JESUS AND INERRANCY

By

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THESIS ABSTRACT

The thesis is an exegetical study of four New Testament passages that are important because of the light they shed on Jesus' understanding of the nature of the Old Testament. The passages are John 10:35; 17:17; Matthew 22:31-32; 5:18. These passages are examined with regard to their significance to the modern inerrancy debate among conservative biblical scholars and theologians.

In chapter one, the writer discusses briefly some background information that is important to the problem of the nature of the Bible and outlines the primary inerrancy positions taken by current scholars. Chapters two through five constitute the exegetical portion of the study. Chapter six is a summary of the conclusions of each of the exegetical chapters and a brief discussion of how the conclusion of the thesis relates to the larger problem of inerrancy.

The position defended in this work is that there is much evidence that Jesus fully trusted the Hebrew Scriptures and probably saw them as completely accurate; yet the particular texts which reveal this are problematic when used as proof-texts for any of the positions on inerrancy.
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INTRODUCTION

The thesis of this paper can aptly be formulated as a twofold proposition: 1) there is much evidence, based on relevant texts in the Gospel accounts in which Jesus cites or refers to the Old Testament, that He believed the Old Testament Scriptures to be truthful and thus trustworthy; 2) however, the usage of Jesus' comments which pertain to the Old Testament as inviolable proof-texts for any of the current nuanced formulations of inerrancy is problematic.

To phrase the thesis statement differently, there is insufficient evidence regarding the texts examined in this study to warrant modern exegetes using Jesus' comments pertinent to the Old Testament as explicit proof either of a strictly or loosely construed doctrine of inerrancy.

The bulk of this study is exegetical. The texts to be dealt with in successive chapters are as follows: chapter two: John 10:35; chapter three: John 17:17; chapter four: Matthew 22:31-32; chapter five: Matthew 5:18. Chapter six, the final chapter, is a summary of the study.

Before entering the exegetical segment of this thesis (chs. 2-5), a brief survey is given to the historical background of the present controversy concerning biblical inerrancy. This material comprises chapter one.
Need for Thesis

Few biblical scholars and theologians of conservative orientation would cavil at the assertion that "inerrancy" is an important issue.

What does it mean to say that the Bible is inspired? Is the Bible accurate in all that it affirms and records, or accurate only on most matters, or accurate only enough to accomplish God's sovereign purpose in His dealing with mankind? How technical and precise is the wording of the Bible? Does the ethos of the modern age demand an unwarranted accuracy from its pages? If the Bible is a mixture of truth and error, then how are we to distinguish the two? These questions, which are only a few that could be raised, indicate, to some extent at least, why the general matter of inerrancy is important and why it is deemed so critical by many biblical scholars, theologians, and apologists. Obviously, these questions and others like them are of concern to all who love the sacred Scriptures and seek to understand and obey them.

To be more specific and relevant to the issue at hand, one might ask why this particular study pertaining to inerrancy is needed. In reply to this it can be said that most scholars in fundamentalist and evangelical ranks would adamantly affirm that, if Jesus adhered to a particular doctrine, or if His statements give implicit support to that doctrine, then our adherence to the doctrine is demanded. This adherence, in the thinking of most conservative scholars, logically stems from a recognition of His unique authority.¹ Of vital

¹Admittedly not all conservatives follow this line of reasoning; however, given the fact that it is a very common position, the writer is assuming it as the status quo for the purpose of this thesis.
concern then is the endeavor to ascertain what Jesus believed with regard to the accuracy of His "Bible," i.e., the Old Testament Scriptures. Often, as will be shown, certain statements by Jesus regarding the Old Testament are used as proof-texts of inerrancy without detailed study being done of these texts. An exegetical study of some of these texts is what the writer intends to do in this paper. The texts that have been chosen do support, prima facie at least, the doctrine of inerrancy and are frequently cited as support.

At this point it should be noted that some scholars might object to the methodology used in this paper on the basis that the argument is a circular one. That is, certain verses in the Gospels are assumed to be inerrant, or nearly inerrant, recordings of Jesus' words in order to build an argument regarding His own position on the inerrancy problem--clearly a question begging endeavor. This objection may receive additional force in light of the work done by form-critical and redaction-critical scholars who have shown that, at least to some extent, redactional activity occurred in the composition of each of the Gospels (the extent of this activity is of course debatable). The writer senses the strength of this objection at the outset of this paper and does not wish to minimize it. However, this work lies fully within that segment of evangelical scholarship which proceeds on the premise that the statements of Jesus recorded in the Gospels are indeed a substantial reflection of His very words.
Summary

This thesis will proceed as follows:

Chapter one: a sketch of some of the vital historical factors that have helped to shape the context of the current inerrancy problem and a brief outline of the two basic positions adhered to

Chapter two: exegesis of John 10:35

Chapter three: exegesis of John 17:17

Chapter four: exegesis of Matthew 22:31-32

Chapter five: exegesis of Matthew 5:18

Chapter six: a summary of the evidence and problems for inerrancy contained in the preceding chapters and a suggestion for further study
CHAPTER 1

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

TO THE INERRANCY QUESTION

Introduction

This chapter is necessary because of the twofold nature of this thesis. The thesis pertains both to what Jesus thought of the Old Testament Scriptures and (albeit to a lesser extent) to the ongoing discussion of inerrancy. Before advancing an argument as to how Jesus' view of the Hebrew Scriptures impinges on the present doctrine of inerrancy, the writer believes that it will be helpful to give a brief presentation of the basic viewpoints being advocated with regard to inerrancy.

Also, the writer believes that it will be helpful to give a brief and highly selective excursus on the historical background out of which the current discussion of inerrancy among conservative Christian scholars has arisen. For certainly this discussion has not arisen from a vacuum but is of a piece with the general problem of biblical authority in an age that has come to be dominated by "science." This overall problem can best be seen (according to many thinkers) as a result of the intellectual fomentation known as the Aufklärung, the Enlightenment, the spirit of which, at least in many ways, still lives in Western society.
Impact of the Enlightenment on Biblical Authority

The current controversy over biblical inerrancy has as its historical antecedent the broader controversy concerning biblical authority which arose in Europe during the period philosophers generally term "the Enlightenment."¹ For many thinkers during this time, the traditional creeds and doctrines of Christianity, especially those of the Roman Catholic Church, were intellectually stultifying in that these doctrines were said to "put faith and revelation above reason" and were thought to hinder free inquiry and scientific progress.² Traditional authorities of all kinds were questioned; reason, primarily in the form of unfettered empiricism, was deified as the ultimate authority for ascertaining truth in all matters. Although the intellectual milieu of this time was complex, with various philosophes making a distinct contribution to the prevailing Zeitgeist, yet the exaltation of reason coupled with a commensurate attack upon traditional authorities was a dominant theme of the time.³


²C. Brinton, op. cit., p. 520.

³Ibid., p. 520.
Such an ethos was bound to affect the traditional veneration and esteem accorded the Bible itself. In due course, what was traditionally thought to have occurred in history became less important for theologians; the more important matter was distilling the "reasonable" elements out of the biblical tradition which could serve as a basis for religion. That is, even if miracles did once occur, it matters little, for "reasonable" men must have a "reasonable" religion. This attitude is revealed in the famous dictum of G. E. Lessing (1729-81): "Accidental truths of history can never become the proof of necessary truths of reason."\(^4\)

Although the spirit of the times may have had a significant impact in various ways upon the Christian religion, the relevant matter for this study is the influence upon the concept of biblical authority. Having once held a sacrosanct position in the thinking of most people during the Middle Ages and the Reformation period, the Bible now began to be thought of (at least by many scholars and educated people) as a book very similar to any other great classic. The human dimension of the Bible was thrust into the foreground through research into the origin and composition of the biblical writings. The German biblical scholar J. S. Semler (1725-91) was one of the first to delve into the subject of the origins of the New Testament books from a "scientific" point of view.\(^5\)


\(^5\)C. C. Smith, "Semler, Johann Salomo" in *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, J. D. Douglas, gen. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1974; rev. ed., 1978), p. 896. The term "scientific" denotes the inductive method of study, i.e., reasoning from the particular to the general without concern as to whether the "particulars" (the data) are in accord with, or in support of, a prior general theory or dogma.
He is generally regarded as the "father of historical-critical theology."\(^6\)

In the nineteenth century, historical-critical scholarship was firmly established, especially in Germany.\(^7\) These scholars maintained that reality is uniform and universal, that it is accessible to human reason and investigation, that all events historical and natural occurring within it are in principle comparable by analogy, and that man's contemporary experience of reality can provide the objective criteria by which what could or could not have happened in the past is to be determined.\(^8\)

If there was anti-supernaturalistic bias in general, affecting or drastically altering the traditional formulations of Christian doctrine, this bias was especially evident regarding the doctrine of biblical inspiration. Whatever else "inspiration" might entail, it could not mean that the biblical writings (even in their original form) were supernaturally preserved from human error.

One natural outgrowth of this kind of tendentiousness, which played a large and conspicuous role in the work of many historical-critical scholars, was the search for the "historical Jesus."\(^9\) Such scholars assumed that Jesus could not have been as He is portrayed in the New Testament.\(^10\) The Gospels

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\(^7\) R. N. Soulen, op. cit., p. 87.

\(^8\) Ibid., pp. 87-88.

\(^9\) A. Schweitzer, The Quest of the Historical Jesus, trans. W. Montgomery (New York: Macmillan Co., 1964; first German ed. Von Reimarus zu Wrede, 1906) is the most renowned work of this kind.

\(^10\) See ibid., pp. 13-329, for a survey of the "lives" of Jesus that preceded Schweitzer's consistent-eschatology approach.
were thought to be comprised of the usual mythological lore that gradually develops among the devotees of any powerful religious personality. And in this case, the mythological accretions enshrined in the Gospels had completely obscured the small amount of "historical" data also found there.

Another significant phenomenon in the nineteenth century which, though it occurred (strictly speaking) outside the traditional area of concern for theology, was to have repercussions for biblical authority in general was the publication of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* (1859). The theory of evolution came into vogue among the educated, creating a tension between biological science and a literal understanding of the early chapters of Genesis. Thus the enormous prestige of science was seen as pitted against the biblical account.\(^1\)

Of course biblical scholarship of a more conservative nature than that concerned with finding the "historical Jesus" also existed in this period. In England during the latter half of the nineteenth century\(^2\) three remarkable scholars, *viz.*, J. B. Lightfoot (1828-89), F. J. A. Hort (1828-92), and B. F. Westcott (1825-1901) demonstrated through their labors that the historical-critical method, when used judiciously and without an a priori bias toward

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\(^1\)Thomas Henry Huxley (1825-1895) was probably the most vociferous and influential champion of Darwin's ideas. A confrontation at Oxford in 1860 took place between him and the Bishop of Oxford, Samuel Wilberforce (1805-1873), with Huxley's arguments gaining the upper hand as a result of this exchange; Josef L. Altholz, *The Churches in the Nineteenth Century* (Indianapolis/New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1967), pp. 130-131.

\(^2\)A notable work regarding the clash in Britain at this time of historical-critical scholarship with the more traditional way of viewing the Bible is W. B. Glover, *Evangelical Nonconformists and Higher Criticism in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Independent Press, Ltd., 1954).
the supernatural, could aid biblical studies.\textsuperscript{13}

In America, the so-called Princeton School, represented by J. A. Alexander (1809-60), Charles and A. A. Hodge (1797-1878 and 1823-86), and B. B. Warfield (1851-1921) stood for traditional doctrine. Warfield stoutly defended biblical inerrancy.

At the turn of the century, James Orr (1844-1913), a Scottish theologian, countered successfully many of the assaults made upon the Bible in his day (though he had reservations about inerrancy).\textsuperscript{14}

\textbf{The American Scene in the Twentieth Century}

In America in the early twentieth century there was a strong reaction by many Christian leaders to Liberalism.\textsuperscript{15} The more conservative scholars, theologians, and pastors began to espouse and defend certain fundamental doctrines as being essential for the survival and perpetuity of the Christian


According to Glover, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 284, because these men defended the "central evangelical doctrines from continental critics," their work was accepted by those who otherwise might have been hostile to it.

\textsuperscript{14}J. Orr, \textit{The Bible Under Trial} (New York: A. C. Armstrong & Son, 1907; second ed.) is typical of his works.

\textsuperscript{15}"Liberalism" here denoting nineteenth-century Protestantism which tended to view the Bible exclusively as a human document and thus a book that can be used as a source of inspiration in our own modern quest for God rather than as a source of revealed, authoritative truth. For a discussion see "Liberal Protestantism," \textit{The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology}, eds., A. Richardson and J. Bowden (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), pp. 325-328.
religion. They became known as fundamentalists. One of the more notable conservative scholars of the time, J. Gresham Machen, is particularly remembered today for his scholarly attacks upon the liberal theology of the time.\(^\text{16}\)

Later in the twentieth century (1950's), some conservative Christian leaders, who could warmly embrace the doctrines of fundamentalism, but who saw the movement as overly narrow in some ways, broke with the fundamentalists. Men such as Carl F. H. Henry, Billy Graham, and Edward John Carnell preferred the label evangelical.

It is within this fundamentalist/evangelical melding that the current "battle for the Bible" is being fought. For the most part, evangelicals were comfortable with the concept of biblical inerrancy. But now this doctrine is being seriously challenged by some evangelicals.\(^\text{17}\)

Harold Lindsell's book, *The Battle for the Bible*, which moved the issue into the foreground of popular debate among conservative Christians, was rather controversial in that the author contended that any conservative denomination or school which modifies its view of inerrancy (in a liberal


\(^{17}\)Probably the most forthright attack on inerrancy that has been made by one who at least appears to be an evangelical is that of D. M. Beegle, *Scripture, Tradition, and Infallibility* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1973; reprint ed.). For others who hold to what in this paper is termed a "loose" view of inerrancy see page fifteen, note twenty-seven.
direction) will, given enough time, likely become liberal on other vital doctrines. 18

The number of books written in the past few years on the topic of inerrancy attests to the fact that the issue is a vital one for evangelical scholars. 19 The overall complexity of this issue, i.e., biblical inspiration and inerrancy, likewise is well attested by the fact that numerous specialists of various fields have written from the vantage point of their respective


Periodical literature pertaining to inerrancy includes M. R. Austin, "How Biblical is 'The Inspiration of Scripture?'" The Expository Times 93
disciplines either for or against a particular understanding of inerrancy. 20

It is evident that the problem of inerrancy is interdisciplinary, involving the fields of Old and New Testament exegesis, textual criticism, theology, and even philosophy. 21

Allowing for various nuanced positions among these scholars, two basic viewpoints can be discerned. One, which seems to be most congruent with the "traditional" concept of what biblical inspiration entailed, 22 is that the canonical writers were so influenced or superintended by the Holy Spirit in their writings which comprise the Bible as to be kept from error in any matter. This inerrancy technically applies only to the original writings


20The first nine works listed in note nineteen contain contributions of more than fifty different scholars who have written articles related to inerrancy (disallowing many of the essays in Radmacher and Preus which pertain specifically to hermeneutics).

21See the essays in the works cited in note nineteen.

22The traditional view of inspiration/inerrancy is argued today by evangelicals. E.g., see J. B. Rogers and D. K. McKim, The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979); contra J. D. Woodbridge, Biblical Authority (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982).
(i.e., the autographs), not to any of the numerous manuscripts which attest to the original writings nor to any version of the Bible, whether ancient or modern. Also, a number of qualifications are made in the doctrine, e.g., rounded numbers and various figures of speech.\(^23\) This view of inerrancy, which in this study is termed "strict inerrancy," is, basically at least, the viewpoint espoused in the aforementioned book by Lindsell.

Other biblical scholars and theologians believe the term "inerrancy" should denote a somewhat different concept (some of them would prefer the term "infallibility," or some other term, for the Bible). Two conceptually linked themes recur frequently in their writings on biblical inspiration and inerrancy.

One theme or idea is that the purpose of inspiration must be paramount in our thinking about the Bible. George Ladd, for example, expressed this concept clearly.\(^24\) One can emphasize this point without believing the Bible to contain errors. However, for some scholars this is a key point for


\(^{24}\)G. Ladd, "Why Did God Inspire the Bible?" in *Scripture, Tradition, and Interpretation*, eds., W. W. Gasque and W. S. LaSor (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978), pp. 49-59. (Ladd himself, however, does not in this essay affirm that the Bible contains errors; his point is simply that we need to be careful in the current debate to see the very practical reason(s) for which Paul declares the Scriptures to be inspired [2 Tim. 3: 16-17]).
ascertaining the nature of biblical inspiration. The Bible, according to this view, was not meant to be taken as an unassailable authority on such matters as geography, history, and science. Thus, where it touches upon such matters, the Bible is not necessarily true, for these matters are peripheral and irrelevant to its overall message. According to this position, even though there are errors in the Bible, God's purpose in giving it to man (which primarily is to bring about his salvation) is not thereby impugned.

The other recurring theme in the writings of these scholars is that the Bible is to be fully trusted on matters of spiritual and theological import, matters which, to a great extent, are not empirically verifiable.

This viewpoint, or "loose inerrancy" as it is called in this study, allows for considerable latitude in the accuracy and precision of the Scriptures. Scholars who have contributed essays to the previously mentioned works (note nineteen) in support of this "loose" position (or something akin to it) are Berkeley Mickelsen, Robert M. Grant, and Donald Bloesch.

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Among those who hold to the "strict" position are Roger Nicole, Wayne A. Grudem, Gleason L. Archer, and James I. Packer.\(^ {28} \) Most of the scholars on both sides of this issue point to the fact that the crucial matter of concern (and it is a very complex matter) is that of defining precisely what is meant by "inerrancy." Both sides agree this definition must be derived from the biblical data itself. At the risk of oversimplifying the matter, scholars on the one side tend to emphasize the biblical data which supports, in their view, the concept that the Bible is completely free from error, though they concede that the biblical writings contain difficulties. Those on the other side tend to emphasize the biblical data which clearly vitiates, in their view, the concept of an errorless Bible. They contend, then, that the "errors" must be given an equal voice, so to speak, with the passages emphasized by the scholars of the "strict" view, and only then can we have a fully biblical doctrine of what inspiration entails.\(^ {29} \)

This emphasis by both sides on the inductive method also highlights


\(^ {29} \)D. A. Carson discusses this difference in methodology under the rubric "Scripture's Phenomena and Truth Claims" in D. A. Carson and J. D. Woodbridge, eds., _Hermeneutics, Authority and Canon_, pp. 23-24. The real question is which should be given priority—the phenomena of Scripture that putatively assert or imply the inerrancy of Scripture or those which putatively vitiates inerrancy. For the strict inerrancy scholars it is the former, _ibid._, p. 24; for the loose inerrancy scholars the latter, D. Beegle, _op. cit._, pp. 266, 275-276.
another difference, or at least an alleged difference, between the two camps, namely, the interplay between inductive and deductive methodology in formulating a doctrine of biblical inspiration/inerrancy. For example, the weakness of the so-called epistemological argument (i.e., God cannot lie; God inspired the Bible; therefore, the Bible is inerrant) is said to be its deductive nature, that is, it practically dictates that God must have given us an inerrant Bible. 30 Thus the "loose" inerrancy scholars tend to denigrate or completely shun any such deductive reasoning, while the "strict" inerrancy scholars recognize too the limitation of aprioristic arguments but contend that any theoretical reasoning process in almost any field will, to some extent, employ both inductive and deductive reasoning. 31

There are many difficulties for scholars on both sides of the inerrancy problem. It has not been the purpose of this chapter to delve into them. The purpose has simply been to present, in a very brief fashion, some of the historical background to the current problem and a basic outline of the respective viewpoints. 32

30 E.g., D. Beegle, op. cit., p. 265.


32 This chapter has been of necessity brief and superficial. For an indepth historical treatment of post-Reformation bibliography and the various positions which have been taken on biblical authority, a helpful work is H. D. MacDonald, Theories of Revelation: An Historical Study 1700-1960 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979). A detailed study of the rise of the historical-critical method is given by E. Krentz, The Historical-Critical Method (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), pp. 6-32. For historical treatment of the specific problems of New Testament study vis-à-vis the
In conclusion, two basic conceptions of inerrancy vie for acceptance among conservative biblical scholars and theologians today. One conception is that the original writings which form the basis of our versions of the Bible were completely void of mistakes on any matter, notwithstanding a degree of imprecision and various difficulties in these writings. The other conception is that the original writings did indeed contain factual mistakes, but that these mistakes in no way nullified (nor nullify today) the capability of these writings to make their readers "wise unto salvation."

The question that now must become central for the following chapters of this thesis is, Can we ascertain if Jesus had what is today formulated as a "loose" conception of inerrancy or a "strict" conception of inerrancy based on pertinent texts in the Gospels? Obviously, He did not elaborate on this question. Nevertheless, we must ask what His remarks imply with regard to His view of the accuracy and truthfulness of the Old Testament Scriptures and then, furthermore, what His view of the Scriptures means or does not mean for the modern discussion of inerrancy.

CHAPTER 2

EXEGESIS OF JOHN 10:35

Introduction

This chapter begins with a brief discussion of the Johannine context of the passage to be examined. Attention will then be focused on the assertion made by Jesus which is relevant to this thesis, viz., "the Scripture cannot be broken." These words are recognized by scholars on both sides of the inerrancy issue as significant for understanding Jesus' view of the Scriptures. Exegesis of this assertion will consist of a study of the terms "Scripture" and "broken." An attempt will be made to ascertain the meaning of these terms based on their usage in the biblical writings. Final remarks will pertain first to what can be said of Jesus' view of the Scriptures based on His statement in John 10:35 and, second, how His statement relates to the current formulations of inerrancy.

Text

If he called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), . . .

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2The English translation used in this paper is the New American
el ekeinos elpein theous prois ouj o logos tou theou exeto, 
kal ou dynatai lUTHNAI H graphi, . . .

Context

Verses 22-39 of John 10 form the significant context to verse 35. In these verses, we are given an account of Jesus' discourse with "the Jews" (vv. 19, 24, 31), presumably the Pharisees, for John seems to make little distinction between these terms in his Gospel (e.g., 1:19; 2:6; 5:10; 6:52; 7:35). We are told that the occasion for this particular confrontation was the "Feast of Dedication" which "took place at Jerusalem" (v. 22). While Jesus was "walking in the temple in the portico of Solomon" (v. 23), the Pharisees demanded that He tell them whether or not He was the Messiah (v. 24). Jesus insisted that He had given them ample witness concerning His identity--His words ("I told you, and you do not believe") and His works ("the works that I do . . . bear witness of me"; v. 25). And then He sealed His indictment with the remarkable statement, "But you do not believe, because you are not of my sheep" (v. 26). What followed was an explication by Jesus of what it means to be "of my sheep" (vv. 27-29), culminating in the assertion, "I and the Father are one" (v. 30). At this time, the Pharisees, being offended, took up stones in order to kill Him (v. 31). Jesus then asked them why they were intending to stone Him (v. 32). They responded, ". . . because You, being a man, make Yourself out to be God" (v. 33).

Jesus' reply to them is recorded in verses 34-38, the first three verses of which form the immediate context for the statement to be dealt with in this chapter:

Jesus answered them, "Has it not been written in your Law, 'I said, You are Gods'? If he called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), do you say of Him, whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'?" (vv. 34-36).

Jesus went on to assert that, even if the Pharisees would not believe His words, they should at least believe because of His works (v. 38). At this, they were provoked again and attempted to seize Him, but he "eluded their grasp" (v. 39).

It is apparent here that the brief assertion by Jesus ("and the Scripture cannot be broken") which is the focus of this chapter is ancillary to His primary concern. That is, Jesus is not here developing a "doctrine of Scripture." His concern is rather to vindicate His claim to be the Son of God, a claim which elicits a strong reaction from the Jewish leaders. In order to defend His claim to have a special relationship with God, Jesus appeals to the Old Testament Scriptures (Psalm 82:6). He is actually quoting from the Septuagint which renders the passage: ἐγὼ ἔσμαι θεὸς ἐστε καὶ οὐκ ὑπόστου ἡμῶν. This is an exact translation of the Hebrew text. Even though His remark concerning the Scripture is ancillary to His main contention, this

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3 Or so it seems that He is. If Jesus spoke Aramaic, as many scholars believe, He may have been quoting an Aramaic Targum on the Hebrew text. Another possibility is that He is indeed quoting the Septuagint, having at least some knowledge of Greek (see p. 28, n. 20).

remark is an extremely important premise in the logic of His argument. This argument is what logicians term a *forbortiori*, that is, an "all the more" or "with stronger reason" type of argument.

As a syllogism, Jesus' argument appears like this:

**Major premise:** In the Old Testament, certain Jewish leaders are referred to as *elohim* (Gk. ἔληλημ').

**Minor premise:** The Old Testament Scriptures cannot be broken.

**Conclusion:** I am all the more justified, in light of the mighty works that I perform, in calling myself the Son of God.

The force of Jesus' logic is not of concern here, except to note the importance of His "minor premise." He simply assumes the trustworthiness of the Hebrew Scriptures. In doing so, He seems to be on common ground with His opponents, for they do not challenge this assumption. His remark is taken as parenthetical by most translators and probably was made only to reinforce the validity of the larger argument with the Pharisees concerning His identity.

It can be argued, however, that Jesus was merely accommodating

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5 His usage of Scripture was similar to that of the rabbis. For discussion of this see R. Brown, *The Gospel According to John* (i-xiii) in *The Anchor Bible* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1966), pp. 409-410. For further discussion of His argument, especially as it relates to a high view of Scripture, see S. Lewis Johnson, *The Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1980), pp. 21-37. See, also, concerning the problem of identifying the *elohim*, A. Hanson, "John's Citation of Psalm LXXXII Reconsidered," *New Testament Studies* 13 (July 1967): 363-367.

6 For a discussion of the Jewish view of Scripture see D. G. Kibble, "The Jewish Understanding of the Old Testament as the Word of God," *The Evangelical Quarterly* 3 (July-September 1979): 145-155. Also, see John 5:39 (this passage being understood as an indicative); 8:52 for scriptural evidence which attests to their reverence for the Old Testament.
Himself to a prevalent but erroneous view of the Scripture (i.e., that the Scripture is completely accurate and trustworthy). This argument lacks plausibility because we are asked to believe that Jesus, in attempting to convince His Jewish opponents of His identity, would undergird His argument with a supposition that He knew to be false. This would be rather strange in light of His emphasis on "truth." Moreover, given the fact that Jesus "does not show himself unduly sensitive about undermining current beliefs," it is unlikely that, on a matter so important as the trustworthiness of their Scriptures, Jesus would have refrained from enlightening the Jews as to their error.

It seems reasonable to assert that John 10:35 is indeed a text which reveals that Jesus had a "high" view of the Old Testament. He evidently believed it to be authoritative and trustworthy and as noted seems to have been on common footing with the Jews of His day in this belief.

To venture beyond a general assertion like this by trying to show how this text supports, as a proof-text, a "strict" or a "loose" view of inerrancy is a tenuous matter. The writer believes that, in order for Jesus' remark to explicitly support a view of inerrancy, the terms He uses—"Scripture" and "broken"—must carry meanings that are the same as, or very similar to,
the meanings of terms used by scholars in the current debate about inerrancy. Thus, the important question becomes: What did Jesus mean in this passage by "Scripture" and "broken," and do these meanings harmonize with concepts intrinsic and crucial to the current discussion of inerrancy? It is to a study of these words that we must now turn.

**Word Study**

1) Scripture

Although in everyday speech the Greeks used the word ἡ γραφή to denote any sort of writing, in the New Testament it is used only with the meaning of sacred Scripture, most often, of course, meaning the Old Testament writings.¹⁰ The noun, ἡ γραφή, together with its plural form, occurs fifty-one times in the New Testament (including the locutions, γραφαὶ ἓν ἅγιον, Rom. 1:2 and τὰ γράμματα, II Tim. 3:16).¹¹ The meaning in John 10:35, as in most other usages in the New Testament, is clearly the Old Testament Scriptures (though, as will be shown, ambiguity remains regarding precisely what scriptures are meant).

Throughout the New Testament the plural αἱ γραφαὶ denotes "collectively

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all the parts of Scripture." The singular may refer to a single passage of Scripture or to the Scriptures as a whole (or at least to more than one passage). 

Regarding John 10:35, it is not so easy to determine if a particular passage is meant (i.e., Ps. 82:6) or the entire Old Testament. The problem is paralleled by current usage of our English word "scripture." The term can mean either a single text or the body of Scripture as a whole.

B. B. Warfield, seeking to fortify his argument for inerrancy, endeavored to prove that Jesus was speaking of the entire Old Testament in John 10:35.

But it is a matter on which commentators are divided.

Even if Jesus was referring only to a particular passage in the Old Testament here, this does not necessarily imply that He would have said anything less of any other passage recorded there. However, one cannot be absolutely certain about this. But it would seem that the burden of proof

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13 If Peter 1:20 seems to be a case of the singular denoting all of the Scripture and several usages, James 4:5 and John 7:38, are difficult in that it is not clear what Old Testament passage or passages are referred to.


rests upon the one who would assert that Jesus might have spoken less highly of some other Old Testament passage or passages, especially given the four-fold Gospel portrayal of His reverence for the Scriptures. Thus, whether Jesus meant specifically the one passage or the entire body of Jewish Scripture, He insists that it "cannot be broken."

2) broken

The word translated as "broken" is ἀναθωρήσας, the aorist passive infinitive of λύομαι. In classical usage the term λύομαι had a variety of connotations. The simple concept of "loosen" proliferates into sundry, yet obviously related, concepts. Some examples are "weaken," "relax" (in regard to physical strength), "undo," "bring to naught," "destroy," "break a legal agreement," and "dissolve." It is not difficult to see the common idea represented by these concepts. That idea seems to be that something which has been impaired, reduced, or diminished can be thought of as being "loosed" or "released" from its original condition.

In the New Testament, two related concepts are found, i.e., "loose" or "release" on the one hand and "destroy," "abolish," or "annul" on the other. Matthew employs the term with a prepositional prefix in a well-known passage:

16 There are more than fifty direct or indirect quotations of the Old Testament by Jesus recorded in the Gospels. (E.g., see Mt. 4:4; 21:13; 22:29; Mk. 12:24; Lk. 22:37; Jn. 13:18; 15:25). He is portrayed as frequently stating, "It is written . . ." or asking "Have you not read . . .?"


18 Examples of the former are Mark 1:7; 7:35; John 11:44; Acts 22:30; of the latter, John 2:19; 5:18; 1 John 3:8.
"Do not think that I came to abolish [καταλύσατε] the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish [καταλύσατε], but to fulfill" (5:17). Paul also uses the term in Galatians 2:18: "For if I rebuild what I have once destroyed [κατελύσατε], I prove myself to be a transgressor." Luke, in his recitation of Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost, also uses the term. In this sermon, Peter says that God raised up Jesus from the dead, "putting an end [λύσατε]" to His agony of death (Acts 2:24).

The word is used several times by John. In chapter two of his Gospel, John relates that, after Jesus had cleared the temple He made the enigmatic statement to the Jews: "Destroy [Λύσατε] this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (v. 19). On another occasion, after Jesus has healed a crippled man on the Sabbath day, John records that this action elicited anger and indignation from the Pharisees. From their perspective, Jesus was guilty of, among other things, "breaking [ἐλύνει]" the Sabbath (5:19). Λύω also has a similar meaning where Jesus asks: "If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath that the Law of Moses may not be broken [κυριεύει], are you angry with Me because I made an entire man well on the Sabbath?" (John 7:23) John explains in his first epistle that the Son of God appeared that He might "destroy [λύσατε]" the works of the devil (1 John 3:8).

It is unlikely that there is much significance in the fact that John does not use a prefixed form of this verb in John 10:35. Although a preposition prefixed to a verb may intensify and strengthen the verb in the Greek Testament, and this does occur rather frequently, yet this is not always the
Based on the usage of the word καταλύω in such passages as Matthew 5:17; 24:2; 27:4; Acts 6:14; Romans 4:20 and others, the words λύω and καταλύω seem to be synonyms, or very nearly so.

At any rate, the word καταλύω is never used by John and, if it were used by John in 10:35, there would probably be little interpretive significance for this passage (with regard to inerrancy). This is so because arguments deriving their force from a subtle nuance of meaning in the words chosen by the Gospel writers to convey the ipsissima verba of Jesus are beset with the problem that Jesus, in the opinion of many scholars, spoke Palestinian Aramaic rather than Greek.20

Assuming an accurate reflection of the very words of Jesus by the Greek καὶ οὐ δύναται λυθήναι ἡ γραφή,21 we can at least say that Jesus is presented by John as dismissing the idea that the Old Testament Scripture—for certain, the passage from the Psalms and at least plausibly the entire Old Testament—could in any way be deprived of its force and authority.


21The writer is aware that some scholars would say this is a gratuitous assumption. It is beyond the purview of this work to engage the issue of redaction-criticism. Thus the writer is taking at face value Jesus' statements relevant to this thesis. Specifically, the assumption here pertains not so much to redaction-criticism (on this, see Introduction, p. 3) as to the idea that the Greek accurately reflects the words of Jesus spoken (probably) in Aramaic (naturally a debatable point).
Concluding Remarks

Taking Jesus' statement in John 10:35 at face value, one must conclude that He endorsed the authority and trustworthiness of the Old Testament, though admittedly it is rather difficult to ascertain with complete certainty what He had in mind by the word "Scripture." However, even aside from this problem, given the meanings of the two key terms in this passage, a problem is raised in relating this text to the modern discussion of inerrancy. The problem is that the status of inerrancy can be attributed only to the autographs, a term denoting a text-critical distinction which apparently did not even exist in Jesus' day. Even if we might eschew the word "errors" as an apt designation for textual discrepancies, they are errors in a technical sense. This is the natural result of scribal transmission of the writings through the centuries. And of course these discrepancies, at least to some extent, were in the Hebrew manuscripts (and the Septuagint manuscripts also) when Jesus spoke the words recorded in John 10:35.

Thus, we have several possibilities in attempting to understand exactly what Jesus meant. One possibility is that He was indeed speaking of the original writings in distinction from the subsequent copies of these writings. However, there is no proof that such a distinction was made among the biblical writers nor by Jesus. Furthermore, this interpretation has an artificial ring to it, for it seems to impose a modern text-critical distinction onto the words of Jesus. Another possibility is that Jesus was referring to the existing manuscripts of His day but was simply unaware of the problems, textual or otherwise, in them. That is, Jesus was mistaken in saying what
He did about the Scripture because He was ignorant of technical matters like this. Or, it is possible that He was speaking with an indifference to precision. That is, à la modern preachers and evangelists, He was speaking of the manuscripts of His day as inerrant (assuming of course that "cannot be broken" means "inerrant") though He actually knew better, but simply did not make this distinction at this point. Then, too, Jesus may have been speaking with another kind of indifference to precision. That is, the so-called problems/errors in Scripture may have been to His way of thinking of such a minor and inconsequential nature that He could still speak of the Scripture as He does in John 10:35. After all, the Greek term underlying "broken" does not seem to be at all a theologically precise term, one that has been honed and refined by theological debate. One can argue, in a priori fashion, that unless in Jesus' day a theological debate about the inerrancy of the Bible was occurring it is highly unlikely that He employed a technical terminology in His actual speech. (One could argue that He likely would have in debate with the learned Pharisees, but still the terminology pursuant to a particular technical debate is the crucial point and the onus probandi would rest upon the one asserting that such a debate existed). Two other possibilities exist that have already been mentioned or alluded to. Jesus may have been singling out the passage from the Psalms as "unbreakable," something He would have said of no other passage of Scripture (obviously, not very likely). Finally,

22Both sides in the modern debate could assert this: For the strict inerrancy side, He may have been indifferent to textual discrepancies; naturally, the other side would extend the indifference to cover the "errors" of Scripture.
it is possible that He was accommodating Himself to the view of his contemporaries regarding Scripture (see p. 23).

It should be obvious that the definitions of ἡ γραφή and λύθηται do not conclusively prove any of these possibilities to be the right one. In general, all that can be said at this point is that Jesus clearly stated the authority and the inviolability of Psalm 82:6 and that quite possibly He viewed every passage in the Old Testament in the same way. It follows that, if indeed Jesus was attesting the authority of every Old Testament passage, He was doing so because He deemed the Old Testament to be accurate and trustworthy. However, it is unlikely that we can determine precisely, in a way that would satisfy those on either side of the inerrancy debate, what He meant beyond this.

23 A problem like this might be said to be one, among many, that causes us, in the words of Moisés Silva, "uncertainty due to incomplete information," M. Silva, "The Place of Historical Reconstruction in New Testament Criticism," in D. A. Carson and J. D. Woodbridge, eds., Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon, p. 111. (His words refer to the problem of chronologically ordering the temptations of Jesus based on the differing accounts given by Matthew and Luke).
CHAPTER 3

EXEGESIS OF JOHN 17:17

Introduction

After the context for the passage is given, the discussion will focus on, as in the preceding chapter, the meanings of the key terms: in this case, "word" and "truth." Again this will be done by tracing the usage of the terms (and any synonyms which might shed light on their meanings) in the relevant biblical writings. The concluding remarks pertain to what this passage reveals concerning Jesus' view of the Old Testament and what this means for inerrancy.

Text

Sanctify them in the truth; Thy word is truth.

ἀγίασον αὐτούς ἐν τῷ ἀληθείᾳ· ὁ λόγος ὁ σῶς ἀληθείᾳ ἐστιν.

Context

The seventeenth chapter of John's Gospel constitutes what is known as the "high priestly prayer" of Jesus. This prayer "was spoken either just before the small company left the room where they had eaten together or as they made their way out of the city, across the Kidron Valley to Gethsemane."¹

The prayer readily divides into three sections: Jesus prays concerning Himself (17:1-5); Jesus prays concerning the disciples (17:6-19); and Jesus prays concerning future believers (17:20-26).

The middle section, dealing with His prayer for the disciples, forms the immediate context for the passage to be discussed. In this recorded section of His prayer, Jesus acknowledges that the disciples had been given to Him by the Father and that they had obeyed the Father's word (v. 6). He goes on to assert, "While I was with them, I was keeping them in Thy name which Thou hast given me; and I guarded them, and not one of them perished but the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled" (v. 12). Jesus then avows that, although He is departing from the world and going to the Father, the things which He has spoken will produce joy in the disciples (v. 13). He acknowledges that He has given the disciples the Father's word and that the world has hated the disciples because they are not of the world (v. 14). Yet Jesus does not pray for their removal from the world, but rather for their deliverance from the evil one (v. 15). He states, "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; Thy word is truth" (vv. 16-17). And furthermore, "As thou didst send Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth" (vv. 18-19). The significant passage for this discussion is verse 17, more specifically the statement: ὁ λόγος ὁ σωτήρ ἐστιν.

At first glance, the statement "Thy word is truth" might be seen as an unequivocal declaration of the veracity of the word of God, i.e., the
veracity of the Scriptures. However, John uses both "word" and "truth" in ways that differ from what these terms might ordinarily mean. (John 1: 1 and 14: 6 are prime examples of such usage). The various concepts conveyed by these words throughout his Gospel must be taken into account for an exegesis of John 17: 17.

Word Study

1) Word

Δόγμα is used 331 times in the New Testament, occurring in all writings except Philemon and Jude. It is used both with general (secular) and theological meanings. Bauer, regarding general usage of the term, lists such meanings as "word" (Lk. 24: 19, where Jesus is said to be a "prophet mighty in deed and word"), various expressions which depend on the context for translation (e.g., "what you say Mt 5: 37"; "statement . . . Lk 20: 20"; "question . . . Mt 21: 24"), statements of definite content (e.g., "assertion, declaration, speech . . . Mt 15: 12. Cf. 19: 11, 22; 22: 15; Mk 5: 36."). the subject under discussion (e.g., "matter, thing . . . Mk 9: 10"). written words and speeches (e.g., "treatise Ac 1: 1"), writings that are part of Holy Scripture (e.g., "ο λ[δόγμα] Ἰουασου 12: 38. ο λ[δόγμα] ο εν τῷ νόμῳ γεγραμμένος 15: 25"). The term is used to refer to the entire Apocalypse

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2 It has been recognized as a significant text for determining Jesus' view of Scripture. E.g., see the discussion by E. J. Young, Thy Word Is Truth, pp. 267-269.


(Rev. 1:3).

λόγος may designate various forms of God's revelation, e.g., God's word, command, commission (Jn. 5:38; 8:55; 10:35; Rom. 3:4). Further, it is used of "divine revelation through Christ and his messengers" (e.g., Tit. 1:3; Jn. 17:14). Frequently, ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ denotes "the Christian message, the gospel" (Luke 5:1; Acts 6:2; 13:44; 1 Peter 1:23). Jesus' own words may be used in this sense of "Christian message" (Jn. 8:31; 12:48; 14:23, 24; 15:3). Many times ὁ λόγος is used to refer to the gospel message (Mt. 13:30-3; Mk. 2:2; Lk. 1:2; 8:12, 15; Ac. 6:4; Gal. 6:6). Other important but less frequent meanings in the Greek New Testament include: computation, reckoning (Rom. 14:12), settlement (of an account) (Phil. 4:15), reason, and motive (Ac. 10:29).

In John's Gospel, λόγος is used forty times. The preponderant usage is to refer to the words of Jesus Himself (at least twenty-three times). God the Father's "word" (λόγος) is referred to five times (Jn. 5:38; 8:55; 17:6, 14, 17). Jesus, speaking to the Pharisees, informs them that they do not have "His word" (the Father's) abiding in them because they refuse to believe that He has been sent by the Father. It is probable that here (Jn. 5:37-39) λόγος denotes the Old Testament Scriptures, but also (as will be shown) an adequate understanding of these Scriptures as well. Jesus insists, in

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5 Ibid., p. 478.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
contradistinction to His antagonists, that He knows the Father and keeps "his word" (Jn. 8:55). Just as Jesus keeps the Father's word, so the disciples are said to have kept His word (Jn. 17:6). Furthermore, Jesus states that He has given the disciples the Father's word (λόγος) and that this λόγος is "truth" (Jn. 17:14, 17).

Finally, there is in the fourth Gospel the personalized usage of λόγος, i.e., the Word made flesh in the person of Jesus Christ (Jn. 1:1, 14).

**Synonym: δημα**

A frequently occurring synonym for λόγος in the New Testament is the term δήμα. This word is found sixty-seven times in the New Testament, primarily in Luke's writings, with twelve occurrences, however, in the Gospel of John. The term is often used in the Septuagint (as is λόγος) for the Hebrew שור (word, saying, utterance, matter, thing).

Though λόγος and δήμα are obviously very similar in meaning, the term δήμα seems more restricted in its meaning. It refers mainly to "that which is said, word, saying, expression." All twelve usages of the term by John denote spoken words and, moreover, in every case the words of Jesus are meant. It would seem then that Leon Morris is right in

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asserting that John does not make "much difference" in his use of Ὄμα and λόγος. However, the similarity of usage applies only to actual speech or utterance, whether of the words of Jesus or of someone else. Thus it is not likely that John's choice of λόγος to denote the Word made flesh was an arbitrary one, but rather that λόγος, perhaps because of philosophical connotations, was the most fitting term to convey Jesus as the incarnate Son of God. Jesus may utter either λόγοι or ἔρματε (the plural of Ὄμα is always used in John's Gospel), but He Himself is the Logos.

Λόγος as Scripture

The pressing question for this particular study is this: Is λόγος ever equated with ἡ γραφὴ, the Scripture, by Jesus, and if so, more importantly does λόγος then mean the Scripture in John 17:17?

There seems to be no explicit, unequivocal declaration that the λόγος equals the Old Testament γραφὴ per se in any of the λόγος passages of the fourth Gospel. However, there is a passage which lends implicit support for linking the two terms. In John 5:38, Jesus declares to the Pharisees that they do not have the Father's "word abiding in" them, and thus fail to "believe Him whom He sent." The very next verse refers to the Scriptures, and obedience to these Scriptures which the Pharisees search, as a source of life. In doing this, they fail to perceive the Scriptures as a witness to the One who is life—Jesus Christ (Jn. 5:39-40).

However, it is precisely the Pharisees' esteem and reverence for the sacred writings, which resulted in assiduous study of the Old Testament (especially the Law), which poses a problem for indentifying ἀγών in John 5:38 ("His word abiding in you") with the Old Testament writings only. For, of all people, did not these Jews have the word (the Scripture) "abiding" in them in a certain sense? That is, did they not "know" the Old Testament intellectually? Jesus concedes as much in His comment--"You search the Scriptures."14 Indeed, a distinguishing mark of the Jewish elite from the γράμματευ, whom they despised as ignorant and even cursed (Jn. 7:49), was their prodigious learning. The rabbinical scholar Jacob Neusner remarks concerning the contrast between the people of the land and the learned:

Other things would have mattered more to them than study of the Mishnah... However lawyers and judges saw their law-studies in a very different light. Study was a super-natural force.15

Thus, it is evident that Jesus had more in mind here than simply an intellectual, letter-like knowledge of the Scripture, for the Jewish elite had this. ἀγών, in this case at least, seems to mean not only the Hebrew Scriptures in a formal sense, but something more--the very expression of the true character of the Father permeating those writings--which, had the Pharisees understood, would have made it possible for them to perceive Jesus as a furtherance, indeed the apex and culmination, of that expression.

14Grammatically, this statement could be a command, but contextually makes more sense as an indicative.

The linkage, then, between λόγος (v. 38) and "Scriptures" (v. 39) in this place in John's Gospel is not an absolutely direct one, but certainly there is a connection. λόγος evidently includes the Scriptures though the term seems to mean something more than just the Scriptures. C. H. Dodd comments:

The λόγος given outward expression in the Scriptures, or in the life-giving word of Christ . . . is itself more than any outward expression: for λόγος is never merely a "word". It is in the widest sense God's self-disclosure, in word or deed, or in the silent operations within the mind of men.  

To be sure, the Pharisees did not hear the voice of God in the Old Testament writings (v. 37), nor did they hear God's voice in Jesus (as opposed to the disciples who did hear God's voice, Jn. 17:8).

In John 8:55, Jesus, again in dispute with the Jews, claims to know the Father and to keep His λόγος. Jesus acts in accordance with what the Father had made known of Himself. Here λόγος seems to clearly denote the prescriptive element in the Old Testament.

John gives support for the λόγος of Jesus being equated with the λόγος of the Father (in chapter 17). Jesus, speaking of the disciples, says that "they have kept Thy word [λόγος]." In verse 8, He says, "for the words [βουλή] which Thou gavest Me I have given to them." λόγος and βουλή here are evidently interchangeable. Verse 14 ("I have given them Thy word [λόγος]") seems, in light of the context, to mean the message, the "word" that the Father wanted to be conveyed to the disciples. Jesus, Himself the

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"Word," serves as a conduit of the "word" of the Father. All that Jesus taught is plausibly entailed in this "word." In verse 17, the λόγος is unequivocally said to be "truth" (ἀλήθεια). How then is λόγος here to be understood? Speaking in the broadest terms, λόγος in John's Gospel always denotes "expression." This seems to be the basal concept, irrespective of the form of the expression, i.e., whether Jesus' words, the Father's word, the word as Scripture, or Jesus as the Word. It is not all that easy to determine just which "word" Jesus means here. The assertion itself—ὁ λόγος ὁ σῶς ἀλήθεια εστιν—makes clear that the λόγος is the Father's λόγος.

Given the context (vv. 6, 8, 14), it might readily appear that the Father's "word" as given by and through the Son is meant. But it may be better to simply see here λόγος in its fundamental significance, that is, God's "expression" manifested in various ways, rather than to compartmentalize or truncate the λόγος. Certainly Jesus, in this intimate prayer, is speaking in lofty and elevated language and the prayer "forms a fitting culmination (in Johannine terms) to Jesus' earthly ministry and leads on to the cross." 17 The sublimity of the occasion lends a degree of naturalness to the idea that Jesus means by ὁ λόγος ὁ σῶς the totality of the divine revelation. 18

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18 Or, to be more precise, the cognitive aspect of special revelation. It is extremely doubtful that λόγος should include what theologians term "general revelation." Moreover, it is questionable whether it should include the non-cognitive aspect of special revelation (pace Dodd, "God's self-disclosure, in word or deed," see quote, p. 39). Is, say, the death, burial,
precisely, in theological parlance, it is at least plausible that Jesus meant
the total cognitive dimension of special revelation, whether the spoken words
of Jesus, the written words of the Bible, or Jesus Himself as the living Word.
Jesus says of this λόγος of the Father that it is "truth" (ἀλήθεια).
This term also denotes various but related concepts in the biblical corpus.

2) Truth

Etymologically, ἀλήθεια conveys the idea of "non-concealment" and thus indicates
a matter or state to the extent that it is seen, indicated or expressed,
and that in such seeing, indication or expression it is disclosed, or
discloses itself, as it really is, with the implication, of course, that
it might be concealed, falsified, truncated, or suppressed. ἀλήθεια therefore, denotes the "full or real state of affairs." 19

The word has a connection with "seeing" which is reflected
in the ancient, Indo-European root which survives in Greek words
like εἶδον (to see) and οἶδα (to know) based upon the root ‘id and
in the Latin wis/vis, as in "wisdom" and "vision," where seeing and
knowing are expressed by the same root word. 20

Its usage in classical Greek is generally to denote reality as opposed to
a lie or mere appearance. 21 The term ἀλήθεια may denote, according to

and resurrection of Christ (as bare event) a "word" or not? On this, see
G. Ladd, A Theology of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans
Publishing Co., 1974), pp. 31-32. The writer believes that λόγος, given the
lexical meanings, implies an intrinsically intelligible "word" or expression.

19 R. Bultmann, ἀλήθεια, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament,
10 vols., eds., G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, trans. and ed. by G. Bromiley


New Testament usage, "truthfulness, dependability, uprightness in thought and deed." An example of this usage is Paul's argument in Romans 3:7 where he contrasts ἡ ἀλήθεια τοῦ Θεοῦ with "my lie [τὸ ἐμὸν ψεύδωμα]." This "practical" or ethical flavoring of ἀλήθεια is also seen in, e.g., II Corinthians 5:8: "Let us therefore celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth [ἀλήθεια]."

Other passages which indicate this aspect of ἀλήθεια are Ephesians 4:24 ("And put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth"), and Romans 2:8, where Paul states that God at the judgment will render to those who do not obey the ἀλήθεια, but rather "obey unrighteousness," the reward of "wrath and indignation." Furthermore, Paul contrasts ἀλήθεια with ἀληθινά in his praise of ἁγίος (I Cor. 13:6). James also uses the term in a sense that connotes something other than (though probably not to the exclusion of) the mere cognitive aspect of adherence to "right doctrine." He informs his readers that a believer who "strays from the truth [πλανηθῇ ἀπὸ τῆς ἀληθείας]" will reap a multitude of sins, and even death (Jam. 5:19, 20). John uses ἀλήθεια with this ethical sense as well. He alone of the New Testament writers uses the construction ποιεῖται τὴν ἀληθείαν. The truth is not merely to be known or believed but practiced. Apart from this specific phrase denoting ἀλήθεια as something which is practical and ethical, much in his

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22 W. Bauer, op. cit., p. 35.

writings implies this conception of truth. This accentuation of the ethical aspect of ἀληθεία, perhaps reflective of the Hebrew background of the New Testament writers, is, according to Nigel Turner, "a leading example of the way Greek terms were bequeathed fresh meanings in Biblical settings." Surely this is possible, for the Hebrew term יִדְעָה "truth" often denotes "reliability, sureness, stability, continuance and faithfulness." However, one should be careful in making too great a distinction between the ethical and cognitive dimensions of the terms ἀληθεία.

It seems that the New Testament writers make no rigid distinction regarding these categories in their usage of the term, ἀληθεία, but rather see these aspects as a natural unity. That is, the New Testament concept is that "true" thinking, both doctrinally (cognitively) and practically (ethically), produces conduct in accord with "truth," i.e., produces Christian conduct. Passages such as Titus 1:1; John 17:17, 19; I Peter 1:22 and I Timothy 6:5 lend support to the assertion that these aspects of truth are coalesced in the New Testament. In regard to this, Roger Nicole writes:

The biblical view of truth . . . is that it is like a rope with several intertwined strands. It will not do to isolate the strands and deal with

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24 E.g., John 8:31, 32, 44; I John 1:8; 2:4; 3:18, 19; II John 4; III John 3.


26 Brown, Driver, Briggs, op. cit., p. 54.
them separately, although they may be distinguished just as various lines in a telephone cable may be distinguished by color. 27

The cognitive or intellectual aspect of truth is, of course, not diminished in the biblical conception. Truth is "reality." 28 It stands in opposition to what merely seems to be the case, whether in the mundane realm or in the lofty realm of theological/philosophical abstraction.

The fact that there is "truth" necessitates that there is also falsehood and that which is not true. Paul could rejoice that Christ was proclaimed "whether in pretense or in truth" (Phil. 1:8). Jesus refers in John's Gospel to Satan as the "father of lies" (8:44). As such, he stands in opposition to Jesus Himself whose own message was truth (Jn. 8:45). Jesus pointed to Satan as the source and perpetrator of that which is false and deceptive in the theological/ethical realm. But those who have come to Jesus are in union


28 W. Bauer, op. cit., p. 35. It is probable that a statement by P. J. Achtemeier is rather one-sided or reductionist: "The fundamental concept of truth in the Bible is not conformity between statement and 'objective reality' but rather reliability, dependability," idem, The Inspiration of Scripture: Problems and Proposals (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980), p. 148. In connection with this, Norman Geisler avers that two theories of truth are in conflict in the inerrancy debate. I.e., a "noncorrespondence" theory of truth which means "factually incorrect statements can be true, provided they accomplish their intended results," and the "correspondence" theory which, à la Aristotle, means truth "is that which corresponds to the actual state of affairs--to the way things really are," "The Concept of Truth in the Inerrancy Debate," Bibliotheca Sacra 137 (October 1980): 328. Indeed, "truth" in the New Testament may mean more than just "the way things really are," but this seems to be at least one facet of the overall concept. See, e.g., the essay by R. Nicole who adduces a number of passages where the factuality of "truth" is apparent (e.g., Jn. 7:18; Rom. 3:7; Eph. 4:25; Jam. 3:14; I Jn. 2:4) "The Biblical Concept of Truth," op. cit., p. 294. Surely it seems unwarranted to preclude the correspondence view of truth from the New Testament.
with the Truth, for not only does He teach truth, He is Truth (Jn. 14:6).

How appropriate, then, in light of the fact that Satan is the perpetrator of
deceit and falsehood and that he can actually be called the "father" of
certain men (Jn. 8:44), that Jesus should pray for His followers to be
sanctified in and/or by the truth (Jn. 17:17). They are to be set apart and
distinct from falsehood, whether in "thought" or in behaviour. Jesus wants
His followers to "know the truth" (Jn. 8:32) and thus be set free from
that which is false. His followers are to perceive and know the truth by
abiding in His word (Jn. 8:31), and just as His word is true, so is the
Father's word (Jn. 17:17). Jesus states that the Father's λόγος is ἀλήθεια.
The two terms are equated. Given the varying ways in which these terms are
used in John's Gospel, how does this equation relate to the matter of the
truthfulness and accuracy of the Old Testament Scriptures?

Concluding Remarks

Based on the preceding discussion of the terms "word" and "truth,"
the writer does not believe that John 17:17 can be taken as a categorical
declaration of scriptural inerrancy, precluding debate on the matter. To
"prove" inerrancy from John 17:17, one would have to show that λόγος and
ἀλήθεια were being used in this instance as technical terms, so that, in
effect, Jesus would be saying, "Your written word [in the original manuscripts
of presumably both Testaments] is inerrant" (disregarding for the moment the
problem of precisely defining inerrancy). These technical meanings simply
cannot be derived from the biblical data. However, this reservation with
regard to inerrancy does not necessarily mean that this passage cannot lend
implicit support for the assertion that Jesus believed the Old Testament to be trustworthy and accurate. The lexical precision that the terms "word" and "truth" would have to carry for this passage to provide explicit support for either a strict or loose view of inerrancy cannot be garnered from New Testament usage of these words. Still, if λόγος does indeed mean (in John 17:17) the totality of God's special revelation, then it is highly unlikely that Jesus believed the Hebrew Scriptures to contain falsehood or error, that is to say, anything that is not in accord with what really is.  

29 The interpretation of John 17:17 given in this chapter may of course be wrong. It is easier to show how the verse falls short of being a proof-text for inerrancy than to demonstrate precisely what it means. One could in fact demonstrate the former without really delving into the latter. However, the purpose of this thesis is to show not only the problem(s) of affirming a particular concept of inerrancy based on the chosen texts but to show that the passages nevertheless lend considerable support for affirming that Jesus had a very high view of Scripture. Thus, the writer is not dogmatically arguing for a particular, precise interpretation of John 17:17 (or of any of the texts) but rather that the verse is one that reveals Jesus' trust of the Scriptures.
CHAPTER 4

EXEGESIS OF MATTHEW 22:31-32

Introduction

The point of this chapter with regard to inerrancy is the manner in which Jesus argues from an Old Testament passage. Since no word studies need to be done, this chapter is brief. The format of the chapter is the same as that of the preceding ones: the text is given, followed by a discussion of the context and then, a discussion of the text itself and how it relates to inerrancy. ¹

Text

But regarding the resurrection of the dead, have you not read that which was spoken to you by God saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? God is not the God of the dead but of the living.

περὶ δὲ τῆς ἀναστάσεως τῶν νεκρῶν οὐκ ἀνέγνωτε τὸ ῥήθην ὑμῖν ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ λέγοντος, ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ θεὸς Ἀβραάμ καὶ ὁ θεὸς Ἰακώβ, οὐκ ἐστὶν [ὁ] θεὸς νεκρῶν ἀλλὰ ἐνόμων.

Context

Matthew 22:23-33 serves as the literary context for the passage to be discussed in this chapter. Members of the aristocratic Jewish sect known as

¹See G. L. Archer, "The Witness of the Bible to Its own Inerrancy," in J. M. Boice, ed., op. cit., p. 97, for attestation that the passage is seen by some conservative scholars as directly impinging on inerrancy.

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the Sadducees confront Jesus in an attempt to baffle Him and thereby vindicate their own theological belief, which differed from His. The belief upon which they so adamantly differed from both the Pharisees and Jesus was that of the "resurrection of the dead" (v. 31). Death, to them, meant the cessation of existence for everyone. Jesus of course taught that all persons would be resurrected for a final judgment (e.g., Mt. 10:15; Jn. 5:29; 11:25-26).

Knowing His teaching, and apparently believing this teaching to be susceptible to logical fallacies, the Sadducees present to Jesus an obviously ad hoc "problem." Basing their story in the Mosaic prescription that, "if a man dies, having no children, his brother as next of kin shall marry his wife, and raise up an offspring to his brother" (v. 24, quoted from Deut. 25:5, 7), the Sadducees relate that there were seven brothers of their company, of which the first married and died, having no children (v. 25). When this happened, another brother married the woman but also died before they could bear children and so on through the seventh brother (vv. 25-26). Finally the woman herself died. After relating this, they pose the perplexing question to Jesus, namely, since the woman was married to each of the brothers, whose wife would she be in the resurrection? (v. 28)

Their egregious error was twofold according to Jesus. They were ignorant both of the Scriptures and "the power of God" (v. 29). Jesus states explicitly that in the glorified state the institution of marriage will cease (v. 30). He then directs their attention to the Hebrew Scriptures: "But regarding the resurrection of the dead, have you not read that which was spoken to you by God saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of
Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? God is not the God of the dead but of the living" (vv. 31-32). To conclude the pericope, Matthew records that the "multitudes . . . were astonished at His teaching" (v. 33).

Discussion of Text

The plan of the Sadducees in their questioning of Jesus concerning the resurrection was, in the words of R. V. G. Tasker, "to discredit Jesus as a theologian by showing the logical absurdity of the orthodox Pharisaic doctrine of the resurrection, which they assumed that Jesus accepted." What is of significance in this passage with regard to Jesus' view of the Old Testament writings is the manner in which He uses the Old Testament to answer the Sadducees' attack on the resurrection. To answer their objection, Jesus quotes from Exodus 3:6. These words, recorded in verse 32: "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob," implicitly teach the resurrection of the dead. The force of the argument seems to rest upon the inference that, when the words were spoken to Moses by God, the patriarchs were still alive and therefore their resurrection was a logical deduction.

Even more important, from the standpoint of Jesus' regard for Old Testament accuracy, is the fact that the strength of the argument resides in the present tense of the Greek word εἰμί (or, assuming that Jesus probably had the Hebrew in mind or an Aramaic translation of the Hebrew, the implied

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corresponding verb underlying the Greek). At the time the words were spoken (several hundred years after the death of the patriarchs) at the burning bush, God declared Himself to be their (i.e., the patriarchs') God, even as the words were spoken. Thus, Jesus bases His argument on a single, rather technical, expression of the text—the present tense verb construction in the Old Testament. The argument would lack force if something other than the present tense of the verb were used. Surely it can be said that any argument for a particular doctrine or belief which derives all or much of its validity from a "technicality" of Scripture bespeaks a very high regard for the accuracy of the Scripture on the part of the one making that argument.

At this point, one might register an objection to the use of this passage as an argument for inerrancy in the same way that the John 10:35 passage might be objected to (see pp. 26-27). That is, it could be argued that this Old Testament passage, for various reasons, e.g., the very words of God are recorded, it is important theologically, was one (perhaps even one of many) that had an exalted status in the thinking of Jesus, but that surely He would not have argued in a similar fashion from every Old Testament passage.

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3 According to Archer and Chirichigno, op. cit., pp. 14-15, the New Testament, the Septuagint, and the Masoretic text are virtually equivalent on this passage. The Septuagint follows the Masoretic text almost word for word, with Jesus apparently using only the words from the Old Testament text needed to make His argument (i.e., He omits a few words). The important matter is that the present tense verb form is the same in each passage. See Archer (ad loc.) for a convenient comparison of the texts.

4 One can rather easily sense the aversion that some scholars have toward the practice of proof-texting. See, for example, F. F. Bruce's comment on this
Obviously, such an objection is not easily countered given the paucity of texts such as this one in the Gospels. In reply, however, one might ask what would be required to convince an objector that Jesus had a very high view of the entire Scripture. Would He have to cite or allude to every single Old Testament passage?

Granted then, this passage does not conclusively prove a strict conception of inerrancy to have ensconced itself in Jesus' thinking, yet the passage must be reckoned with in attempting to understand His view of Scripture. We might at least say that in this instance He used Scripture in such a manner as would indicate that He believed it to be accurate even in the verb tenses.

In any event, it is evident from this passage that Jesus believed the doctrine of a resurrection of the dead to be in accord with the Old Testament particular passage in his New Testament History (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1972; reprint ed.), p. 150. Classic expression was given to this aversion in C. H. Dodd's According to the Scriptures (London: Nisbet & Co., Ltd., 1952), in which the author argued that the New Testament writers eschewed the "mechanical process of bringing together isolated 'proof-texts' and their supposed 'fulfillments,'" and rather their concern was "to exploit whole contexts selected as the varying expression of certain fundamental and permanent elements in the biblical revelation . . ." p. 133. Relevant to this, D. A. Carson suggests that, in the text under discussion, Jesus may have had in mind the concept that "God is the eternal God of the covenant, a fact stressed wherever reference in the Genesis record is made to the patriarchs (e.g., Gen. 24:12, 27, 48; 26:24; 28:13; 32:9; 46:1, 3-4; 48:15-16; 49:25)" "Matthew" in The Expositor's Bible Commentary, gen. ed., F. C. Gaebelien (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), vol. 8, p. 462. This important concept need not necessarily rule out the possibility that Jesus and the New Testament writers may have used "proof-texts" at times. The two practices (i.e., proof-texting a single passage to make a point over against citing a text as representative of a certain motif enshrined in Scripture) are not mutually exclusive.
Clearly, in His estimation, the Sadducees were guilty of a two-fold error, namely, ignorance of the Scriptures and ignorance of the power of God (v. 29). On this passage, E. F. Harrison has aptly remarked:

How striking it is that the one allusion to error by our Lord in the days of his flesh was not to something in the Scriptures but the failure to know and interpret them aright.  

To summarize, one may conclude from Jesus' use of the Old Testament in this particular instance that He thought this passage to be accurate even in the verb tense employed by the writer. It is at least likely that He thought this of every passage in the Old Testament. Jesus is thus revealed here as trusting the minute accuracy of an Old Testament passage. Still, the scarcity of such instances recorded in the Gospels of His using the Old Testament in this way necessitates a degree of caution in citing this Matthaean passage as an absolute proof-text for a strict version of inerrancy.

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5 Other Old Testament passages could have been cited for support of this belief, e.g., Isaiah 26:19; Daniel 12:2; cf. also Job 19:25-27.

CHAPTER 5

EXEGESIS OF MATTHEW 5: 18

Introduction

This chapter, like the preceding one, is very brief. Although there are many difficulties connected with an exegesis of this section of Matthew's Gospel (5:17-20), as well as with this particular verse, the discussion in this chapter will pertain only to how Matthew 5:18 impinges on the matter of inerrancy. At first glance, Matthew 5:18 seems to be a passage that might be regarded as a strong assertion of biblical inerrancy. This is something which many popular writers assert and is sometimes said to be so by scholars.¹

Text

For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished.

 ámbn gdr légω ámbn éωs àn paréldn o sóuraudh kai h γη, Íwta én h múa keraúa oú mē paréldn àpò toû nómu, éωs àn pánta genvtau.

Context

The Sermon on the Mount as recorded by Matthew forms the larger context for this statement by Jesus. More specifically the statement is part of a section of the Sermon dealing with Jesus' relationship to the Law (i.e., 5:17-20). In these verses Jesus expresses the fact that His life and work has a degree of continuity with the Law and the Prophets. He states emphatically that He did not come to "abolish the Law or the Prophets," but rather "to fulfill" them (v. 17). Using strong language, He makes it plain that, "until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished" (v. 18). He goes on to say that the one who will be "called least in the kingdom of heaven" is the one who fails to keep even "one of the least of these commandments, and so teaches others" (v. 19a). In contrast, the one who will be "called great in the kingdom of heaven" is the one who keeps and teaches the commandments

Attestation and the Problem of Formulating a Doctrine of Scripture," D. A. Carson and J. W. Woodbridge, eds., Scripture and Truth, p. 144 links this passage with "the permanence of scripture."

2This is a notoriously difficult portion of Scripture. Some scholars skilled in form and redaction criticism surmise that the Sitz im Leben for these verses was a polemical context involving Matthew (or the early Church if the setting is pushed back to the oral traditions stage) with antinomians, hence the exaltation of the Law (vv. 17-18). E.g., see "The Antinomians in Matthew," in G. Bornkamm et al., Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), pp. 159-164. Contra see W. D. Davies, "Matthew 5:17, 18," in Christian Origins and Judaism (New York: Arno Press, 1973; reprint ed.), pp. 31-36, who remarks, "There is nothing in Matt. 5:17-19, then, which cannot be connected with the circumstances of Jesus' own ministry . . ." (p. 37). (In any event, in keeping with the expressed premise of this paper, these verses are assumed to contain the thought of Jesus rather than exclusively that of Matthew or the early Church).
(v. 19b). He concludes His discourse on the Law and the Prophets with the seemingly draconian proviso that, in order to enter the kingdom of heaven, one's righteousness must surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees (v. 20).

**Discussion of Text**

That verse 18 should be perceived as a passage signifying something about the nature of Scripture is primarily due to the terms used in the passage, namely, ιῶτα ("smallest letter") and κεραία ("stroke") which clearly denote something very minute and technical so that, if indeed Jesus is referring to the accuracy of the Old Testament Scriptures, then this verse would be the most explicit text in the Gospels on biblical inerrancy. 4

Clearly, a point of vital concern here is what is meant by the word νόμον, for this is what the terms ιῶτα and κεραία apply to. "Law" may indeed refer here to the entire Old Testament Scriptures. 5 Jesus states in the preceding verse (v. 17) that He did not come "to abolish the Law or the Prophets . . . but to fulfill." This designation, the Law and the Prophets, is used several times in the New Testament to refer to the Old Testament

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3 The word ιῶτα, according to Bauer, is "evidently the Gk. equivalent of the Aram [sic] yod, which in the original form of the saying, represented the smallest letter of the alphabet," op. cit., p. 386. The other term, κεραία, which is more difficult, Bauer defines as "literally] 'horn'; projection, hook as part of a letter," p. 429. D. A. Carson surveys several suggestions that have been offered for its precise meaning—one being that "it forms a hendiadys with 'jot,' referring to the smallest part of the smallest letter" "Matthew," in op. cit., p. 145.

4 Luke 16:17 is a parallel passage.

5 W. Bauer, op. cit., p. 545 (e.g., Jn. 10:34; Rom. 3:19).
Scriptures (e.g., Matt. 7:12; 11:13; Jn. 1:45; Acts 13:15; 24:14; Rom. 3:21). The word νόμος alone also may mean "Scripture," in that "the most authoritative part gives its name to the whole." The designations, then, which are used to denote Scripture vary somewhat, from which we are probably on safe ground to infer that "Law" in verse 18 means the same as "the Law or the Prophets" in verse 17. That is, the terms τὸν νόμον ἢ τοὺς προφητὰς (5:17) and τὸν νόμον (5:18) likely are synonymous. However, given the context of this passage and the fact that various sayings and actions of Jesus may have made Him appear at times to be an "antinomian," we may also suppose that it is the Mosaic Law that Jesus here is primarily concerned with. Matthew presents to his readers a Jesus who uses strong language in declaring Himself not to be an opponent of the Law. Jesus avers that He came to fulfill the Law (5:17), and by way of emphasis and explanation affirms that the smallest details of the Law are valid and binding "until all is accomplished [ὡς δὲ τὸν γενήσεων]." Gundry aptly states, "Matthew presents Jesus' teaching as of a piece with the law and the prophets." 

There are various difficulties with this section and much that pertains

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6 W. Bauer, op. cit., p. 543 (e.g., Jn. 10:34; Lk. 10:26).

7 M. Silva points out that the Pharisees were able through their ingenious casuistry to actually mitigate the force of the divine commands. Too often it is supposed that they obeyed these commands too strictly when, on many occasions at least, they were too liberal. Silva contends that Jesus is inveighing against this laxity in this section of the Sermon on the Mount. See his remarks in idem, "The Place of Historical Reconstruction in New Testament Criticism," D. A. Carson and J. D. Woodbridge, eds., Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon, pp. 112-121.

to the issue of Jesus' relationship to the Law. However, Jesus' relationship to the Law is not a matter of concern for this paper. The matter of concern is rather how this passage might or might not support the doctrine of inerrancy.

Although the entire Old Testament Scriptures may be peripherally in view here (Mt. 5:18), they (the Scriptures as a whole) do not seem to be the matter of primary concern. Rather, Jesus is emphasizing that the Mosaic Law which is enshrined in the Scriptures is valid and will remain so into the future (until precisely when in the future is beside the point for the argument at hand). That the motif of verses 17 and 18 is primarily that of fulfillment should be evident (κληρώσας and the similar term in v. 18, γενομένος). Given this contextual motif, the terms ἔντα and ἔρεαι must refer to that in the Scriptures (specifically the Law) which demands fulfillment. Certainly it is not correct to say that absolutely every sentence, phrase, or word in the Hebrew writings demands fulfillment. Clearly this is not the case. D. Hubbard writes:

The heart of the argument, then is not the accuracy of Scripture but the binding, persevering quality of the divine commands that Jesus did not abolish but fulfilled.⁹

For this passage to support a strict conception of inerrancy one would have to show that Jesus is speaking of every single, little detail of the

written Scriptures. Evidence for this is lacking. In a rather oblique sense, admittedly, this passage may reveal Jesus' view of the entire Scripture. Comments D. A. Carson on this passage: "His [Jesus'] is the highest possible view of the OT." Jesus does affirm clearly and forthrightly that even the minutiae of the Old Testament in need of fulfillment would indeed be fulfilled, presumably in His own redemptive mission.

One may conclude that this passage provides at best a limited degree of support for the proposition that Jesus held to a strict conception of inerrancy. Jesus is clearly revealed as affirming the accuracy of certain details of the Old Testament. But it is highly questionable if His words can be construed as referring to every detail in the Old Testament writings. To take His words here as proof of a strict view of inerrancy is to go beyond the evidence.

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CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION OF THESIS

Introduction

This chapter contains, first, a brief recapitulation of the exegetical evidence presented in the preceding chapters for determining Jesus' view of the Old Testament. After this, some remarks are made which pertain to the position defended in this thesis and how this relates to the larger issue of inerrancy.

Summary of Exegetical Evidence

On the basis of the Johannine and Matthean passages dealt with in this study, it is reasonable to affirm that Jesus believed the writings which comprised the Old Testament of His day to be eminently trustworthy and authoritative. The onus of proof rests upon the one who would assert otherwise.

Jesus affirms to the Pharisees that the Scripture cannot be broken (John 10:35). Even if we are unable to fathom precisely what He meant by this asseveration in light of the contemporary problem of the nature of Scripture, still we must conclude that Jesus saw the writings of the Old Testament as authoritative, and authoritative quite probably because these writings were deemed unique in that God Himself spoke through these writings.
It is not at all implausible that Jesus believed the Old Testament to be authoritative because He believed it to be totally accurate.¹ He quoted an Old Testament passage that is hardly germane to the central theological themes of the Old Testament. Yet He deems these words "unbreakable." Probably very few would argue that He placed His imprimatur on the single passage from Psalm 82. Surely He meant more than this (even if at the moment He was speaking only of this passage).

During His profound prayer (John 17), Jesus says that the Father's word is truth. Whatever else He may have meant by "word," if He was including the Old Testament writings in this word, then it is difficult to believe that He would have countenanced the idea that those writings might contain anything that is contrary to "truth."

When confronted by the Sadducees (Matthew 22:23-33), Jesus answers them by appealing to a passage from the Pentateuch. Perhaps this in itself indicates little, except that His overturning of their assault upon the resurrection depends on the verb tense being a present tense in this passage rather than something else—as if He thought the Scripture to be accurate in minute detail.

In the Matthean Sermon on the Mount, Jesus indicates that even the smallest matters recorded in the "Law" will be fulfilled, implying a high

¹Indeed, some scholars of not so conservative proclivities have conceded this: e.g., J. Gerstner cites A. Jülicher, "Jesus war ein Fundamentalist" (Jesus was a Fundamentalist) in his chapter "A Protestant View of Biblical Authority," F. E. Greenspahn, ed., Scripture in the Jewish and Christian Traditions: Authority, Interpretation, Relevance (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1982), p. 49.
regard for the Scriptures in which those details are interspersed (Matthew 5:18).

In light of the evidence that Jesus had a very high view of the Hebrew Scriptures, what can we conclude regarding His view of Scripture in relation to the problem of inerrancy? The writer believes that we are precluded from claiming the words of Jesus as explicit support for any view of inerrancy. There simply is inadequate conclusive data. That is to say, those passages in which an attribute is predicated of the Scripture or the "word" (John 10:35 and 17:17) do indeed reveal in a general way His high regard for the Old Testament; but when the attempt is made to press them beyond this, the evidence is lacking for a particular concept of inerrancy—a "loose" or "strict" one. Somewhat ironically, the most forceful passage (of those considered in this study) for showing Jesus' attitude to the Old Testament seems to be Matthew 22:31-32, where He bases a significant theological tenet (i.e., immortality) upon a subtle, grammatical point in the Hebrew Scriptures. If many such texts were recorded in the Gospels in which Jesus uses the Scriptures in a very technical manner, then the strict inerrantist would have a forceful argument. But this is not the case. One might argue that, if a single passage in Scripture teaches a certain doctrine then that is enough, especially for those who have a high view of Scripture. But obviously the word of moment in this proposition is "teaches." A didactic text which clearly asserts a particular doctrine must be distinguished from a text from which one may only infer that the writer or speaker adheres to a particular doctrine. Matthew 5:18, too, in a general way seems to indicate Jesus' high regard for
Scripture, but the primary import of this passage is that of "fulfillment" rather than a statement apropos to the nature of Scripture per se.

Of course one can argue on the basis of such passages as those dealt with in this paper and, also, the general impression one gets from even a cursory reading of the Gospels, namely, that Jesus possessed both an intimate knowledge of and a profound trust in the Hebrew Scriptures, that the weight of cumulative evidence leans toward the stricter conception of inerrancy. Nevertheless, it must be said that the evidence which points to Jesus having a strict inerrancy view of Scripture is primarily of an implicit rather than an explicit nature.

The writer thus affirms that Jesus fully trusted the Old Testament, believing it to be completely authoritative, and that, furthermore, we might at least plausibly infer that He spoke of and used Scripture in the way that He did because He deemed it completely accurate. Still, His statements (at least those studied in this paper) cannot be taken as dogmatic proof for a particular view of inerrancy.

Concluding Remarks

The writer believes that the endeavor to find explicit evidence from the words of Jesus for a defense of a particular conception of inerrancy is a fruitless enterprise. The problems connected with deriving explicit evidence of this sort are insuperable. In short, it is not so easy with regard to "Jesus and inerrancy" to bridge the gap between exegesis and theology. Even so, this does not mean the "gap" is so wide that it cannot be crossed. Implicit
exegetical support for a doctrine should not be denigrated nor dismissed, and certainly there seems to be considerable implicit support for the doctrine of inerrancy (strictly construed) from Jesus' statements dealt with in this paper.

In a study of this type where so much depends on our being able to ascertain the precise meanings of the key words used by Jesus (especially is this the case with John 10:35 and 17:17), it is evident that we would benefit from knowing the very words that He spoke. Probably most scholars would contend that we have at least the "very voice" of Jesus in many cases though not His "very words." This is because it is widely held that He spoke a dialect of Aramaic rather than Greek. However, this is not a matter on which there is total unanimity (as noted above, p. 28, n. 20) and, due to the exegetical significance of ascertaining Jesus' exact words for studies like this one, it is an area that would warrant further study. The writer does not mean to suggest that having the very words spoken by Jesus would somehow solve the difficulties encountered in extrapolating from His words how He would have sided in the present debate over the Bible. The suggestion is rather that any research which would enable us to enter more fully into the thought of Jesus Himself is of obvious merit.

The host of problems overall for a strict conception of inerrancy may or may not be insuperable. It has not been within the scope of this work to comment on this matter. Even though many scholars have long ago jettisoned (due to the problems) the strict view of inerrancy, obviously a sizeable number of capable scholars still believe the doctrine to be reasonable,
defensible, and in accord with the biblical data, notwithstanding the problems. ²

Since there are problems for scholars on both sides of this issue, it is probably fair to say that for many scholars it is a matter of which view poses the most problems. Do the problems that the strict inerrantists must deal with (problems such as the phenomena of Scripture itself) outweigh the problems that the loose inerrantists must deal with (problems such as certitude regarding the Bible and formulating an understanding of inspiration)?³ Probably many strict inerrantists would concur with a statement made thirty years ago by Carl F. H. Henry regarding the differing views of Scripture: "Whatever difficulties the high view poses, they are as nothing alongside the frustrating and overwhelming difficulties of its competitors."⁴

The doctrine of verbal-plenary inspiration and its corollary, inerrancy, is based on various biblical data, of which the witness of Jesus is only a

²See, for example, the works listed on pages 12-13, note 19, in the first paragraph. See also J. P. Moreland, "The Rationality of Belief in Inerrancy," Trinity Journal 7 (Spring 1986): 75-86.

³For some who have adopted a "loose" understanding of the Bible's accuracy and trustworthiness it is rather difficult to succinctly formulate what they believe about the problematic nature of the Bible vis-à-vis the Bible as the authoritative book of Christianity. Regarding churches guided by pastors who are of this view, William Countryman states: "This does not mean that these churches have neglected Scripture, but it does mean that they have no simple explanation of the place of the Bible in modern Christianity" idem, Biblical Authority or Biblical Tyranny? (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), p. 10. This in itself of course does not mean the "loose" view of Scripture is wrong. Anyhow, the "strict" inerrantists have a rather similar problem—it is not so easy to give a simple explanation for many of the difficulties in the Bible.

part, albeit an important part. The scholar must certainly address the classic
text on biblical inspiration, II Timothy 3:16-17, as well as other texts, in
coming to terms with the nature of the Bible. Commentators on both sides
insist that the Bible is a conjoining of both the divine and human dimensions
in a mysterious and incomprehensible way. Hopefully, as scholars and
theologians continue to interact on this crucial issue, fresh insights will
emerge that will propel the current status of biblical scholarship beyond the
polarizing impasse of inerrancy.
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