Inspiration of Scripture

Part 1 of 2: Encountering Challenges to Biblical Inerrancy
with Andreas J. Köstenberger, Darrell L. Bock, and Michael J. Kruger
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Welcome to the Table where we discuss issues of God and culture. And today our topic is the scripture, the inspiration of scripture and particularly issues that swirl around the concept of inerrancy and the trustworthiness and reliability, particularly of the New Testament. And I have two very distinguished guests and actually good friends online here over Skype. Mike Kruger and Andreas Kostenberger. I'm not sure I did the Germanic nature of that name much justice, but I did my best Andreas.

As you can see, they're both with us on Skype because they're in different locations. So, Andreas, why don't you tell us where you are and what you do where you are?

All right, Darrell. Great to be with you and with you, Mike. I'm in Lake Forest, North Carolina. I am senior research professor here at the Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Very good. And Michael, you're in yet another locale. Where are you? I know you're a busy guy.

That's right. I'm Charlotte, North Carolina. I'm about three hours away from Andreas right now. Wish we could do this together, but we're in the same state. So I'm Reformed Theological Seminary, the Charlotte campus. And I'm a professor of New Testament here and also president of the campus.

Yeah, just happens to be president, you know. So well, I really do appreciate you guys joining us for this. And we'll just dive straight in. And I'll tell you – tell everyone kind of how this podcast came to be a topic we wanted to discuss. Over the last year there have been a series of blogs really around raising questions about inerrancy in one way or another. Pitched probably at a younger audience in many ways to discuss the nature of the scripture. Michael was watching this go one and wrote Andreas and me, among others, to participate in some responses to some of the issues that were raised. And so we did that. And in the midst of that, you know I raised the question, well, let's not just do it on a blog. Let's go ahead and talk about it with people and kind of work our way through the issue.

So, Michael, why don't you fill that out and talk about how that happened and where people can find that information and then we'll dive into the topic straightaway.
Michael Kruger: Yeah, well, thanks, Darrell. All of us keep up with what's going on in the Biblical world from time to time regarding inerrancy and inspiration. And probably most of us know we've been seeing the blog site over at Pete Enns' blog. I forget the title of it right off the top of my head. Where he had a series going called Aha Moments in Biblical Scholarship. And that series was designed to highlight scholars who changed their view of scripture once they realized there were things in it they didn't expect. And so these were sort of evangelical scholars that later became more moderate and sometimes even further than that down the line. And they had these epiphany moments regarding usually contradictions they found in the Bible. And there was a long list of these that he had on his website.

So as you know, I contacted you and Andreas and a number of other scholars and said, "Hey, you know why don't we go through these alleged contradictions sort of one by one and offer a response so that the world out there, particularly the lay level folks, can get a short succinct answer to some of these Bible challenges?" And so we did that. My site's name is called Canon Fodder. Obviously one N for canon less you miss the pun.

Darrell Bock: Exactly right.

Michael Kruger: And we've been doing that series for a while. We've had about eight or nine installments. We've got a little pause. I'm waiting for Don Carson's and Stan Porter's. Maybe we'll be waiting a while longer. You know how these things go.

Darrell Bock: Yep.

Michael Kruger: And then we'll wrap up the series. But it's been great. We've been looking at all kinds of things. Old Testament issues. New Testament issues. It's been fun.

Darrell Bock: So, yeah, and the thrust of this, the feel of these pieces was, you know the closer I looked and the harder I looked and the more mature I became in working with the scripture, the more realistic a view of scripture I came to have. And it kind of works through, as you call them, epiphany moments. And we'll talk about the light associated with the moment in a minute.
But, Andreas, when Michael asked you to do this, I know you responded positively as I did. Why do you think this is an important conversation to engage in?

*Andreas Kostenberger*  
I really feel like this is a bit of a new development, somewhat unprecedented in that you have no longer someone like Bart Ehrman who clearly is not an evangelical who stands outside of the orthodox evangelical Christian faith, who basically takes a strong position of doubt and skepticism and then in many tries just to frontly, you know contradict and undermine the scriptures.

This is very different. Here you have some people who would like to be considered evangelicals who believe they are evangelicals who are claiming to actually try to strengthen other people's faith and to uphold the trustworthiness of scripture, but they have forged this new paradigm that they call trustworthy but flawed or inadequate but still reliable. And if you and I think that's a contradiction in terms, I think what they feel like is, well, it's kinda like a marriage where both people are sinners, right, but just because they're sinful people doesn't mean they can't still have a great marriage.

*Darrell Bock*  
Mm hmm.

*Andreas Kostenberger*  
And so it appeals to this newer, younger generation that says, well, we're too sophisticated to still believe that scripture is inspired an inerrant. But we still need a foundation for our faith and we still think Jesus is great. So it's this new movement within the evangelical movement. And that's why it is particular dangerous I think and needs to be responded to.

*Darrell Bock*  
So, Michael, you put forward these blogs and are in the process of posting them. Why is this an important discussion in your mind?

*Michael Kruger*  
Well, in many ways I get these questions all the time just in my role as a professor. I know you guys do too. I mean our students are asking. And they're usually asking because their congregations are asking and the average person in the pew is asking. And so if we don't have a response to these things then our seminary students as they go out on the pulpit aren't going to know how to interact with these issues.
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The other thing I'll add to it too is part of the newness and what's happening here isn't just the retention of the evangelical label while you critique the Bible, which is sort of a weird hybrid. But also the idea of taking this to the lay audience has been sort of the turned for the last 10 or 15 years. It's been a much more popular thing. Armen certainly has done this. He sort of bypasses the academy and goes right for the laypeople in many of his works. You look at Pete Enns’ recent book, The Bible Tells Me So, written very much at a lay level, popular level. Published by Harper One; no footnotes. All designed to go for the lay level.

So the reason I thought the blog was important is because even though the three of us have written about these issues in books, the average person we know today, for better or for worse, isn't reading the books we write necessarily. They're reading blogs. They're reading the websites. We want to reach the average person, which is why I thought this series was so important.

_Darrell Bock_  Yeah. It is. Well, let's talk a little bit about teaching of the inspiration of scripture and inerrancy. And, of course, the thing you often hear about inerrancy from some people is, it's a new doctrine. It's relatively recent in its development. It doesn't reflect the views of the early church. Those kinds of things. Now if I had been really smart I would have gotten a historical theologian who majors in this to discuss this. But I think you guys are capable of handling it.

What do we do with the idea of the claim that inerrancy is new? And I think to start of this discussion I want to put on the table something that I teach in exegesis that really is important, and that is what I call the word concept fallacy. Which is that just because you don't see the word in a discussion doesn't mean that you don't have the concept on the table. And I like to illustrate it this way. This might be tough since you guys are in North Carolina. But my illustration is the cowboys are going to the frozen tundra to melt the cheese heads. And when I say this I ask my class, what am I talking about? And of course they respond, well, that's American football. And I say, "Well, how do you know that's about American football? American football is nowhere in that sentence." And of course they're able to triangulate the various linguistic clues in the topic that tell me that's what it's about.
Or another example that I'll use that's theological. The Nicene Creed never uses the word trinity explicitly in its layout. And yet it's all about the trinity. So just because you don't use a word doesn't mean you don't have a concept. So with that kind of as the background, I don't know which one of you want to speak to this first, but let's deal with the idea that inerrancy is a new concept and a new doctrine.

Well, one thing would be to start out by pointing out to, you know what you might call the self-attestation of scripture. Scripture says of itself that it is trustworthy, that it is truthful. You know you think of some psalms like Psalm 19 or Psalm 119. You think of Jesus' own statement that the scripture cannot be broken. And you think of other statements where you see that the New Testament writers, like the gospel of John, has a strong emphasis on eyewitness testimony that's truthful.

And so first thing to be said, not the last thing, would be that really, you know even in scripture itself you already see that you have this testimony that scripture can be trusted because it is the word of God.

Yeah, I think that's exactly right. I would add a couple more things. One of the things I find fascinating about those who don't like the word inerrancy and think that's new usually prefer terms like infallible. And of course, I always point out that in some sense infallible's even more stringent than inerrancy. Inerrancy just simply says the text is without error. But infallible means it's incapable of erring. And so in one sense you could point out the incontinency there.

The other response we'd make, which is a typical one, is that historically studies have shown that, in fact, it's not a new idea. It's not simply a twentieth century fundamentalist concept. It dates all the way back to, we would argue, the early church. Certainly as Andreas has pointed out, the early scriptures themselves. But I was looking just in Augustine's work recently and you look at Augustine's interaction with the synoptic gospels and dealing with the synoptic problem, he makes a number of statements that are very clearly consistent with what we could call inerrancy even though he leaves the word out. And so you could date this all the way back to the early church.
**Darrell Bock**

Now obviously there are key texts in the New Testament that address this as well, that talk about the scripture being God-breathed, to use the good very literal translation of the word that often gets translation as inspired. This is the 2 Timothy 3:16 passage. We've got the passage in Peter which talks about no prophecy comes by human generation, if I can say it that way. But is directed to an act of God.

So the trustworthiness has to do with ultimately a statement that God is responsible for the contents of scripture and thus it rests in the character of God. Inerrancy has two major concepts to it. One is the association of authorship and the divine roots of the generation of that authorship. And the second is a slightly more controversial addition and that is the qualification in the original manuscripts. This is something that gets put forward that a lot of people will raise and they will say, well, we don't have those original manuscripts so what's the point of referring to them? So let's deal with that question a little bit. How do you all respond to the idea that it's important to make a statement about original manuscripts versus say the copies of the scripture we hold in our hands?

**Michael Kruger**

Maybe I can just give a brief summary statement and let Mike elaborate a bit. But I think the important thing to point out is that we don't have the original manuscripts but we do have the original text. We have the text of scripture. And along with that, it is actually the text that is inspired. Not the ink on the parchment.

**A. Kostenberger**

Yeah. That's absolutely correct. I mean if you read Ehrman's Misquoting Jesus, he makes this argument regularly. Which is, hey, we don't have the autographs. We don't have the original copies. He almost thinks of original text as a physical object. That if you don't have the physical object, the autographs, then therefore you don't have the original text. But we would argue the original text can be preserved in other ways. So that the text can exist without the original physical copies. And as we've argued in our own book, The Heresy of Orthodoxy, and other places have done this, you know our copies are so very close to the or our reconstructed text is so very close to the original that it's really not a relevant point to suggest that we don't have the original text. In a sense we do have the original text, at least close enough for any reasonable discussion about what the original author said.
Yeah. We have so much manuscript evidence for what this text is extended over multiple copies and over multiple centuries. You sometimes get into a discussion about how far back many of those copies go. But you're dealing with a line in which you're making copies because as copies wear out you reproduce them in order to keep the text alive. You know you're before the printing press. You're before Macs and PCs. And so this is how you preserve the text is to copy them again and again and again and again. And the masses of manuscript evidence that we have in comparison to other classical pieces of literature tell us that we have the text.

I like to tell my students, our problem is we have about 105 percent of the text rather than 100 percent of the text. We've got the text plus all the variants that have come in through the process of copying and the process of text criticism is to whittle away at those options. And for a layperson for whom, you know text criticism and manuscripts is a completely different almost foreign world, even they get some access to this conversation. Cause a good Bible will oftentimes in the margin have a note that says or that tells you what the alternative is. So you know if it's not the reading that you have in the text, then the option is this thing that's sitting off in the margin that's tell you what the wording is.

So we've got access to the original text in many ways.

Yeah, the analogy I like to use is it's like having a puzzle with too many pieces. So you take a puzzle and you dump out the box and you're trying to make the picture make sense on the front. And when you're done making it you have these extra pieces left over. And that's kind of what textual criticism, as you pointed out, is. We have more than the original. And there's only certain ones that fit. Right. And you can make a good distinction between the ones that fit and the ones that don't. And that's really what the text critical task is all about.
Darrell Bock

Yeah. Another point that I like to make, I remember having a discussion when I was a doctoral student in Aberdeen with an evangelical who had come from another seminary context and he was – he held the kind of this next view if inspiration over from my own. And we were over dinner with our wives, probably not the most exciting conversation our wives have ever participated in. And I turned – we were discussing inerrancy. We were discussing original manuscripts. And I turned to him, and we both were working in Luke, Acts. And to I said to him, "When you preach in the church, do you preach manuscript D?" And he said to me, "No." And I said, "Well, why not? I mean if the statement of the original manuscripts doesn't make any sense, then why not just pick the text of Acts that you like?" And of course he came back to me and said, "Well, I don't think D is," and he, you know kind of paused. And I said, "Yeah, that's the point."

And I think sometimes we forget that when we've got a doctrine like inerrancy there actually is something we're trying to affirm that's important. And that is that when I approach the text, I approach the text with an openness and a trust that this text is accurate. That it's designed not just to affirm something but to deny something at the same time. And what it's primarily denying is the idea that the scripture errs. That when I approach it I've got to approach it with some kind of an understanding and appreciation that it – that I read it in such a way that I try and make sense of it first rather than simply assuming that it's wrong. And I think sometimes people forget that when they think about this doctrine.

Michael Kruger

And, of course, Darrell and Mike, I think the three of us are primarily focused in our scholarship on the New Testament. But I think the same could be extended to the Old Testament as well. As you know, The Dead Sea Scrolls have unearthed numerous Old Testament manuscripts such as the famous Isaiah scroll. And I think what you see is about 1,000 years prior to up to that point the earliest manuscripts, the Masoretic tradition. People were amazed how close to that tradition that the reading was. Which goes to show that the scribes took great care to preserve manuscripts because they believed this was the word of God. This was sacred scripture. And so if anything, they were scrupulous in trying to preserve their holy scriptures.
A. Kostenberger Yeah, I would add to that on the New Testament side, in my book The Question of Canon, I do this a little bit in our book, The Heresy of Orthodoxy, I go deeper into also the Christian scribal infrastructure. What does that look like? What were Christian scribes like? What evidence do we have for the way they copied the text and how scrupulous they were? And what sort of formats they used? And as we all know, there was impressive things about early Christian scribal activity that suggests a great deal of organization and uniformity. And intentional planning within the Christian scribal process. And I think that's always another layer of trust while we have the original text.

Darrell Bock Now, of course, this isn't all to suggest that there aren't issues to discuss. I mean the reason why we have these conversations and these blogs are going back and forth arguing positions pro and con is because there are issues out there. There can be an assumption that inerrancy means certain things that it may not actually mean. And therefore, some ways in which I find inerrancy gets attacked or challenged is by foisting on inerrancy a standard that itself, the scripture itself is not trying to maintain. And so people wrestle with things like the differences in parallel accounts between the gospels, the differences in details about certain kinds of events; that kind of thing.

So, Mike, let me start this kind of new direction in our conversation off this way. What were some of the kinds of specific issues that came up that your blog response has been dealing with? And let's think about them kind of in generic kinds of categories about the kinds of questions people have when you say the scripture doesn't err with regard to the original manuscripts.

A. Kostenberger Yeah. So there's several different categories here. One of the most common is the parallel passage category, right? And this particularly is true for the synoptics. Where synoptics tend to not seem to have Jesus saying the same things or doing the same things in the same order. So this is a common issue.

Darrell Bock And synoptics, of course, being Matthew, Mark and Luke.

A. Kostenberger Thank you.
So one of the issues is how the Bible squares with itself. And there's a number of those largely related to the gospel accounts. But then there's another category of objections that came up in terms of how the Bible squares to what is said in other disciplines or what is said in other historical accounts. So not just the issue of whether the Bible disagrees with itself, but does the Bible disagree with Josephus or about the census of Quirinius? Does it disagree with other thing we know about the ancient world and how things were done? And so those are two large categories of the kind of attacks that went down. The Bible disagrees with itself and the Bible disagrees with other known facts of history.

Darrell Bock

Okay, let's go through some specific examples here so we help people sort of kind of what's going on. And also create the right kinds of expectations for the types of things that the Bible is doing. One example that comes up, this goes back to an article that I did for a book called Jesus Under Fire that was entitled The Words of Jesus Live, Jive or Memorex. Memorex doesn't exist anymore so it's a faded metaphor. And of course that was a kind of tape that people recorded things on. Those of you who are under 25, just look up dictionary the word tape, and we're not talking about the type of thing that holds things together but a recording tape.

Anyway, so – and here's one of the examples that came up that I think illustrates the kind of problem that we're dealing with. I'm thinking about the confession that Peter makes at Caesarea Philippi. And he's answering the question, and in fact, even the question raises the question to some degree, who do people say that I am or who do people say the son of man is? I mean the question gets asked in two different forms to begin with. And the answer comes back, the Christ. The Christ of God. And then the Christ and then I like to embellish the Matthean version, the Son of the Living God. So you've got these three different replies that you're dealing with. And so the question becomes, you know in relationship particularly to the idea of a red letter Bible, you know Jesus said exactly this, what's going on here? So how would you explain that kind of an example to your audiences, or to your students.
**Michael Kruger**

Well, first of all, Jesus probably spoke Aramaic, not Greek. And the gospels are written down in Greek. So you have first of all a translation issue at work here. And secondly you have literary dependence between the gospels as well. You have, thirdly, different emphases made in the different gospels. And this being an oral culture I think you simply don't have the same obsession with literalist precision as we today might find. So somebody could conceivably paraphrase the Aramaic in a certain way and somebody else could paraphrase it slightly differently and both feeling they've adequately and accurately paraphrased the original statement.

**Darrell Bock**

Michael?

**A. Kostenberger**

Yeah. I tell my students all the time, you know look, do we have the actual words of Jesus? Well, depends what you mean, right? We certainly don't have them in Aramaic, as Andreas already pointed out, assuming he spoke Aramaic, which is debated. And then it's very common in ancient historiography to condense, summarize, paraphrase, and then even when you condense, summarize or paraphrase, you do it on certain terms. Like what's my audience? What part do they need to know about? What thing do I want to emphasize to the person I'm speaking to?

And so it's not just that you're doing those things. You're doing those things with a particular audience in mind. So no wonder that Matthew has is slightly different than Luke. But they're all trying to condense or paraphrase or summarize what Jesus said in some fashion. So you have a whole number of different dynamics swimming around. And when we compare this to the other historians in the ancient world this is exactly what they did. They hear a speech. They don't give you the whole speech. They summarize the speech in a statement and then put it on the lips of the person who spoke it. Doesn't mean it's inaccurate. It means that it's accurate in the way that ancient historiography was done.

**Darrell Bock**

And, of course, this particular example what I like to point out is is that what you've got going on is you've got a confession that Jesus is the Christ in all three. The gist of what is being said here is clear, particularly in light of what was said before with the prophetic categories that were mentioned by, who do people say that I am versus, you know who do you say that I am? And so you've got those kinds of different.
Another example that shows this kind of difference I like to point out happens in something as significant as the wording at the Last Supper. You've got the difference between this is the blood of the covenant versus this is the blood of the new covenant. Okay. And you go, you know the very, very literal person says, okay, what did Jesus say? And of course there's only one covenant that hasn't been established by the time Jesus is talking. The Abraham covenant's already operative. The Davidic covenant's been going for a while. It's the new covenant that was being anticipated to be realized. And so when he's talking about establishing the blood of the covenant, it's quite possible that's all Jesus said but implicit in that was the covenant that was being referred to, which was the new covenant. So someone comes along and makes explicit what's implicit. It was already there. It just wasn't on the surface. And in the process you get a difference of wording.

So those kinds of situations I think happen actually pretty regularly and can be anticipated. Michael, you look like you want to –

A. Kostenberger

I've got another example, even within early Christianity outside the New Testament of this happening. So often what would happen is patristic writers would translate the work of another patristic writer and when they translate it into another language they make explicit what they know is implicit in the original text. A good example of this is Rufinus of Aquileia who translated a lot of Origen's work from Greek into Latin. And when he did that he would often take what is implicit in Origen and make it explicit for the needs of his audience. People would accuse Rufinus of not being a good translator. But actually he did very similarly what no doubt the New Testament writers would do when they would quote people. Sometimes they would take something that's implicit and make it explicit for the sake of the audience. Nevertheless true.

Darrell Bock

Okay, well, that's one category. Let's deal with another here. And now I have in mind the sequence of the three temptations. Which is another good example of a different sort. I'll let one of you explain the nature of the problem and then I'll let either one of you discuss how you deal with that one. Who wants to take on the temptations of Jesus?

A. Kostenberger

Andreas?
Michael Kruger  We have in Matthew 4 and Luke 4 both an account of Jesus' temptation. There's a shorter version, of course, in Mark. Just very, very quickly in keeping with Mark's brevity. But both in Matthew and Luke you have a more extensive, you know you might almost say blow by blow account where you have a series of three temptations. And if memory serves, either the first temptation is the same in both but Matthew and Luke reverse the order of temptations numbers two and three. Luke concluding with the familiar temptation of Jesus throwing himself down from the template and many believe, well, I'll let Mike explain how interpreters deal with this.

A. Kostenberger  Yeah, I think where Andreas was headed with that, and of course, Darrell knows better than anybody being the Lukan scholar, is people think that Luke rearranged the temple at the end because of his focus on the temple and other aspects of his gospel. And this is a good example, again, of how theological concerns can also dictate the way history is presented. It doesn't dictate whether history's true or accurate. It's not that Luke was making something up. But you present history in such a way to address the theological needs of your audience and the theological needs you have. And that's one of the explanations for that particular order.

Regardless, you know it's a great reminder that chronological order is in principle not something the gospel authors always felt the need to follow. I mean one of the perennial examples of this, which probably you're headed to, Darrell, is the issue of the cleansing of the temple. Right?

Darrell Bock  Mm hmm.

A. Kostenberger  In the synoptics versus John. Which is another example of, potentially at least, chronological order issue. And there's a number of other examples.
Darrell Bock

Yeah, and, in fact, I like to say, how many sporting event reports being that read, begin with the way in which the tip off happened or the kick off happened and then proceed in chronological sequence through the story of the game? We actually do this today in our own historical writing. We just don't think about it very much. Usually when I pick up a story of an event, the key play is usually at the front end or some key part of the game, and then at some point we go back in and either review, sometimes in sequence, sometimes out of sequence, what happened in the game. In some cases the choice is made that something happened or its relationship to something else is more than talking about the chronological sequence in which it happened. And we allow historians today to make those choices. We ought to allow ancient historians to make those choices as well.