurrected Jesus?”*¹



Reliability of the NT

Internal Evidence Test

5. The NT (and OT) exemplifies unity and consistency, a high ethical standard, & fulfilled prophecies

- **Unity and Consistency:** considering its diversity of authorship (66 books, 40 authors, 1600 years, 3 languages, 3 continents) also literary genres, circumstances, and walks of life
- **Ethical Standard:** surpasses what would be expected from ordinary men & women
- **Fulfilled Prophecies:** prophetic accuracy speaks of its cohesiveness and truthfulness (Isa 7:14)
 - Jesus quoted from at least 15 OT books: “It is written” (Luk 4:4) ‘*gegraptai*’ – it stands written
 - Jesus claimed divine authority for his own teachings (Mat 24:35)
 - 351 total OT prophecies fulfilled in Jesus Christ **1**

“The written Word, then, is the authority of God for settling all disputes of doctrine or practice. It is God’s Word in man’s words; it is divine truth in human terms.” -Norman Geisler



Reliability of the NT

External Evidence Test

What evidence can be found **outside the Bible** to corroborate what it attests to? (e.g. non-biblical writings, archaeology, and other sources)

1. Non-Biblical Writings providing independent multiple attestation confirming accounts of Christ from the NT

- **Josephus** – *Antiquities of the Jews* speaks of Jesus as one who did incredible deeds, was a teacher, who gained a following among Jews and Greeks, and who was crucified by Pilate. It also speaks of the tribe of Christians named after him who had not died out to that day.
- **Tacitus** – *Annals 15.44* speaks of Nero's torture of a group of people called Christians, Pontius Pilate's execution of Christ, and the breaking out of the superstition of the Christian movement through Judea and Rome
- **Pliny the Younger** – *Epistles 10.96-97* speaks of the worship and assembly of Christians.



Reliability of the NT

External Evidence Test

2. Archaeology and other evidences:

- The NT is corroborated by archaeology. Below is a list compiled by James Warner Wallace of Cold Case Christianity:

The Gospels and Writings Have Been Verified By Archeology

1. The Census - by the Quirinius Inscription
2. Lysanias - by the Damascus Inscription
3. "The Pavement" - by the Tower of Antonia
4. Pontius Pilate - by the Pontus Pilate Rock
5. Crucifixion - by remains of Yohanan Ben Ha'galgol
6. The Iconium - by the William Ramsay monument
7. "Politarch" - by Thessalonican Inscriptions
8. Sergius Paulus - by the Sergius Paulus Inscription
9. Gallio - by the Delphi Inscriptions

The Gospel of Luke Includes True Accounts of Roman Culture

1. A correct description of ways to gain Roman citizenship
2. An accurate explanation of provincial penal procedure
3. A true depiction of invoking one's roman citizenship
4. A true description of being in Roman custody



Reliability of the NT

External Evidence Test

3. Other External Evidences:

- **Transforming Power:** millions of lives changed to date (Rom.12:2, 10:17)
- **Influence on Society:** bestseller of all time (5B), printed in 1,200 languages, read by more people than any other book, most oft-quoted book.
- **Historical Accuracy:** the fact that the bible has never been proven inaccurate with its recollection of history provides great evidence to its validity. A book of made up 'fairy tales' would unlikely get history right.
- **Survivability:** how many other thousand-year-old writings have survived?? In fact, there are thousands of manuscript copies, more than any 10 pieces of classical literature combined. **In spite of removal efforts, like in 303 AD when Diocletian ordered that every copy of this sacred text be destroyed.**



Reliability of the OT

[Video: Is the OT Reliable - Sean McDowell - \(4\) min¹](#)

What evidence do we have that supports the reliability of the OT?

Given that the OT spans a greater amount of time than the NT, and that it takes place much further back in history than the NT, it is more difficult to assess it historically.

Nonetheless, we have good reasons to trust in its reliability!

3 key points:²

- 1. Corroborated by external archaeological evidence**
- 2. Was copied and transmitted with great care and precision**
- 3. Is treated as historical by the New Testament**

1. Sean McDowell, "Is The Old Testament Reliable? 3 Solid Evidences. SeanMcDowell.org," February 23, 2018, <https://youtu.be/LCwrXcC52Co>.

2. Ibid.



Reliability of the OT

1. Corroborated by external archaeological evidence

- though not every person or matter in the OT has been directly confirmed by external sources (e.g. patriarchs such as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, or King Darius (Babylon)), *much of the OT does find external archaeological support*¹
- Over the last two centuries, many people mentioned in the OT who initially found no external confirmation *began to turn up in the archaeological record*: King David (Israel), King Sargon II (Assyria), King Belshazzar (Babylon), and many others²
- *“In almost every case, when the facts are fully known, they have repeatedly provided an almost uncanny confirmation of the accuracy of the history of the Old Testament.”*³ -Walter C Kaiser Jr.
- *“I’ve been accused of teaching the verbal, plenary inspiration of the scripture... All I have ever said is that in all of my archaeological investigation I have never found one artifact of antiquity that contradicts the statement of the Word of God.”* -Nelson Glueck (Archaeologist)

1. Richard E. Averbeck, “The Reliability of the Old Testament,” The Gospel Coalition, accessed March, 2021, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-reliability-of-the-old-testament/>.

2. Steven B. Cowan and Terry L. Wilder, *In Defense of the Bible: A Comprehensive Apologetic for the Authority of Scripture* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2013), 220-221.

3. Ibid.

Reliability of the OT

1. Corroborated by external archaeological evidence

- **Just one example:** prior to 1993-1994 we had no external confirmation for King David's existence. Consequently, many scholars postulated he was merely created as priestly propaganda by the Jews in Babylonian captivity as a heroic historical figure to boost their national respectability¹
- In 1993-1994, at the site Dan in northern Israel, the Tel Dan Stele was discovered which makes a reference to the "House of David". This stone dates to around 841 BC and makes reference to 8 other biblical kings.



1. Steven B. Cowan and Terry L. Wilder, *In Defense of the Bible: A Comprehensive Apologetic for the Authority of Scripture* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2013), 211.



Reliability of the OT

2. Was copied and transmitted with great care and precision

- the Jewish people took great care when copying OT manuscripts from generation to generation¹
 - Scribes were highly trained
 - would sit alone in a room with a specific lighting
 - had a specific medium (animal skin parchment or papyrus) and a special pen
 - could only write one letter at a time rather than memorizing lines
 - upon completion a separate person would check the copy line by line, and if there were 3 or more errors in an entire book, the entire manuscript was discarded!

1. Sean McDowell, "Is The Old Testament Reliable? 3 Solid Evidences. SeanMcDowell.org," February 23, 2018, <https://youtu.be/LCwrXcC52Co>.



Reliability of the OT

2. Was copied and transmitted with great care and precision

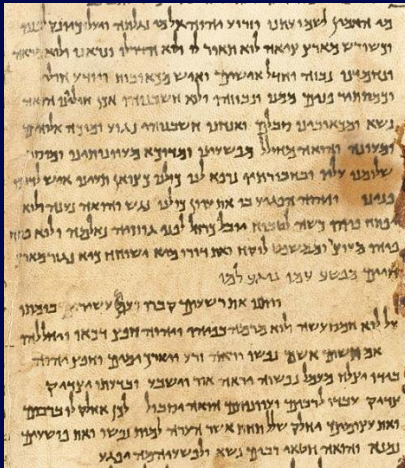
- The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls demonstrates the accuracy of these scribes
 - these were ancient manuscripts discovered in the 1940's-1950's in eleven caves near Qumran, on the northwestern shores of the Dead Sea
 - within these scrolls was the Great Isaiah Scroll which dates to around 150-100 BC. This is 1,000 years before the earliest manuscripts we previously had. *When comparing those to the Great Isaiah Scroll, we find they are incredibly accurate, even after 1,000 years!*
 - *“As for the OT text itself, the Dead Sea Scrolls (ca 150 b.c.- a.d. 70) provide good evidence of a carefully transmitted core-text tradition through almost a thousand years down to the Masoretic scribes (ca eighth-tenth centuries a.d.) Thus, the basic text of OT Scripture can be established as having been soundly transmitted...”¹ –Kenneth Kitchen*

1. Kenneth A. Kitchen, “A Closer Look: The Historical Reliability of the Old Testament,” February 22, 2012, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2012/february/closer-look-historical-reliability-of-old-testament.html>.

Reliability of the OT

2. Was copied and transmitted with great care and precision

- What is chilling (but expected) about this discovery, is that with the Great Isaiah Scroll *we find written prophecies of Christ that date to before he was even born!*



Isaiah 53

Website of The Israel Museum, Jerusalem
Photography by Ardon Bar Hama

Isaiah 53 Prophecy	Historical Fulfillment
Would not be widely believed	John 1:10-12
Would not have the look of Majesty	Luke 2:7
Would be despised and suffer	Mt 26:67-68; 27:39-43
Concerned for others' health/die for our sins	Mt 8:17; 1 Peter 2:24
Pain/punishment would be for us	Mt 28:20; Rom. 4:25
Would not respond to charges	Mt 26:63
Oppressed and killed	Mt 26:65-68
With criminals during life/death	Mt 27:38, 57-60
Buried in a rich man's tomb	Mt 27:57-61
Crushed, suffer/die, yet live	Luke 23:44-48, 24:36-44
Would bear our sins	1 Peter 2:24
Have a portion with the great	Phil. 2:8-11

Image from Genesis Apologetics, "The Reliability of the Bible," June 5, 2019,
https://youtu.be/qAH_-Du2428?t=319



Reliability of the OT

3. Is treated as historical by the New Testament¹

- Jesus considered the OT as inspired by God and authoritative
 - *“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.” -Mat 5:17-18 ESV*
 - Jesus affirmed Moses as the final authority behind the Torah, as well as the authority of the Major and Minor Prophets (Mar 7:10; 12:26; Luk 5:14; 16:29-31; 24:27,44; Joh 5:45-47;7:19,23)²
- The other NT authors considered the OT as inspired by God and authoritative
 - *“For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” -2 Pet 1:21 ESV*
 - apostles appealed to fulfilled prophecy of OT (Act 2:22-36)
 - Paul appealed to fulfilled prophecy of OT (Act 28:23)

1. Sean McDowell, “Is The Old Testament Reliable? 3 Solid Evidences. SeanMcDowell.org,” February 23, 2018, <https://youtu.be/LCwrXcC52Co>.

2. Josh McDowell and Sean McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict: Life Changing Truth for a Skeptical World* (Nashville, TN: Harper Collins, 2017), 122.



Biblical Inerrancy

INERRANCY DEFINED: refers to the actual text of the bible, the view that holds that the original manuscripts of Scripture as recorded are without error.¹

- Inerrancy recognizes apparent contradictions or inconsistencies in the biblical text not as errors but as difficulties that can be resolved when all the relevant data are known. (Horton, 103)
- If God breathed the words of Scripture, and God cannot lie, the Scripture **MUST** be entirely true.
- Inerrancy recognizes the use of figurative language.
- Inerrancy understands that NT quotations of OT statements may be paraphrases.
- Inerrancy considers the cultural and historical methods of reporting such things as genealogies, measurements, etc.
- The *Chicago Statement*, adopted by almost 300 evangelical scholars in 1978, affirms the inerrancy of the bible.



**Thanks for Coming!!!
See You Next Week!!!**