



**WORLDVIEW MADE PRACTICAL**  
**Volume 21 Number 10**  
**March 11, 2026**

## **What Do We Mean By Biblical Inerrancy? Part 2**

By Tal Davis

The authority of the Bible for doctrine and ethics has been the cornerstone of the Jewish (Hebrew Scriptures) and Christian (Old and New Testaments) faiths since before the earliest centuries of the First Millennium A.D. The historical events and spiritual truths documented in the 66 canonical books of Bible are essential for maintaining the authenticity of genuine Christian orthodoxy. The question, of course, that is often posed by skeptics and non-Christian religionists is what is the basis for our belief in the Bible's authority. The answer is that we believe that its authors were specially inspired by God's Spirit and therefore were without error in what they wrote down.

In this two part series, we are examining the meaning of biblical Inerrancy. To do so we are analyzing the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy's (ICBI) 1978 statement of belief called *The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy* (CSBI). The statement was signed by nearly 300 prominent evangelical scholars "to defend the position of Biblical Inerrancy against a trend toward liberal conceptions of Scripture." The statement consists of nineteen Articles of Affirmations and Denials explaining what Biblical Inerrancy both is and is not.

In Part 1 we looked ed at Articles I - IX (to read Part 1 go here: <https://www.marketfaith.org/2026/02/what-do-we-mean-by-biblical-inerrancy-part-1-tal-davis/>). In this Part 2, we continue and discuss Articles X - XIX.

### **Article X**

WE AFFIRM that inspiration, strictly speaking, applies only to the autographic text of Scripture, which in the providence of God can be ascertained from available manuscripts with great accuracy. We further affirm that copies and translations of Scripture are the Word of God to the extent that they faithfully represent the original.

WE DENY that any essential element of the Christian faith is affected by the absence of the autographs. We further deny that this absence renders the assertion of biblical inerrancy invalid or irrelevant.

This article makes an important point. When Bible scholars talk about special divine inspiration, they are only technically talking about what was specifically written down by the actual authors themselves. That is to say, what Moses himself wrote on the papyrus, or what Luke himself wrote on the scrolls. Those are called the original autographs. However, none of these are still extant, but, as the article states, the available ancient manuscript copies now in existence are amazingly ac-

curate reproductions of the originals. Thus, those accurate copies and translations can be relied upon to have faithfully transmitted the Word of God as revealed through the original authors to us today.

So, the article asserts, that just because we do not have the original manuscripts, no essential doctrine or truth of Christianity is missing, nor is the infallible and unique authority of the Scriptures diminished.

It is the ongoing work of textual Bible scholars to search for the earliest and best manuscripts in the original languages that are deemed true to the original manuscripts in order to provide the true Word of God. This is called Lower Biblical Criticism and, unlike Higher Criticism (see Article III), it is not based on subjective or philosophical perspectives. In the last hundred years great strides in archaeology (egs: the Dead Sea Scrolls; the Ryland's Library Papyrus) have been made so that we can be very confident we have the real Bible.

At this point we should probably interject one important principle. There is no such thing as an inerrant translation. Translations may change over time as languages change. They should always be based on the best available ancient manuscripts and done by teams of the most qualified scholars of the ancient languages. This has been an especially divisive issue among American evangelical Christians for over a century. A large portion of American fundamentalists are committed to the principle that the King James Version (KJV - 1611) is the only legitimate translation of the Bible in English. They argue that all later versions, especially those done in the 20th century, were based on distorted texts that intentionally removed important passages from the New Testament. Actually, most modern translations used by evangelicals are based on far better and older ancient manuscripts than were those used by the translators of the KJV. Newer reliable ones include: The New American Standard Bible; The New International Version; The Christian Standard Bible; The English Standard Version; and the Contemporary English Version.

### **Article XI**

WE AFFIRM that Scripture, having been given by divine inspiration, is infallible, so that, far from misleading us, it is true and reliable in all the matters it addresses.

WE DENY that it is possible for the Bible to be at the same time infallible and errant in its assertions. Infallibility and inerrancy may be distinguished, but not separated.

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This article simply affirms that since the Bible's authors were divinely inspired by God the Holy Spirit, that the Scripture they wrote and the faithful transmission of it we now possess is infallible. Infallible means that it is incapable, when accurately interpreted and translated, of leading us astray in any area of theology or ethics. So it is true in everything it addresses. Note, it does not address everything.

The article denies, as some assert, that the Bible can be infallible in some areas of belief and doctrine yet errant in other facts of history, geography, and science. That position is common even among some evangelicals. However, in recent decades, archaeology and advances in science have demonstrated the Bible's reliability in those areas.

### Article XII

WE AFFIRM that Scripture in its entirety is inerrant, being free from all falsehood, fraud, or deceit.

WE DENY that biblical infallibility and inerrancy are limited to spiritual, religious, or redemptive themes, exclusive of assertions in the fields of history and science. We further deny that scientific hypotheses about earth history may properly be used to overturn the teaching of Scripture on creation and the flood.

This article simply affirms that the whole Bible is without error and does not anywhere lead anyone to a false conclusion about anything.

This reiterates what was said in Article XI. The article denies that the Bible is only inerrant in matters of religious natures but is irrelevant as far as issues of history and science. As we indicated, recent discoveries in archaeology have buttressed biblical historical accounts in both the Old and New Testaments. Archaeological discoveries in the Middle East have demonstrated that many biblical persons, events and locations once regarded as legendary or fictional have been shown to be historically factual. The article also states that scientific hypotheses should not be used to deny the Bible's teaching on creation or the flood. That should not be taken to mean that Christians who affirm inerrancy cannot disagree on such topics as the age of the earth or the universe. Many of the scholars who signed the CSBI had divergent views on those topics.

### Article XIII

WE AFFIRM the propriety of using inerrancy as a theological term with reference to the complete truthfulness of Scripture. WE DENY that it is proper to evaluate Scripture according to standards of truth and error that are alien to its usage or purpose. We further deny that inerrancy is negated by biblical phenomena such as a lack of modern technical precision, irregularities of grammar or spelling, observa-

tional descriptions of nature, the reporting of falsehoods, the use of hyperbole and round numbers, the topical arrangement of material, variant selections of material in parallel accounts, or the use of free citations.

This article positively affirms using "inerrant" as a legitimate theological term when discussing the totality of the Bible's truth claims.

It does, however, assert that it is illegitimate to judge the Bible in ways that "are alien to its usage or purpose." Furthermore, it says that just because the Bible may use non-modern technical terms, unusual grammar or spelling, non-scientific descriptions of nature, have varying details of events, or use imprecise quotes, etc., that it is therefore not inerrant. Those are reflections of the human element in the divine-human nature of Scripture.

### Article XIV

WE AFFIRM the unity and internal consistency of Scripture.

WE DENY that alleged errors and discrepancies that have not yet been resolved vitiate the truth claims of the Bible.

This article simply states that the whole Bible, though diverse in its authors, languages, styles, historical backgrounds, etc. is, nonetheless, unified in its basic worldview and understanding of the nature of God and of man.

It also contends that those few supposed remaining discrepancies that have not yet been resolved by biblical scholars (and there are far fewer than there used to be) do not diminish the overall truth of the Scriptures.

### Article XV

WE AFFIRM that the doctrine of inerrancy is grounded in the teaching of the Bible about inspiration.

WE DENY that Jesus' teaching about Scripture may be dismissed by appeals to accommodation or to any natural limitation of His humanity.

This article states that inerrancy finds its basis inside the Bible's own teaching about divine inspiration. In many verses of both the Old and New Testaments, Scripture is testified to as being given by the movement of the Word of God and the Spirit of God on prophets and writers.

The article denies that Jesus' teaching on Scripture can be discounted because He was just accommodating His audience's ignorance, or because of His own human limitations.

### Article XVI

WE AFFIRM that the doctrine of inerrancy has been integral to the Church's faith throughout its history.

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WE DENY that inerrancy is a doctrine invented by scholastic Protestantism, or is a reactionary position postulated in response to negative higher criticism.

This article states that inerrancy has always been the belief of the universal Christian Church (not any particular institutional or ecclesiastical body) from the earliest times. This is evident in the writings of the early church fathers who consistently quoted the Old Testament books and also the New Testament Gospels and epistles as authoritative.

The article denies inerrancy was invented by post-Reformation scholastic Protestantism just to counter Roman Catholic authorities, which included the extra-canonical Apocrypha and church tradition. It also was not just as a reaction to the growth of Higher Criticism in the 18th and 19th centuries (see Article III).

### Article XVII

WE AFFIRM that the Holy Spirit bears witness to the Scriptures, assuring believers of the truthfulness of God's written Word. WE DENY that this witness of the Holy Spirit operates in isolation from or against Scripture.

This article states that the Bible is made real to believers by the illumination of the Holy Spirit in their minds and spirits. He is the same Spirit who inspired the authors to begin with. When Christians read the Scriptures with genuine openness to the Spirit's leading He will make its teachings clear and true to them. This is a supernatural event that the natural or unsaved person cannot really comprehend. They may read the Bible but its personal meaning will not sink in without the Spirit's illumination.

This spiritual illumination does not really happen apart from the Scriptures. Therefore anyone who claims God speaks to them apart from the Bible is suspect. Also the Holy Spirit will never tell someone to believe, do, or prophecy something that is contrary to Scripture.

### Article XVIII

WE AFFIRM that the text of Scripture is to

be interpreted by grammatico-historical exegesis, taking account of its literary forms and devices, and that Scripture is to interpret Scripture.

WE DENY the legitimacy of any treatment of the text or quest for sources lying behind it that leads to relativizing, dehistoricizing, or discounting its teaching, or rejecting its claims to authorship.

This is an especially important principle for studying the Bible. One that many people do not understand. The Bible should be interpreted using a systematic approach called grammatico-historical exegesis. Exegesis means to "draw-out" the meaning. That system seeks to find as closely and objectively as possible exactly what the author of the text actually meant when he wrote it, which is not always simple. To do that we need to investigate the language (Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek), the sentence syntax he used, and the historical background in which he wrote. Frankly, most of us are ill-equipped to undertake that task. That is why we usually need to employ Bible commentaries, dictionaries, atlases, study guides, etc. written by persons trained in biblical research.

In doing so, we need to make sure they come from credible conservative sources and publishers. That is why the article denies "the legitimacy of any treatment of the

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text or quest for sources lying behind it that leads to relativizing, dehistoricizing, or discounting its teaching, or rejecting its claims to authorship."

### **Article XIX**

WE AFFIRM that a confession of the full authority, infallibility, and inerrancy of Scripture is vital to a sound understanding of the whole of the Christian faith. We further affirm that such confession should lead to increasing conformity to the image of Christ. WE DENY that such confession is necessary for salvation. However, we further deny that inerrancy can be rejected without grave consequences, both to the individual and to the Church.

This final article asserts that the inerrancy of Scripture is a crucial aspect of the whole Christian life. Believing in the full inerrant authority and reliability of the Bible is a key to growth in the knowledge of, and conformity to, the image of Christ.

Further, it says that, though it is not necessarily true that one must believe in inerrancy for salvation, it is a serious mistake not to do so. It will hinder one's spiritual growth and dependence on the Bible for truth. Furthermore, when church members deny the full authority of God's Word, the church often suffers as it loses its grounding in scriptural doctrine and purpose. History has shown that when churches and denominations stray from biblical authority, they drift away from its principles of evangelism, missions, and ethical teachings.

### **Conclusion**

This concludes our study of the meaning of Biblical Inerrancy from *The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy*. I hope it has enlightened you a bit as to the significance of this principle for Christian living and church history.