

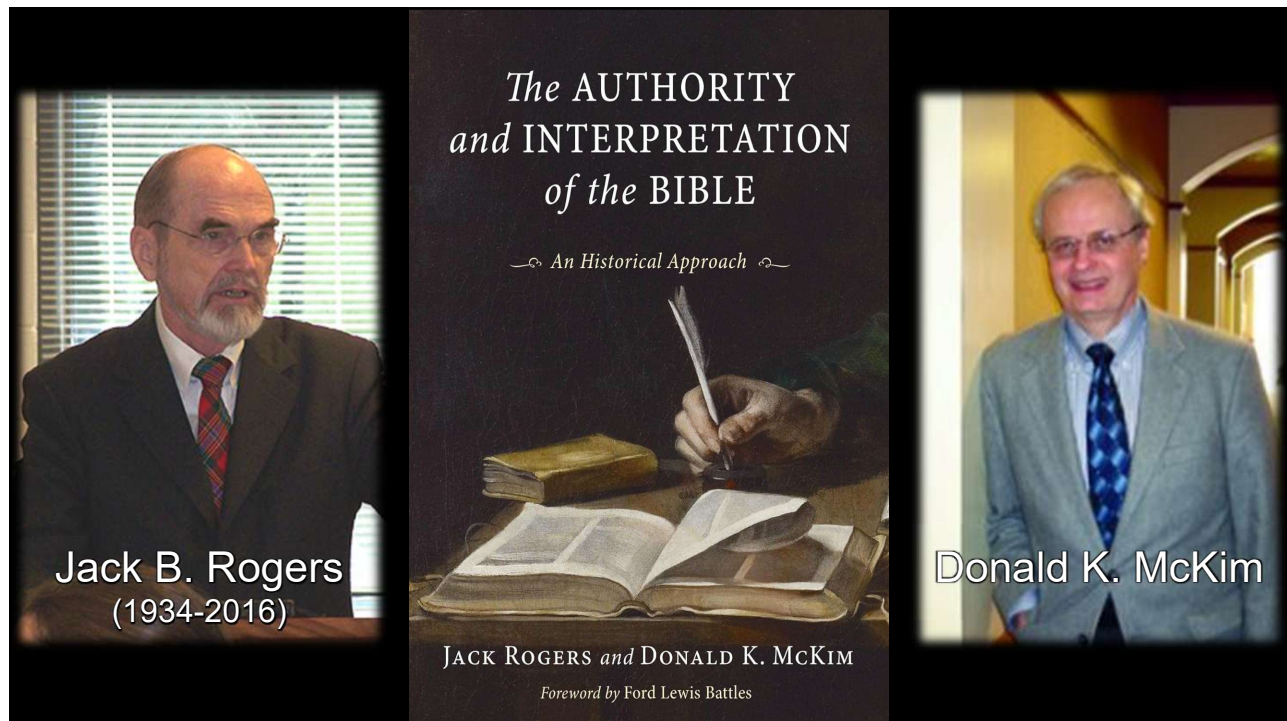
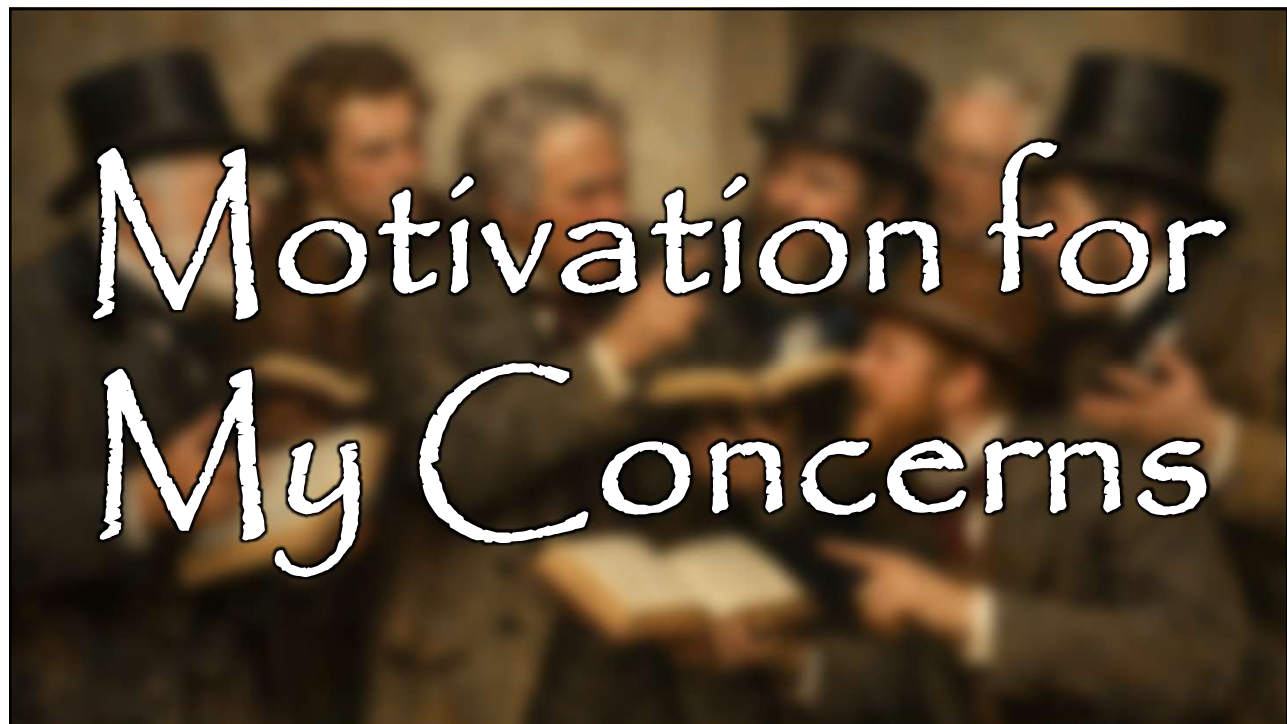


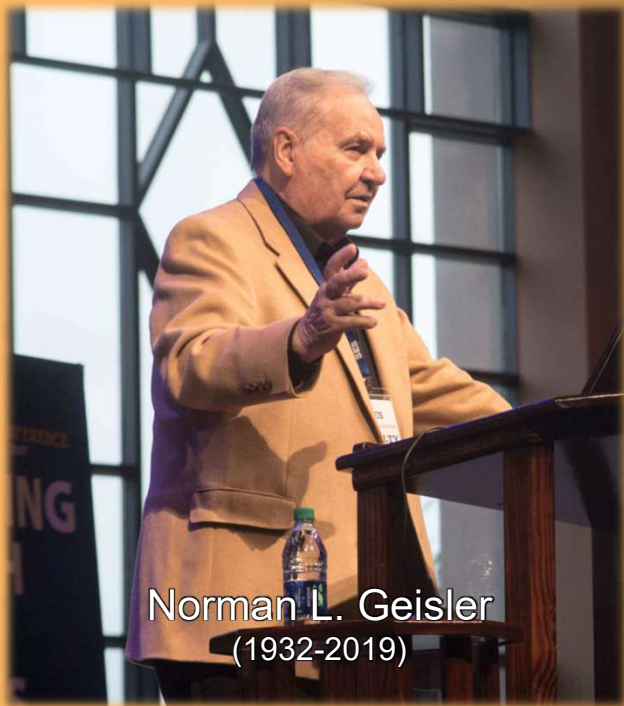
The Concept of Truth in the Inerrancy Debate, Revisited

Richard G. Howe, Ph.D.

Provost

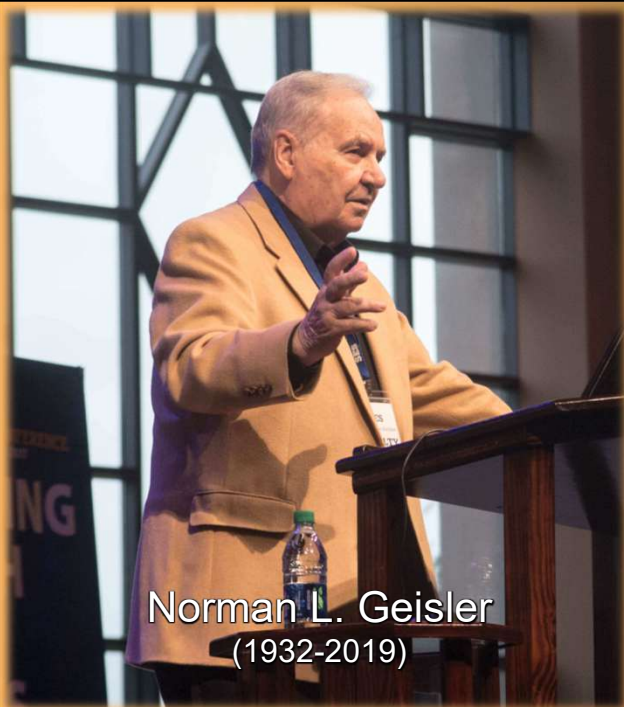
Norman L. Geisler Chair of Christian Apologetics
Professor of Philosophy and Apologetics
Southern Evangelical Seminary
Rock Hill, South Carolina, USA





Norman L. Geisler
(1932-2019)

*It was evident to Norman Geisler back in the 70s that the main problem with Rogers and McKim's position on the inerrancy of the Bible was the issue the **concept of truth**.*

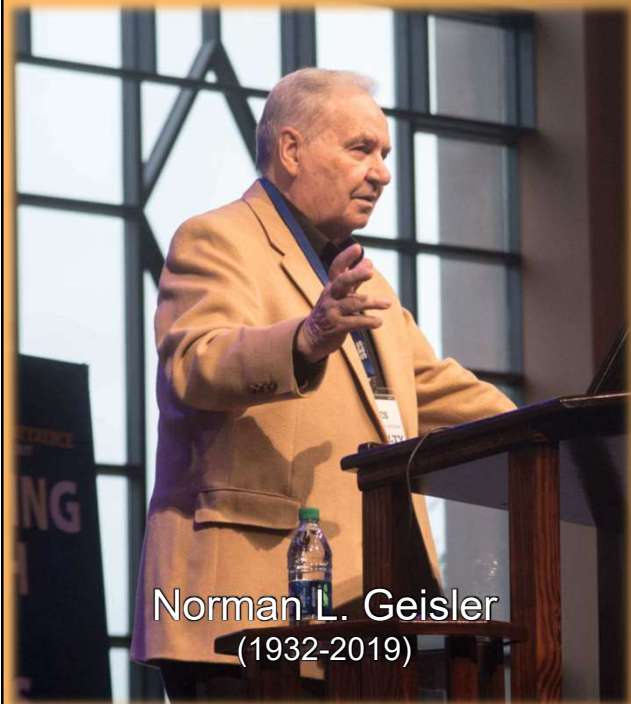


Norman L. Geisler
(1932-2019)



Bibliotheca Sacra

A Theological Quarterly Published by Dallas Theological Seminary



Norman L. Geisler
(1932-2019)

The Concept of Truth in the Inerrancy Debate

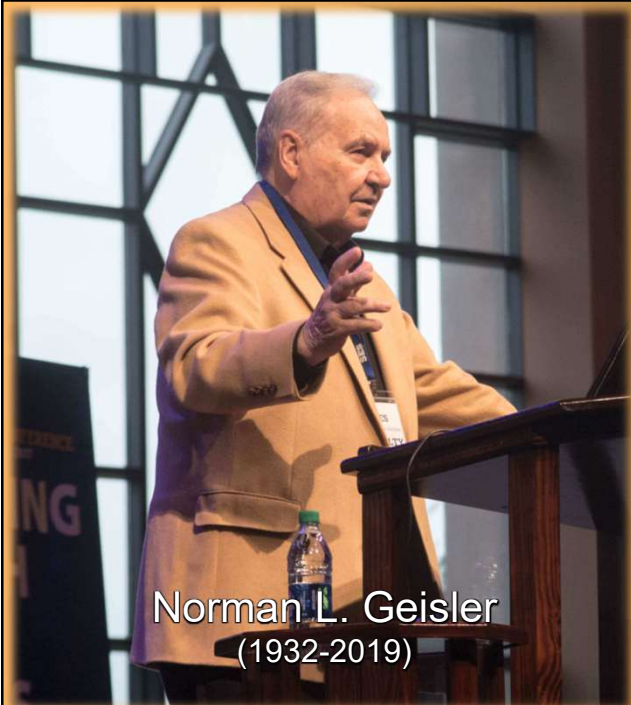
Norman L. Geisler

How is it that evangelicals on both sides of the inerrancy debate can claim the Bible is wholly true and yet one side believes that there can be minor mistakes of history or science affirmed by the biblical authors,¹ while the other side denies that there are any mistakes whatsoever? Some even claim to believe in inerrancy to the point that every word of the Bible is true,² and yet they hold that Jesus' statement that the mustard seed is the "smallest of all seeds" is scientifically incorrect.³ Some claim that the Bible is "the only infallible rule of faith and practice"⁴ but hold that Paul was wrong when he affirmed that the husband is the "head" of the wife.⁵ One errantist put it bluntly when he wrote, "We can speak of the Bible as being inspired from cover to cover, human mistakes and all."⁶

Is this duplicity? Are those who believe the Bible contains errors intentionally deceiving their constituency? Do they hold a double standard of truth? As a matter of fact, it is not necessary to come to any of these conclusions. Errantists do not hold a double standard but rather a different theory of truth.

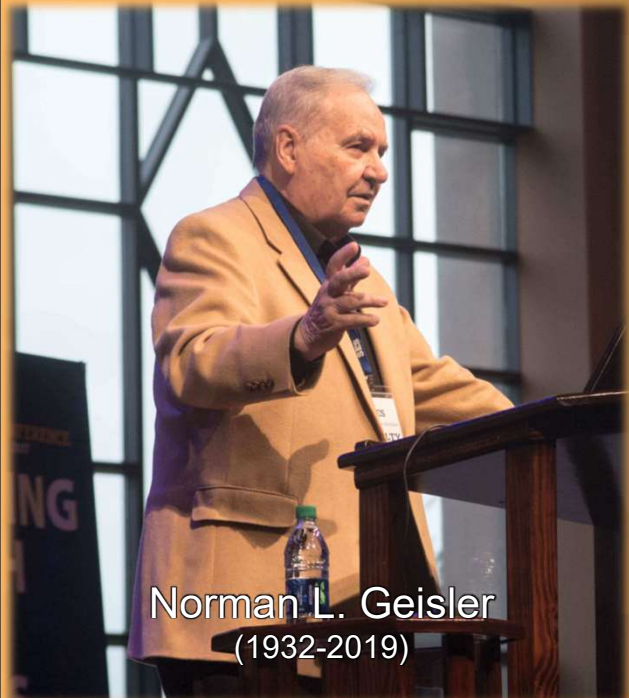
Could it be, then, that the real problem is that a fundamental issue that occasions the difference between the two major camps of evangelicals on biblical inerrancy is that they are presupposing different theories of truth? This writer proposes that this is indeed the case. One thing is certain: Different theories of truth will make a significant difference in what one considers to be an "error," or deviation from the truth. In fact, what counts as an

327



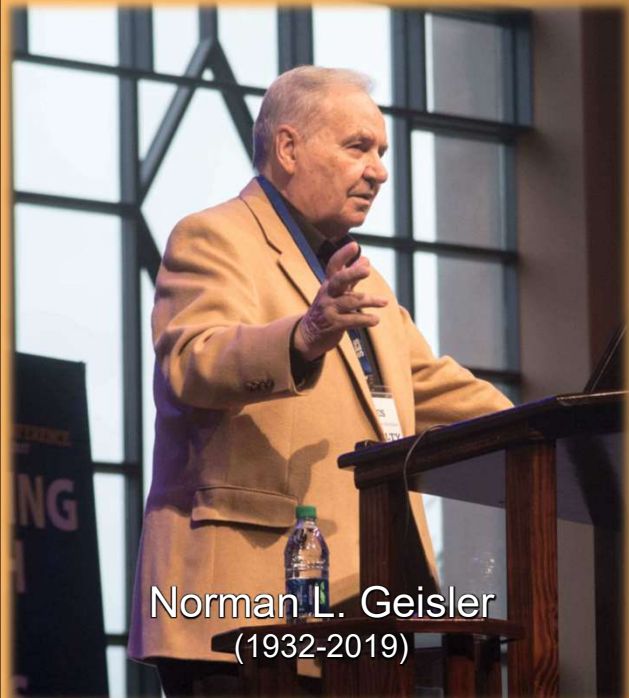
Norman L. Geisler
(1932-2019)

In this weighty article, Geisler contrasts Rogers and McKim's functional concept (or theory) of truth with the correspondence theory of truth.

A photograph of Norman L. Geisler, an older man with grey hair, wearing a tan jacket over a blue shirt. He is standing at a wooden podium, gesturing with his right hand while speaking. A water bottle is on the podium. The background shows a large window with a geometric pattern.

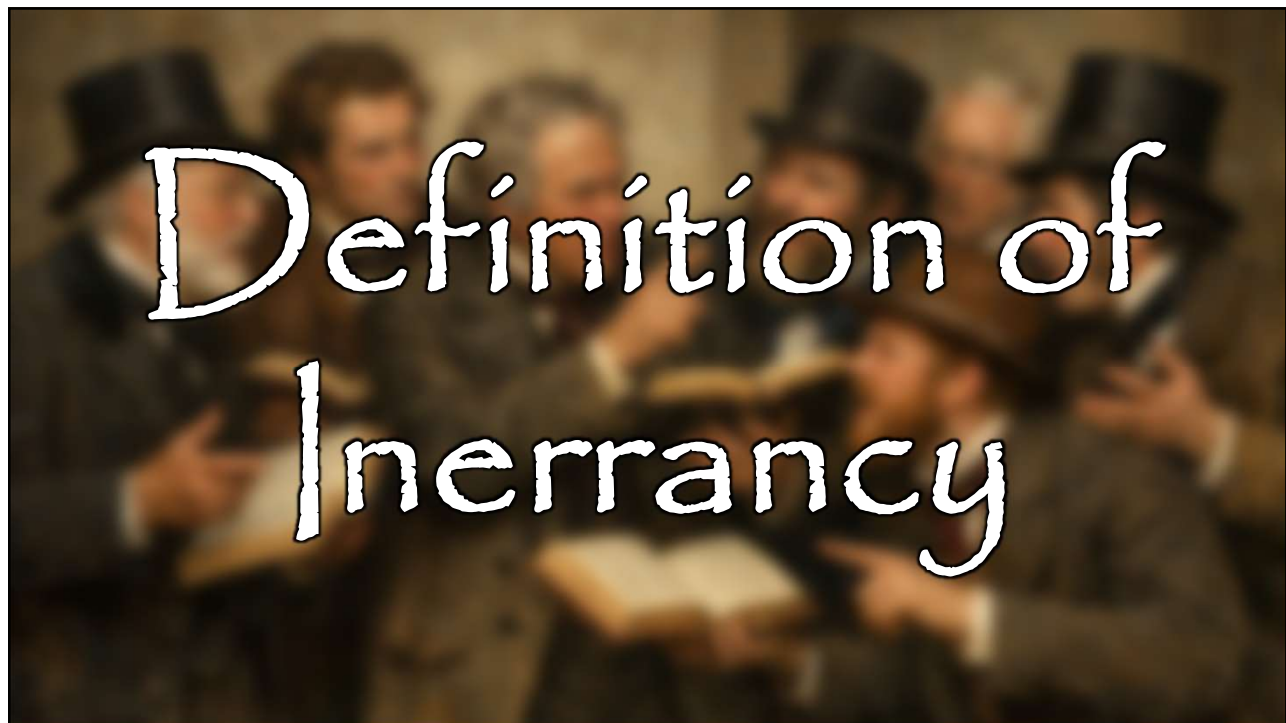
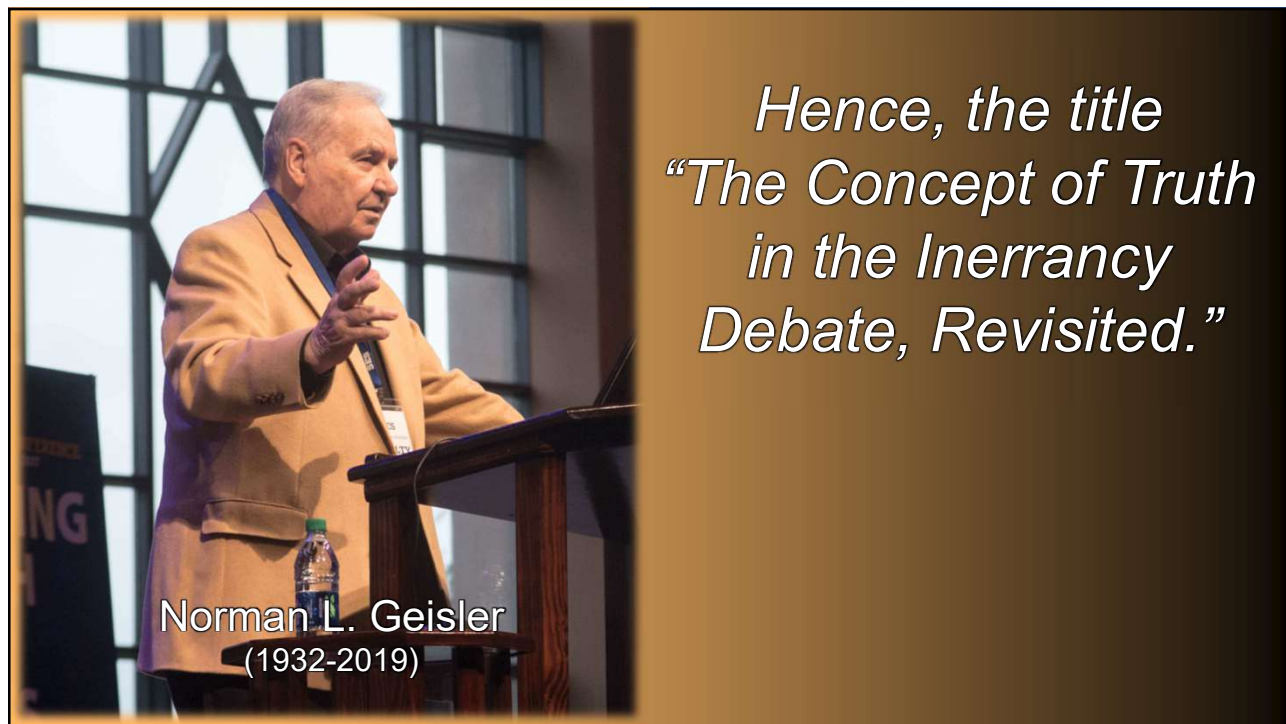
Norman L. Geisler
(1932-2019)

*In this weighty article, Geisler contrasts Rogers and McKim's **functional concept of truth** with the **correspondence theory of truth**.*

A photograph of Norman L. Geisler, an older man with grey hair, wearing a tan jacket over a blue shirt. He is standing at a wooden podium, gesturing with his right hand while speaking. A water bottle is on the podium. The background shows a large window with a geometric pattern.

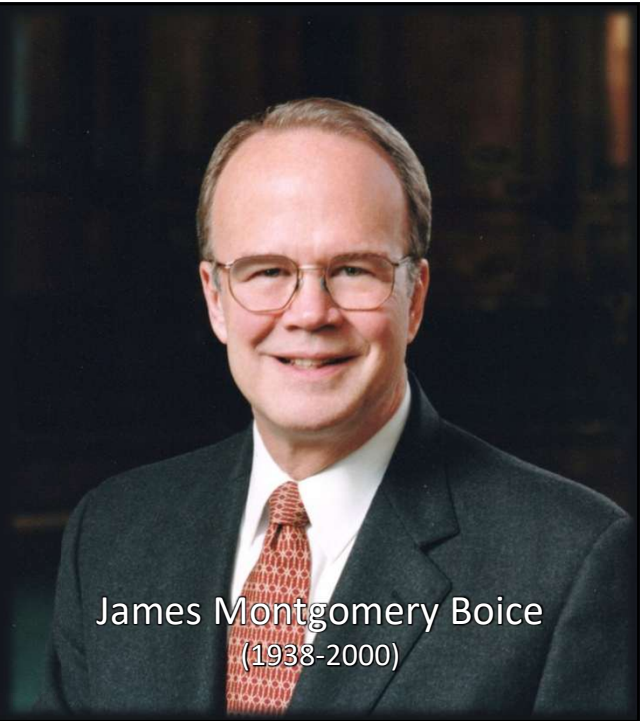
Norman L. Geisler
(1932-2019)

I became interested in whether and how the concept of truth might figure into several current debates regarding biblical inerrancy.



***"What
Scripture says,
God says—
through human
agents and
without **error**."***

[Adapted from James Montgomery Boice, *Does Inerrancy Matter?*
(Oakland, CA: International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, 1979)]



James Montgomery Boice
(1938-2000)

**One cannot know whether
the Bible is without**

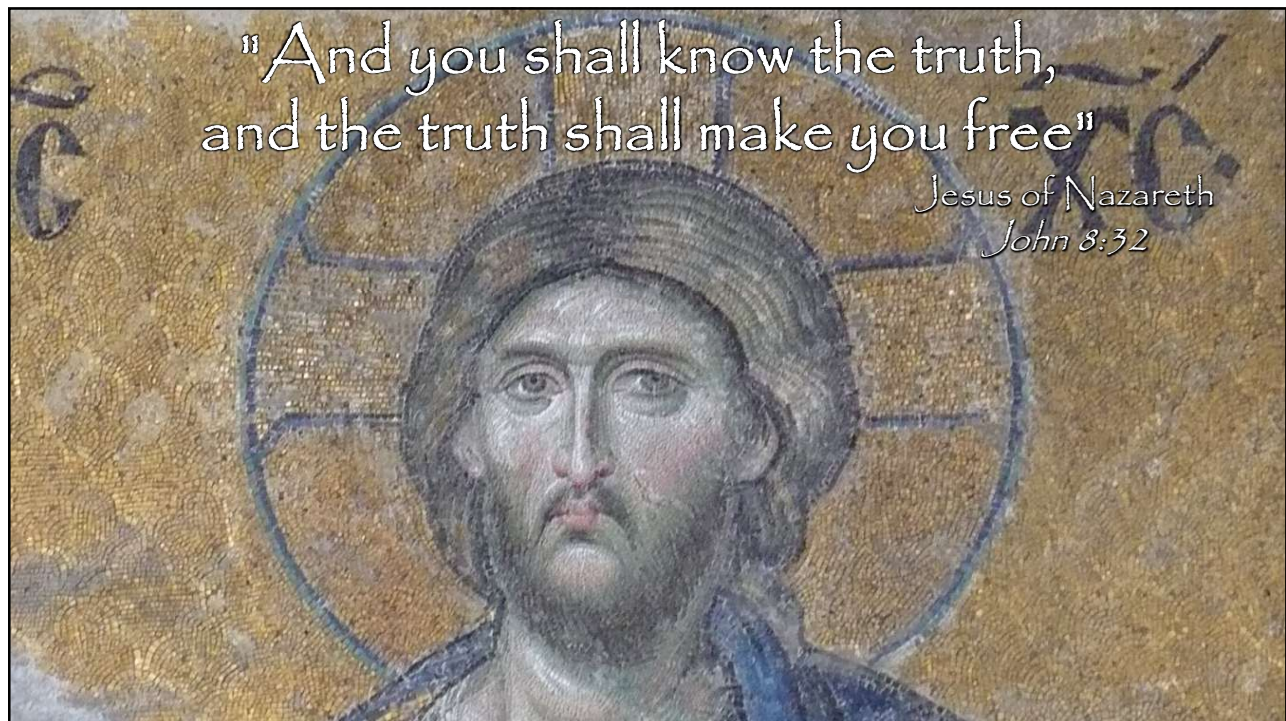
error

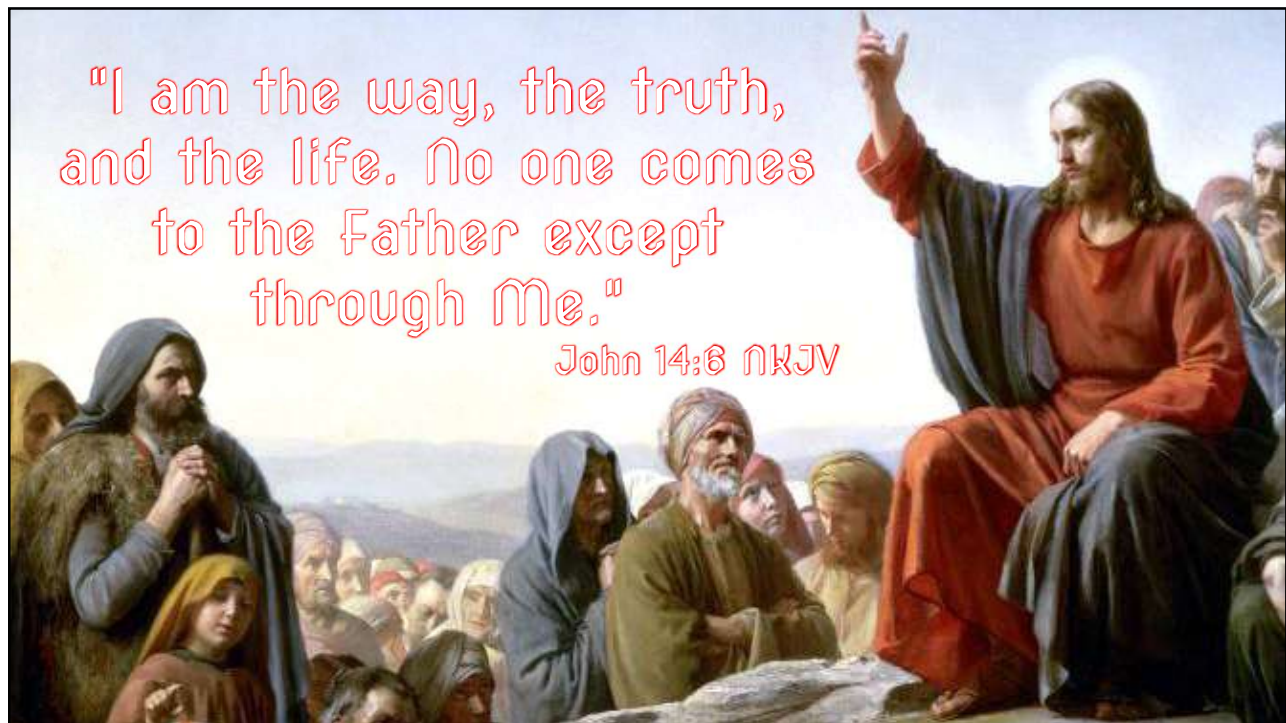
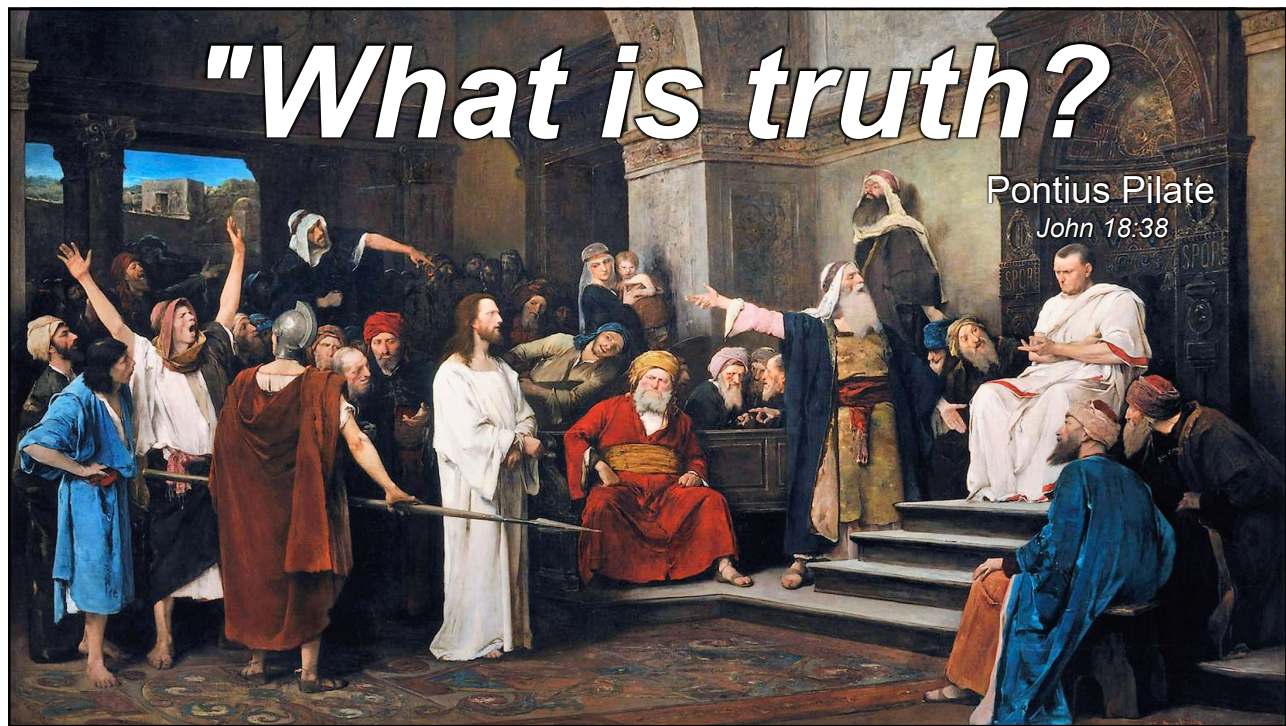
**until one knows
what an error is**

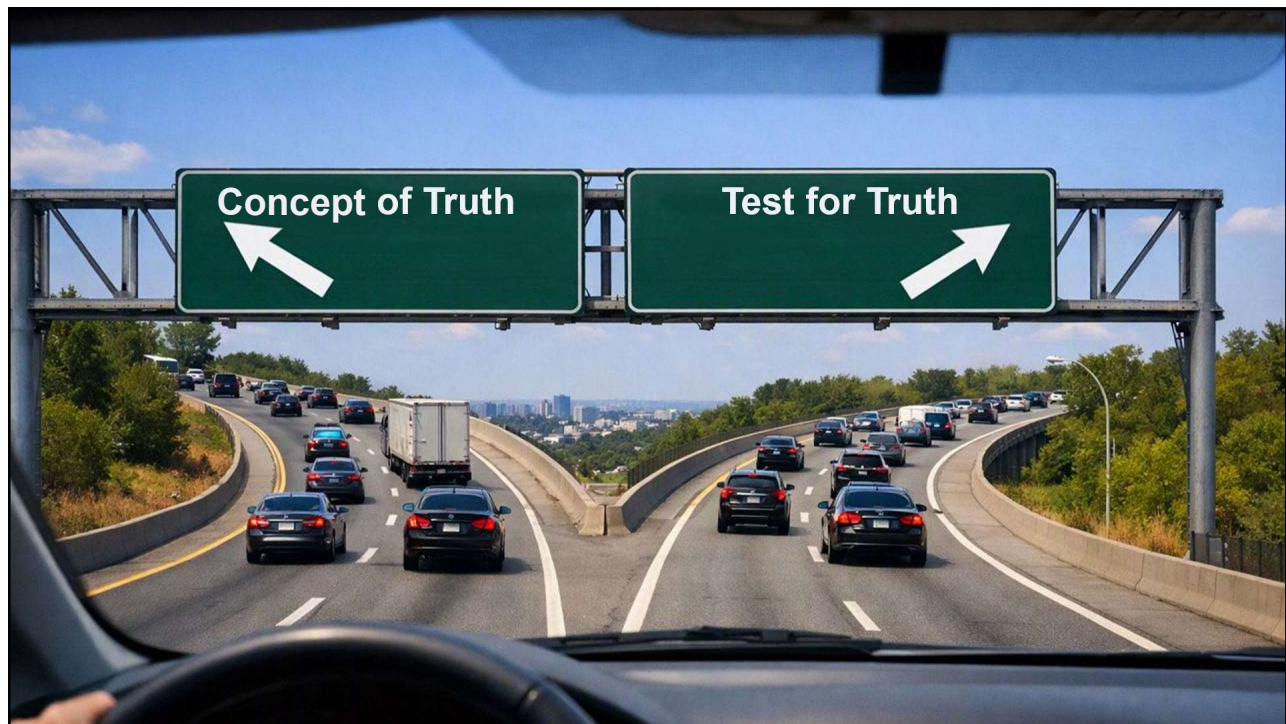
But one cannot
know what an

until one
knows what

error → ***truth***
is is





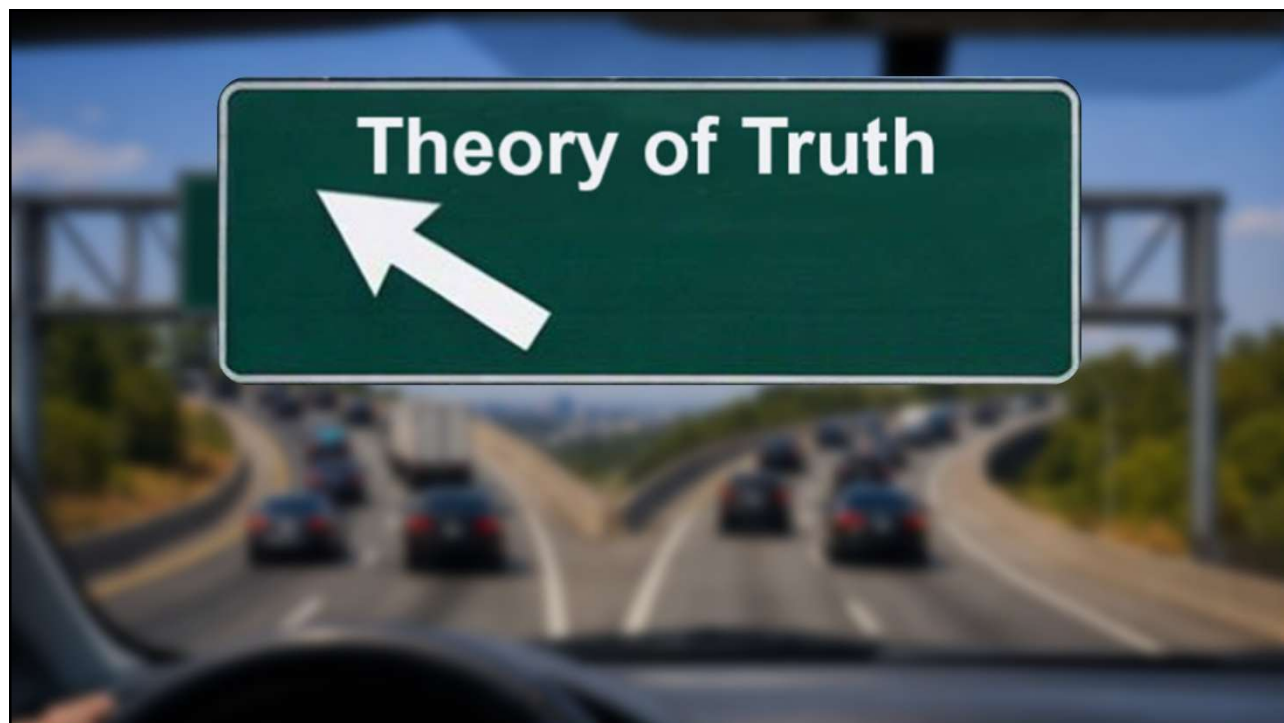
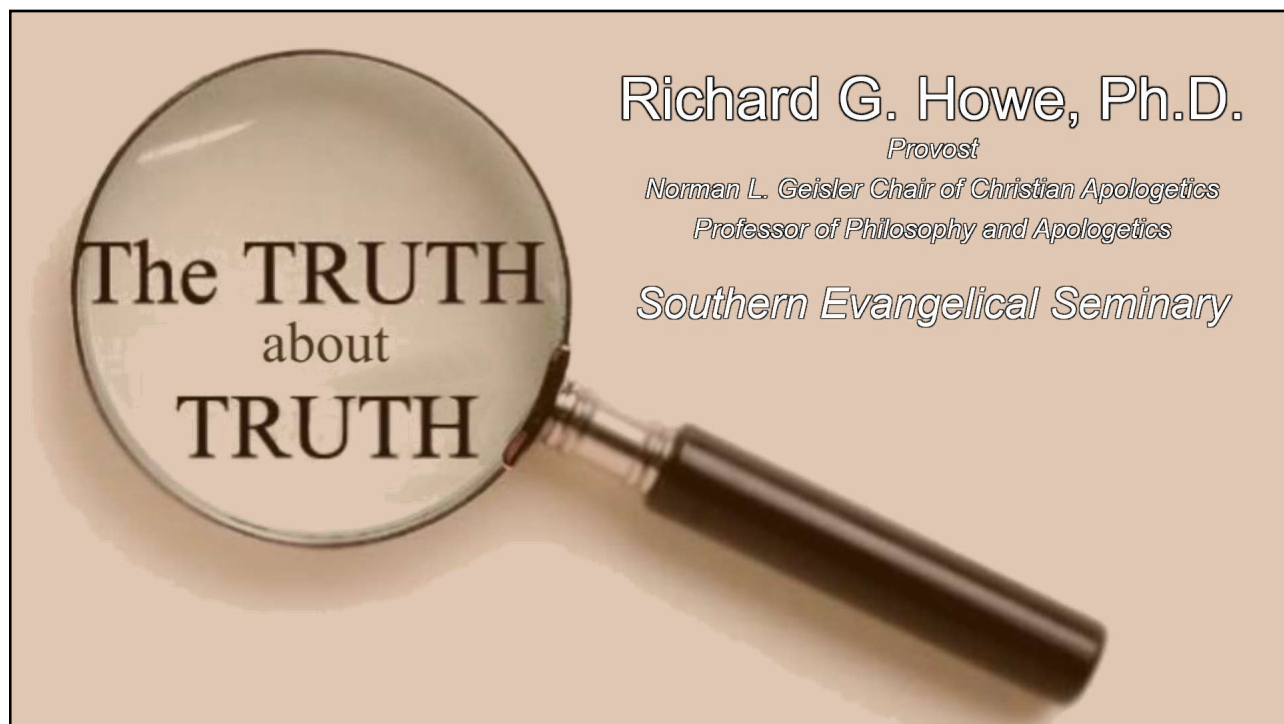


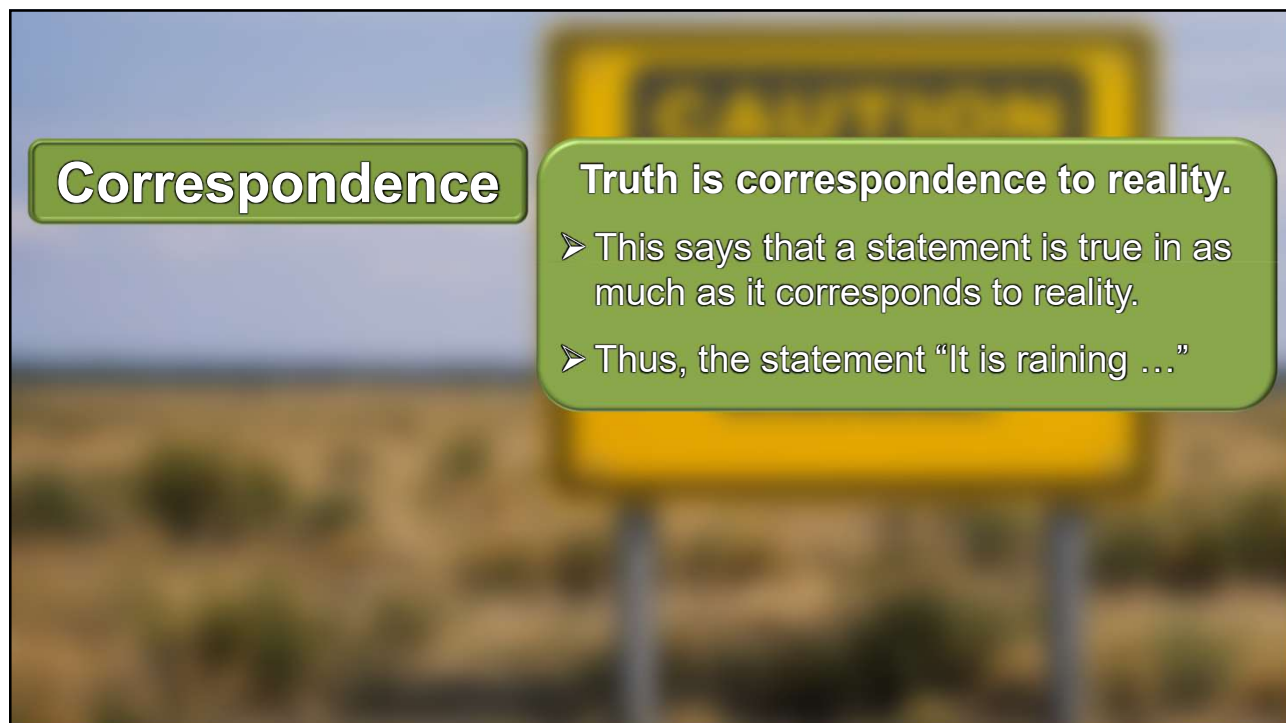
∞ Theory of Truth ∞

*how one **defines** the terms 'true' and 'truth' when saying that a statement is true*

∞ Test for Truth ∞

*how one **discovers** whether a statement is true, regardless of one's theory of truth*





'It is raining'

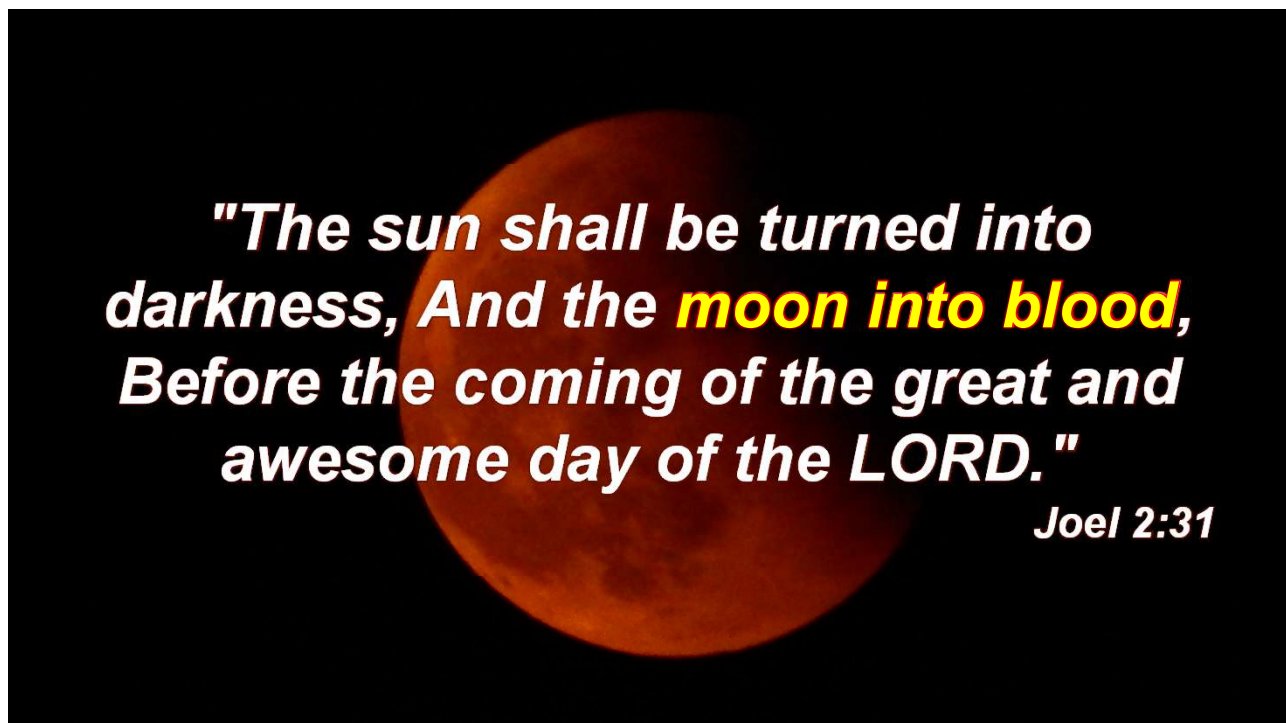
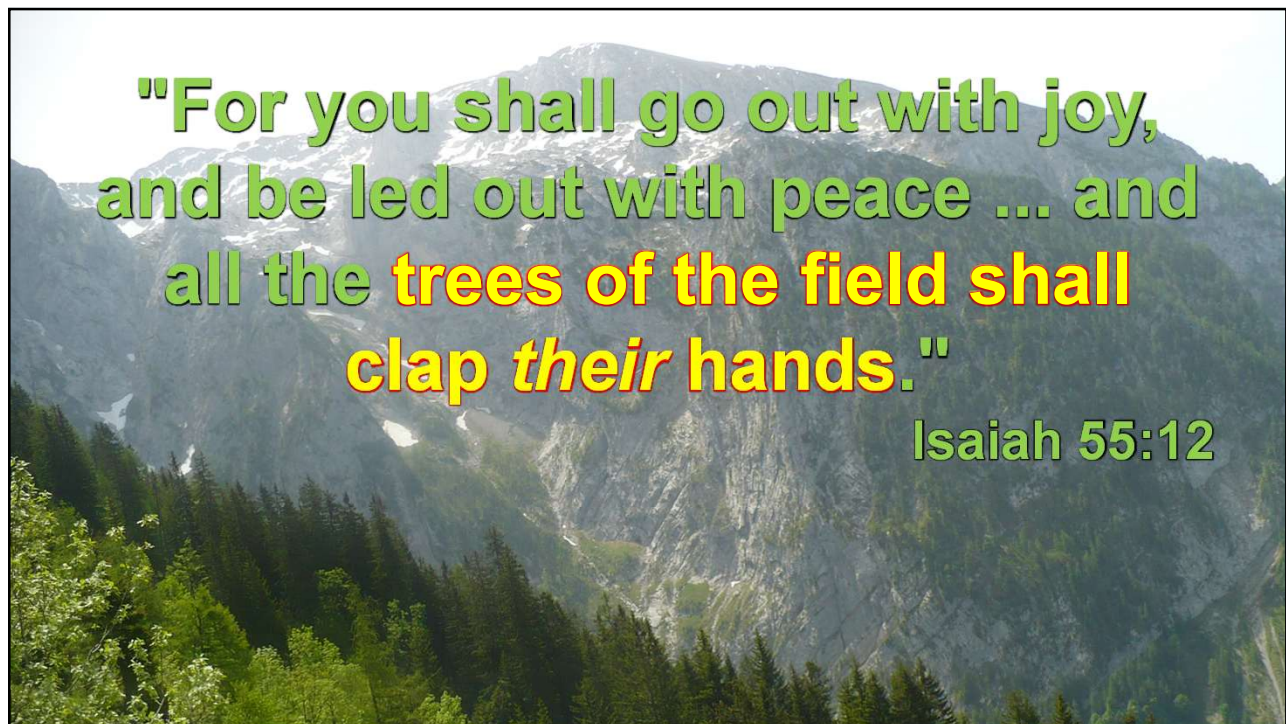
would be a true
statement if it is in
fact raining
in reality.



'It is raining'

would be a false
statement if it is in
fact not raining
in reality.



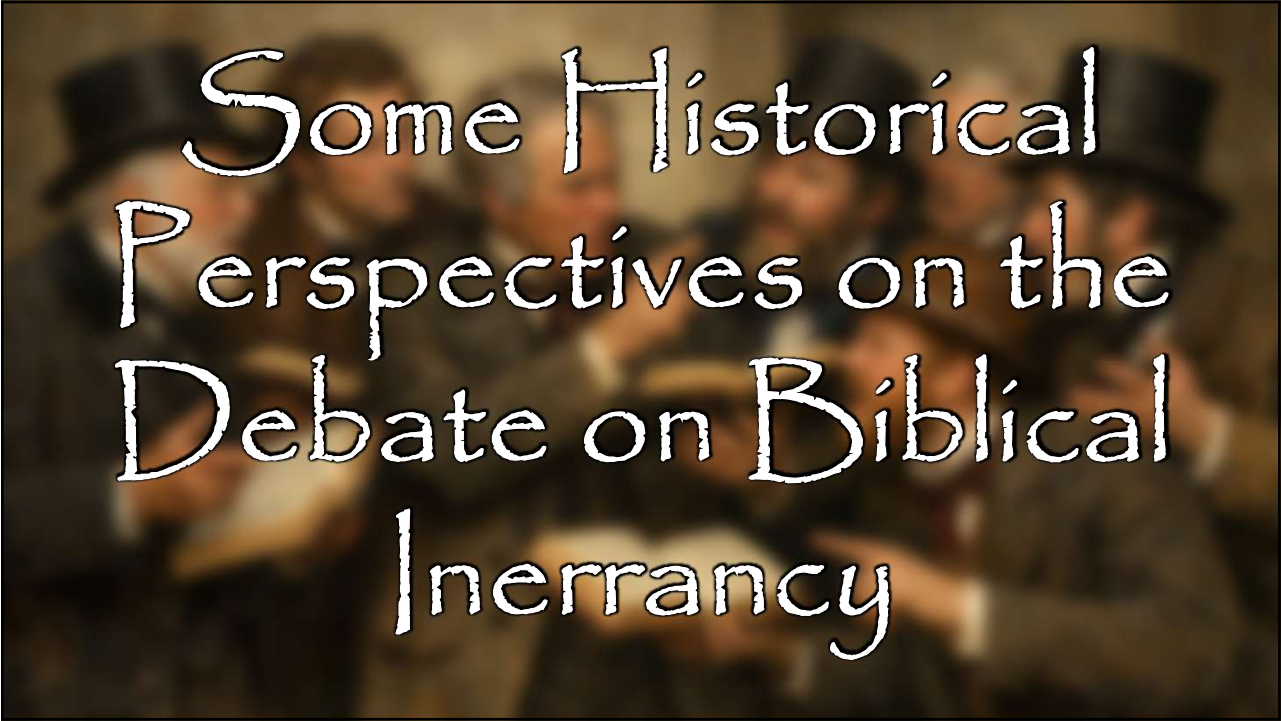


Ways a Proposition Can Correspond to Reality

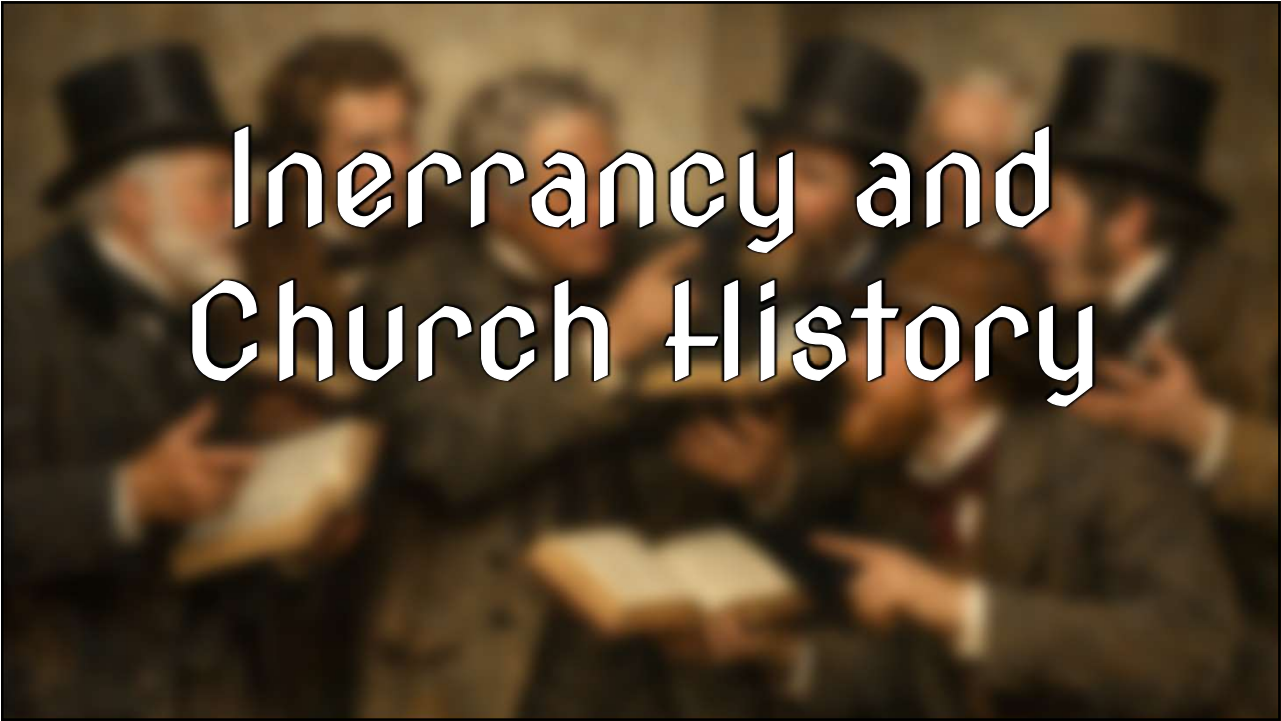


Test for Truth

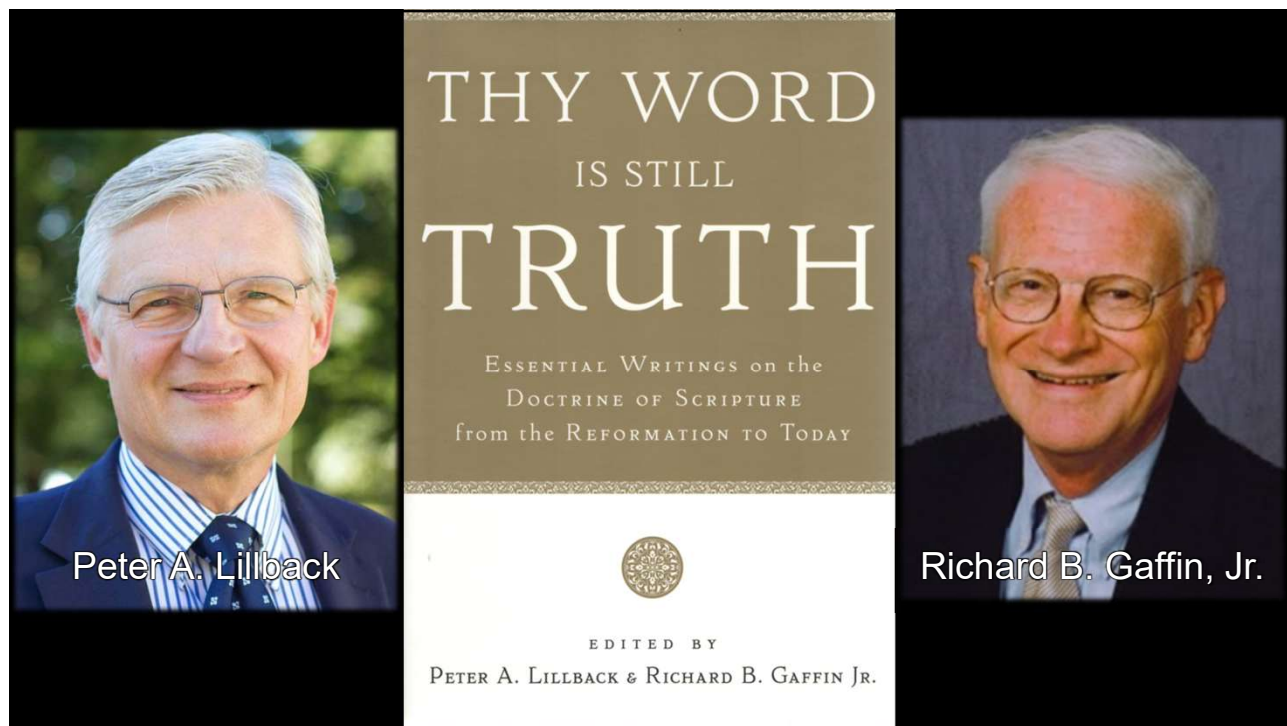


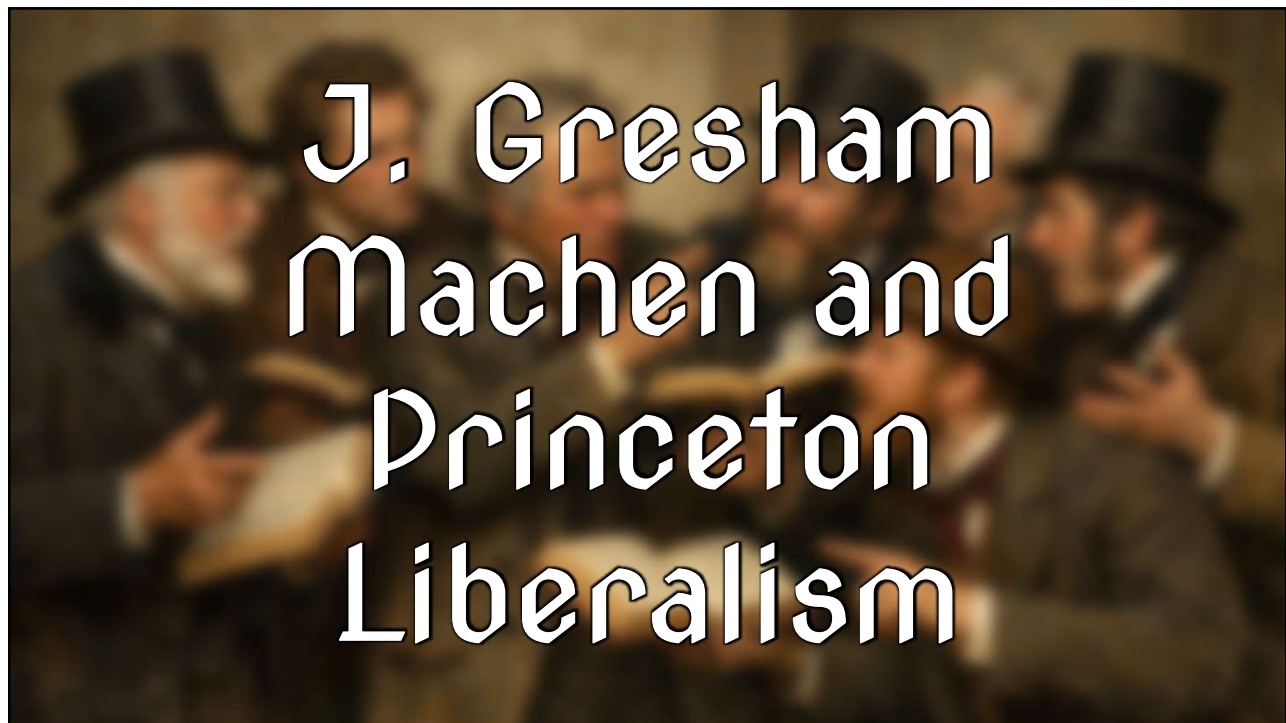


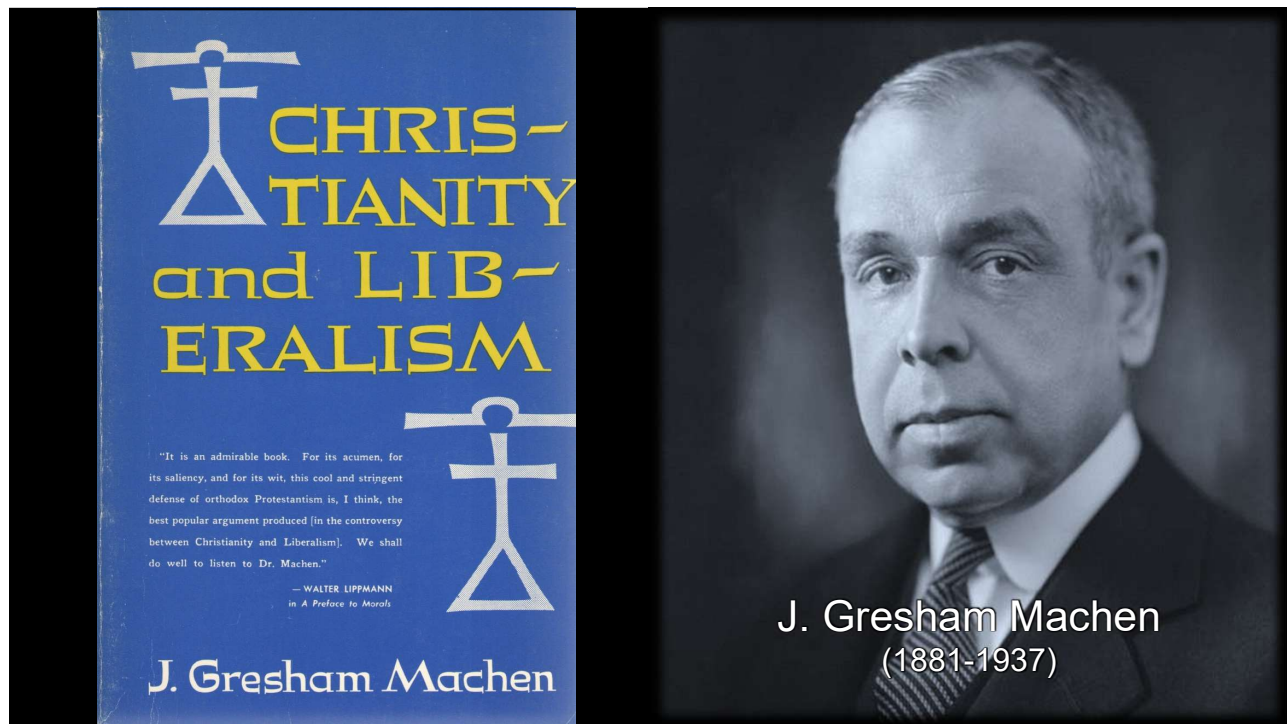
Some Historical Perspectives on the Debate on Biblical Inerrancy

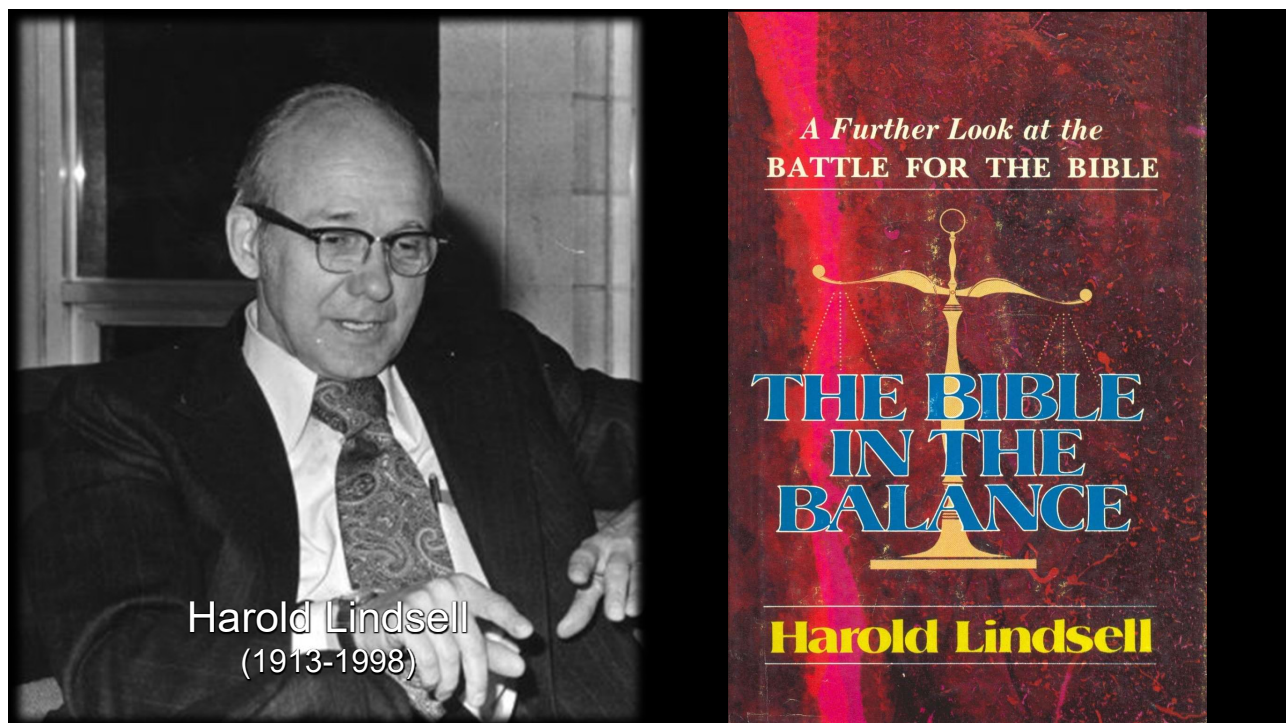
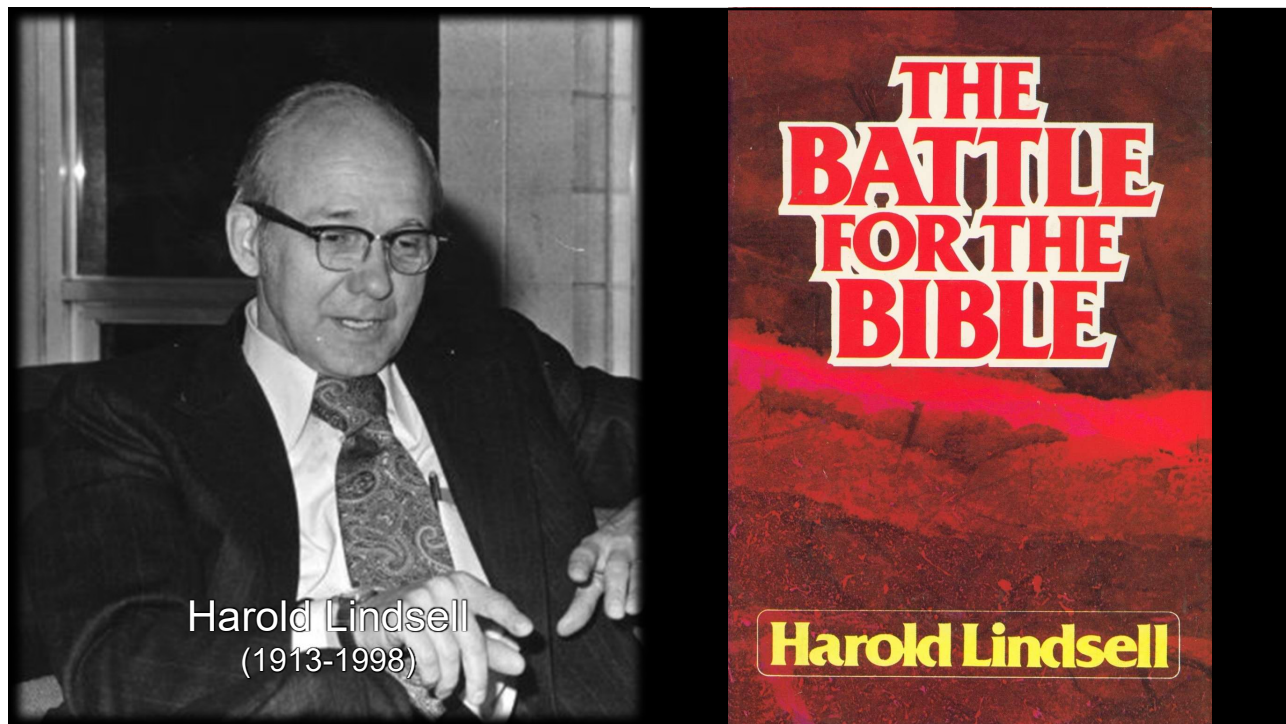


Inerrancy and Church History





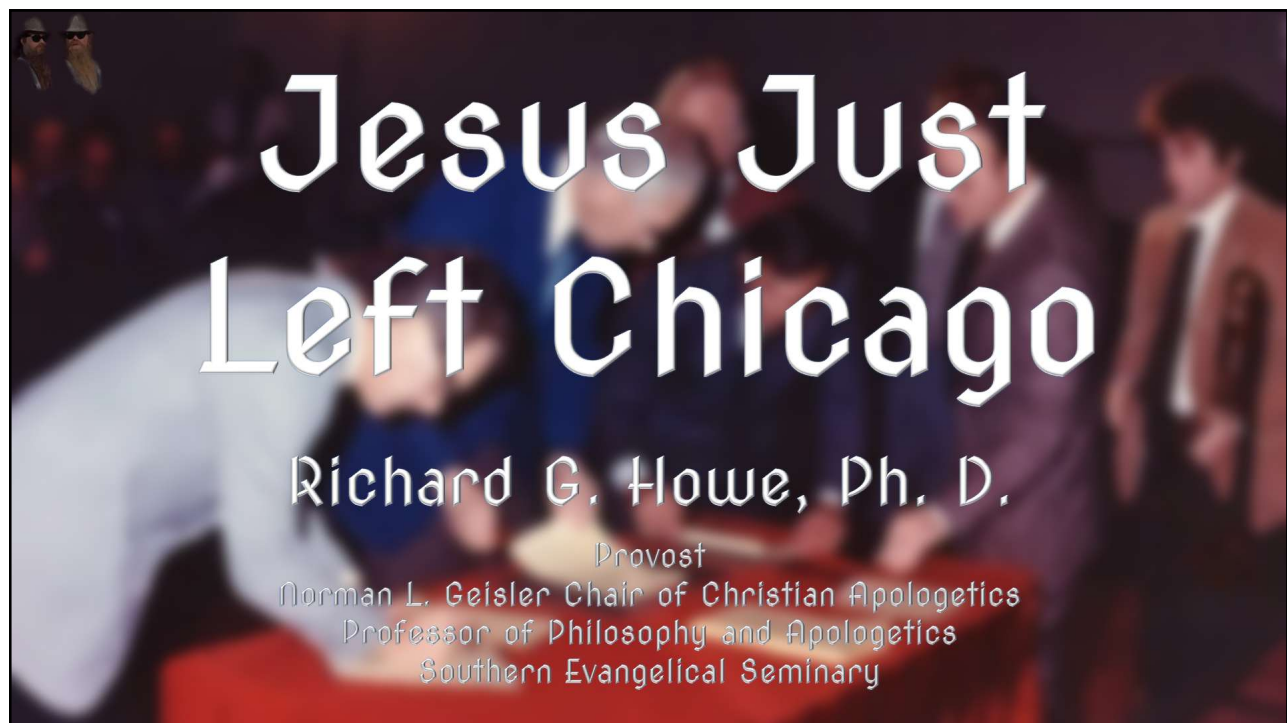




The International Council on Biblical Inerrancy

The Chicago Statement
on Biblical Inerrancy





Mike Licona · Jun 2, 2014 · 23 min read

ON CHICAGO'S MUDDY WATERS



Mike Licona (June 2, 2014)

Many of us have had the driving experience of moving along peacefully when we become startled by the sudden appearance of flashing blue lights in our rear-view mirror. We pulled over to the side of the road and waited for the police officer to approach our car and inform us what law we had just broken. We wondered, "How much is this ticket going to cost me? Am I going to get any points on my driving record that will result in a higher auto insurance premium?"

Of recent, some having an overly wooden view of what an inerrant Bible should look like

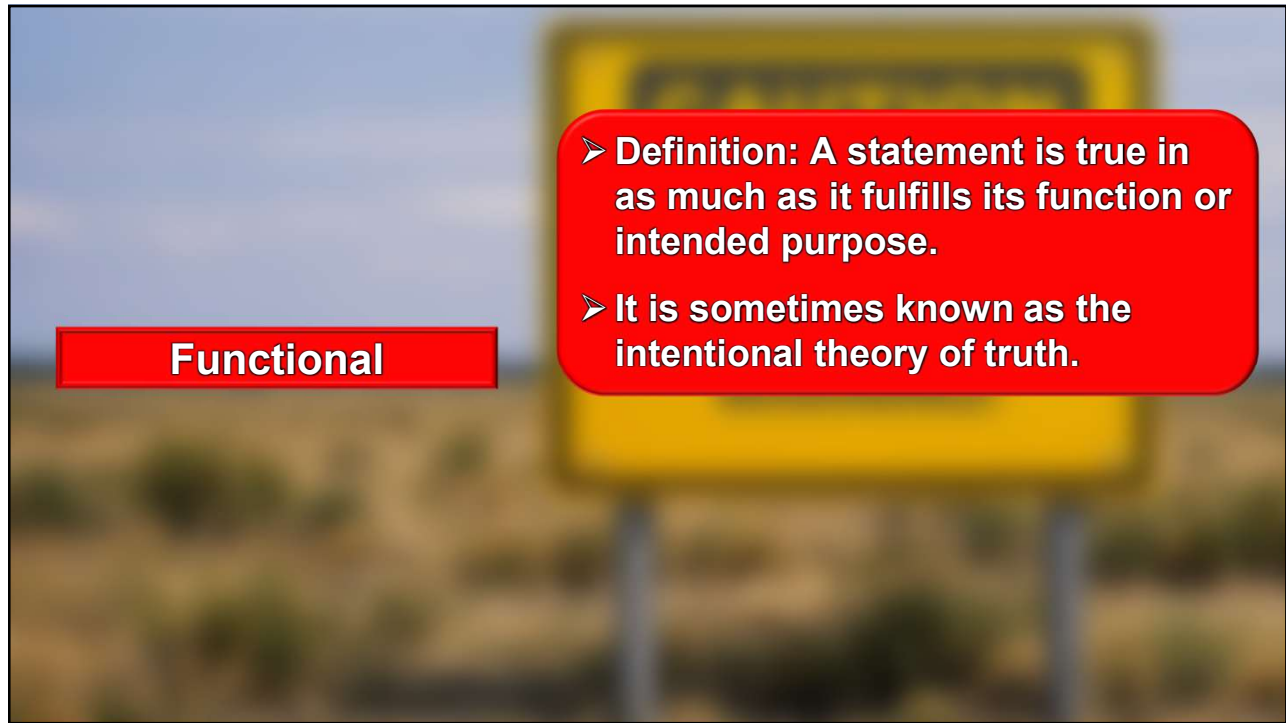
Mike Licona · May 1, 2024 · 1 min read

CHICAGO STATEMENT ON BIBLICAL INERRANCY NEEDS A FACELIFT



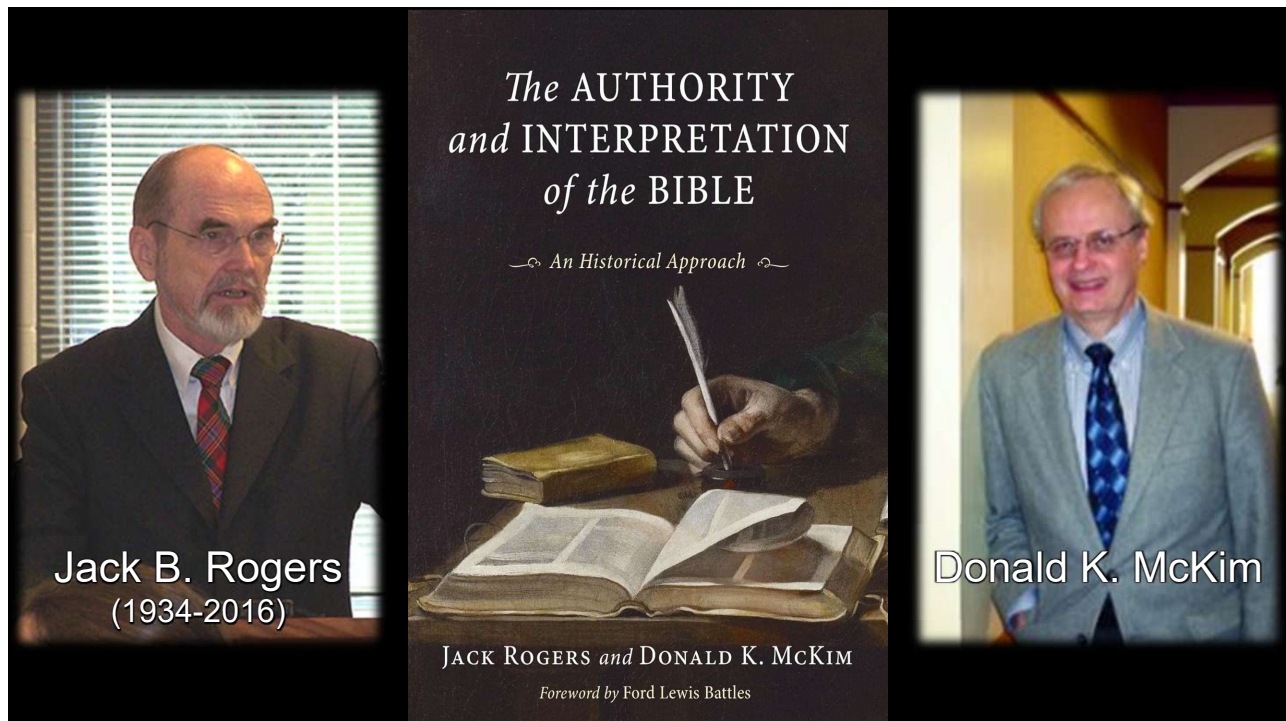
At the 2023 Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, I read a paper titled *The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy Needs a Facelift*. The paper was well-attended and was followed by a period of thoughtful Q&A. I'm making my paper public, due to having received many requests for it.





Functional

- **Definition: A statement is true in as much as it fulfills its function or intended purpose.**
- **It is sometimes known as the intentional theory of truth.**



*The AUTHORITY
and INTERPRETATION
of the BIBLE*

— An Historical Approach —

Jack B. Rogers
(1934-2016)

Donald K. McKim

JACK ROGERS and DONALD K. MCKIM
Foreword by Ford Lewis Battles



Jack B. Rogers
(1934-2016)

*"For early Christian teachers, Scripture was wholly authoritative as a **means** of bringing people to salvation ... interpretation of the Bible was influenced by the understanding of its saving **purpose**."*

[Jack B. Rogers and Donald K. McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), 458-459]



Donald K. McKim

*"The foundation of the doctrine of Scripture in the early church needs to be recovered. For early Christian teachers, Scripture was wholly authoritative as a **means** of bringing people to salvation and guiding them in the life of faith. ... The interpretation of the Bible was influenced by the understanding of its saving **purpose**."*

Notice how Rogers and McKim describe the nature of biblical authority in functional terms.

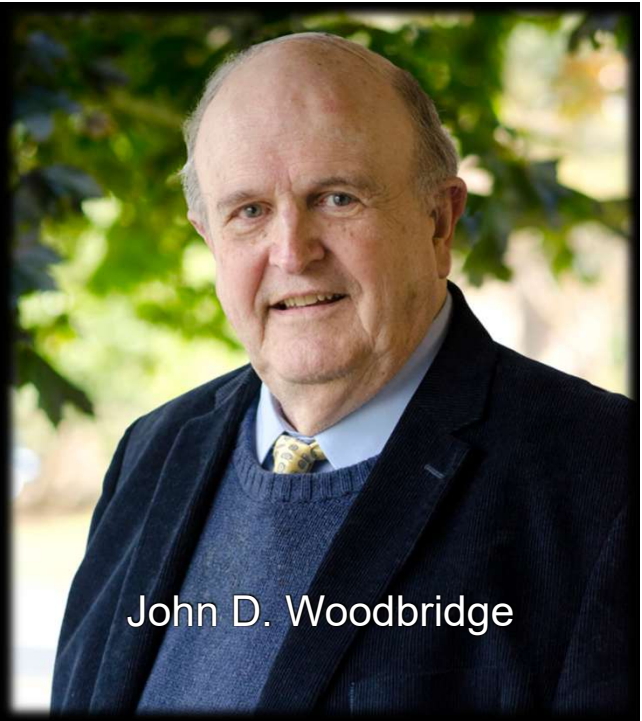
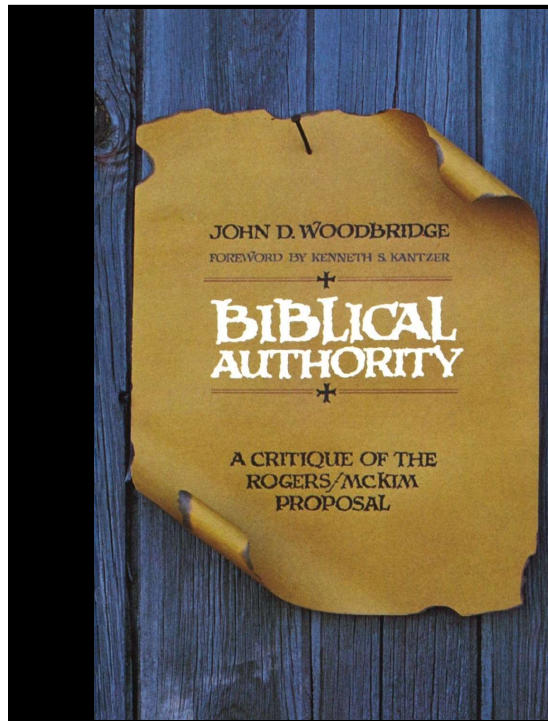
For them, biblical authority resides in the Bible as a "means" and in terms of its "purpose."

They denigrate any characterization of biblical authority in terms of the Bible telling the truth as correspondence to reality.



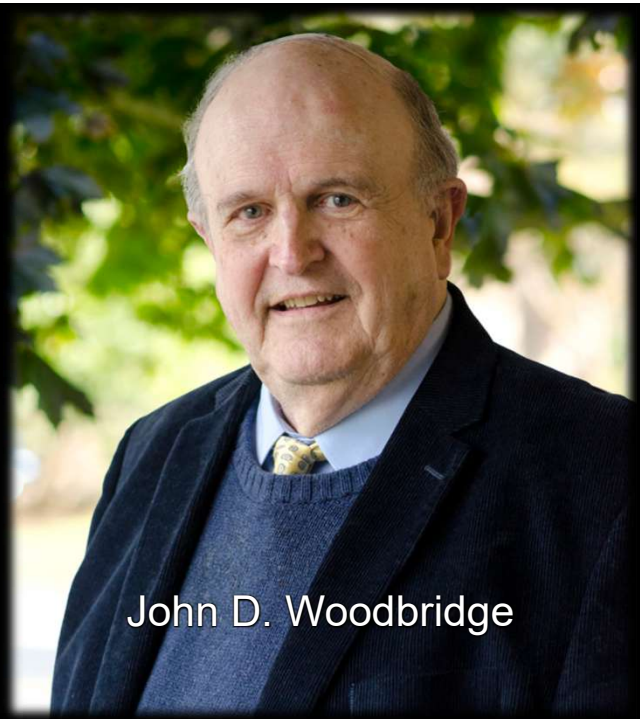
🌀 Two Problems 🌀

- 1. How confident can one be in deciding which facts are essential to that end or purpose?*



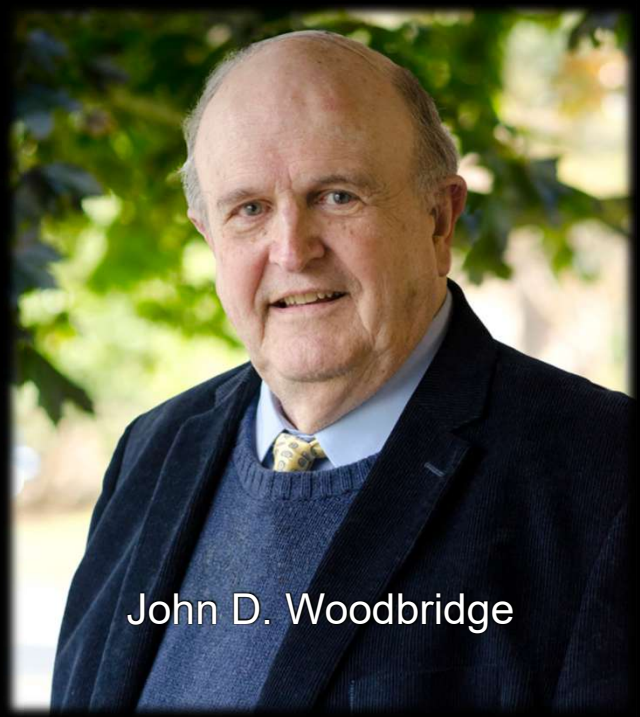
John D. Woodbridge

"Although Rogers and McKim's volume bears the title The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach, we discovered that their real interests were actually quite narrow and apologetic."



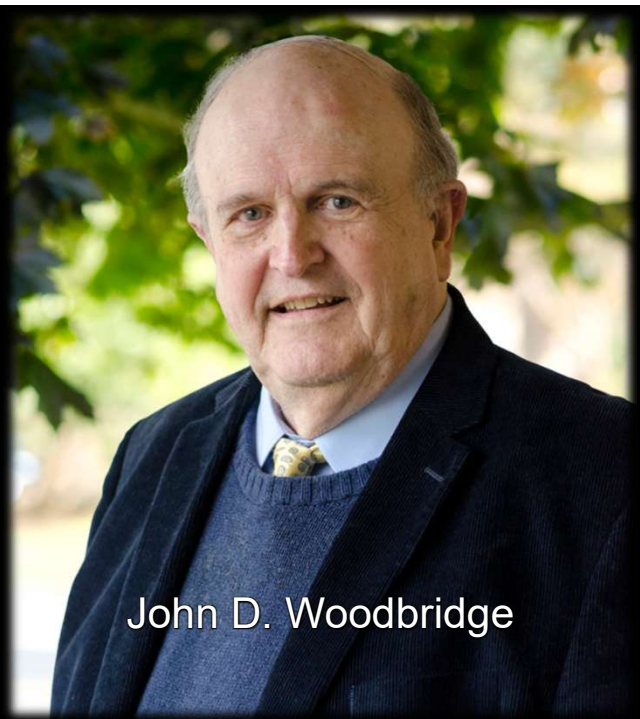
John D. Woodbridge

"They wanted to baptize as staunchly evangelical the hypothesis that the Bible is infallible for matters of faith and practice but subject to 'technical mistakes' in science, history, and the like. ...



John D. Woodbridge

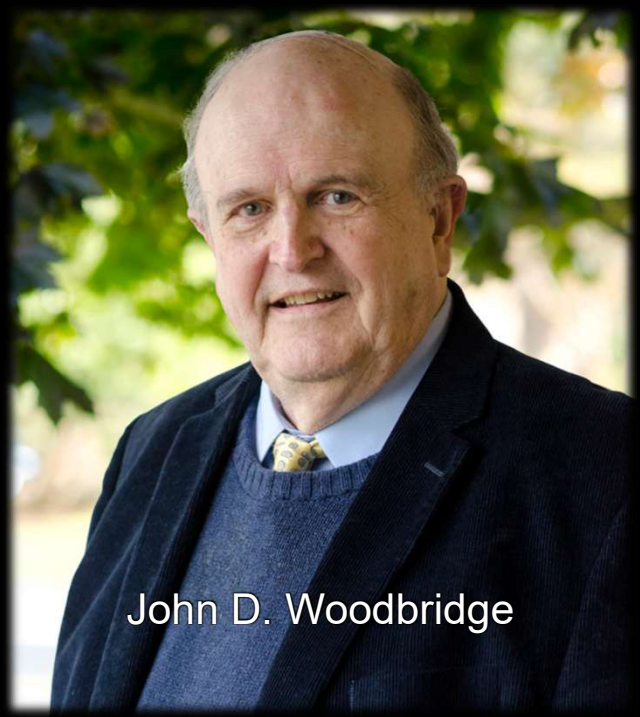
"The authors' description of the Bible creates for them the same kind of dilemma that neoorthodox scholars before them faced, namely, how to distinguish the infallible 'central saving message' from the errant 'difficult surrounding material.'



John D. Woodbridge

"This is a critical problem because Christianity is grounded in human history. Salvation truths are planted in the soil of the Bible's historical discourse about things that happened."

[John D. Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers / McKim Proposal* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 153, 154]



John D. Woodbridge

❧ Two Problems ❧

- 1. How confident can one be in deciding which facts are essential to that end or purpose?***
- 2. What implications do the admission of one error in the Bible have for the doctrines of inspiration and inerrancy?***



Jack B. Rogers
(1934-2016)

"Scripture was not used as a sourcebook for science. Early theologians accepted God's accommodated style of communication. God, like a good father or mother, adopted the thought and speech of children in order to relate to them."

[Jack B. Rogers and Donald K. McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), 458-459]



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[Jack B. Rogers and Donald K. McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), 458-459]

Notice the strawman fallacy in Rogers and McKim saying that "that the Bible is a sourcebook for science."

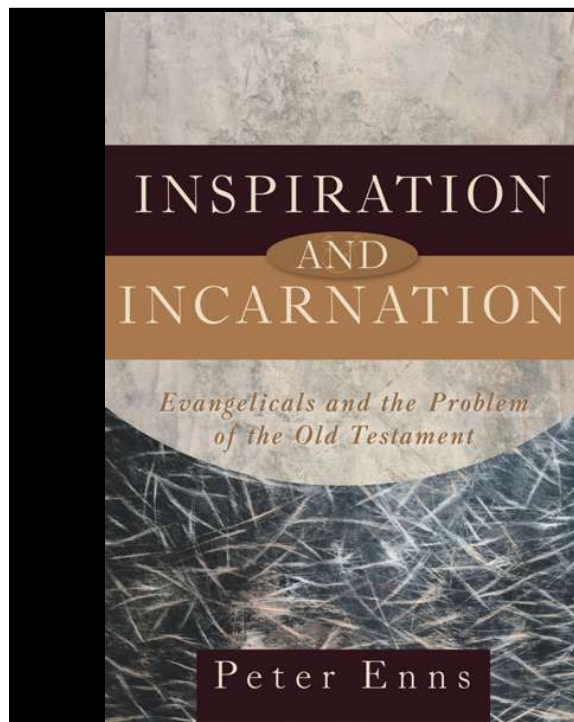
To my knowledge, no party to this discussion is claiming that the Bible is a sourcebook for science in saying that the Bible is inerrant in all that it affirms, including statements it makes about nature.

*"Scripture was not used as a sourcebook for science. Early theologians accepted God's **accommodated style** of communication. God, like a good father or mother, adopted the thought and speech of children in order to relate to them."*

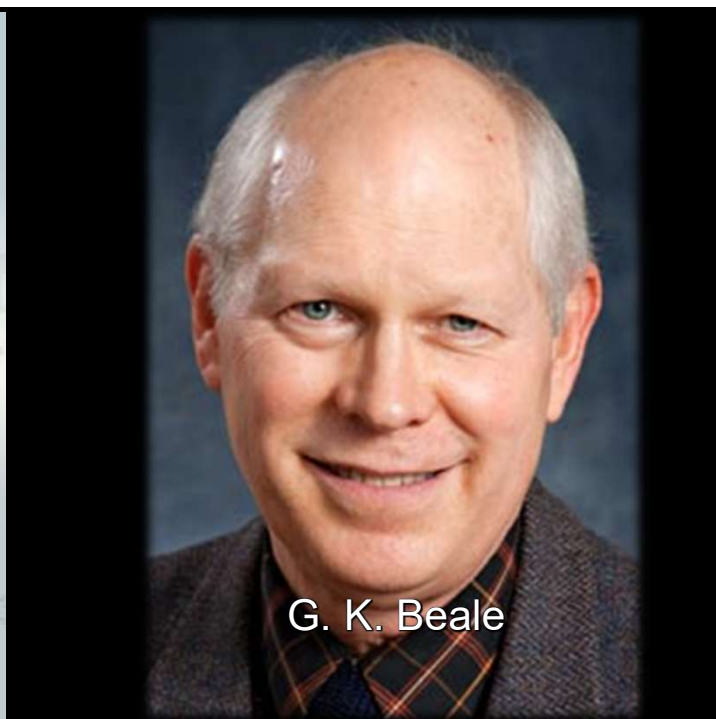
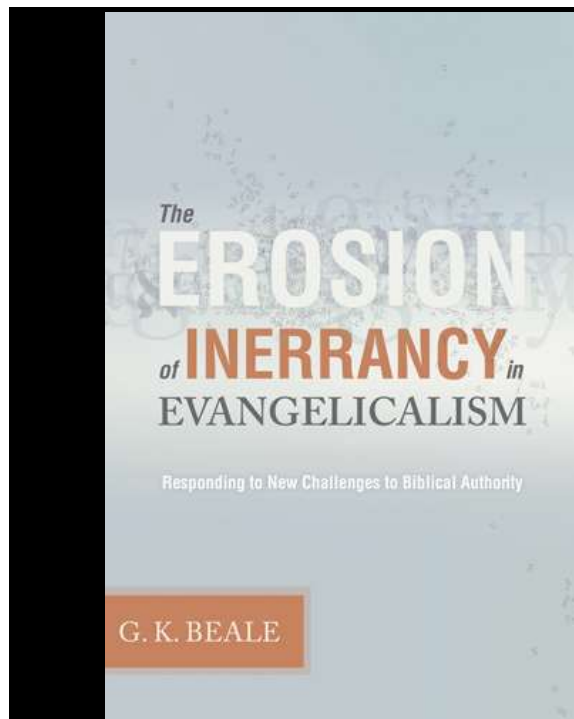
[Jack B. Rogers and Donald K. McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), 458-459]

One should note also that their use of the expression 'accommodated style' includes the claim that some of God's "communication" includes factual errors.

Recent Evangelical Controversy

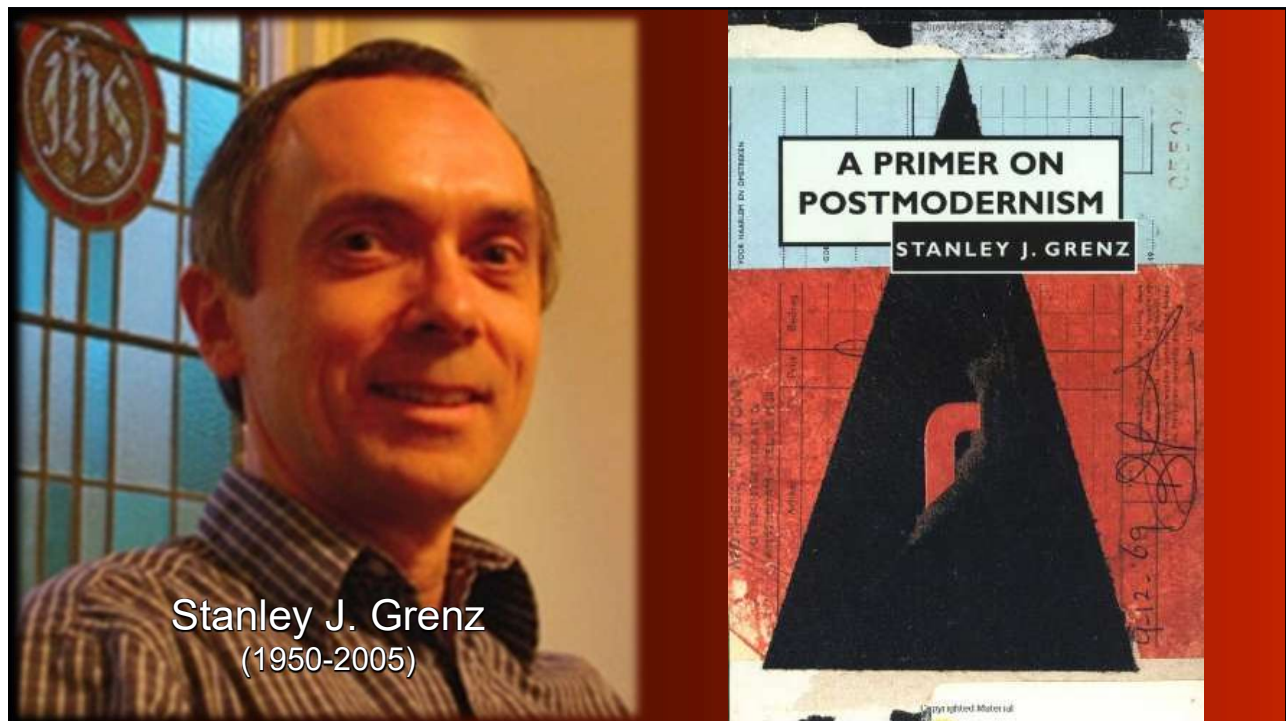


Peter Enns



G. K. Beale

Current Evangelical Controversies: Postmodernism



Stanley J. Grenz
(1950-2005)

A portrait of Stanley J. Grenz, a man with short brown hair, wearing a striped shirt, smiling slightly. He is positioned in front of a window with a circular stained glass design featuring the letters 'IHS'.

Stanley J. Grenz
(1950-2005)

"In contrast to the modern ideal of the dispassionate observer, we affirm the postmodern discovery that no observer can stand outside the historical process. Nor can we gain universal, culturally neutral knowledge as unconditioned specialists."

A portrait of Stanley J. Grenz, a man with short brown hair, wearing a striped shirt, smiling slightly. He is positioned in front of a window with a circular stained glass design featuring the letters 'IHS'.

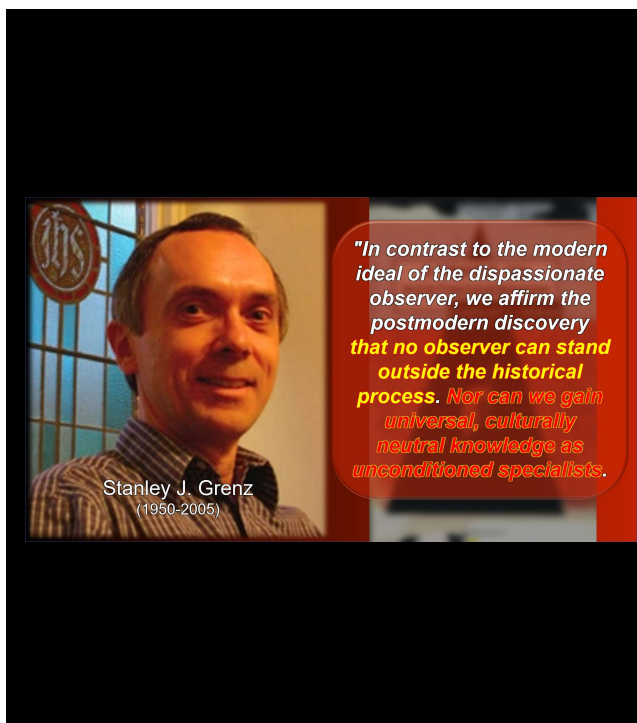
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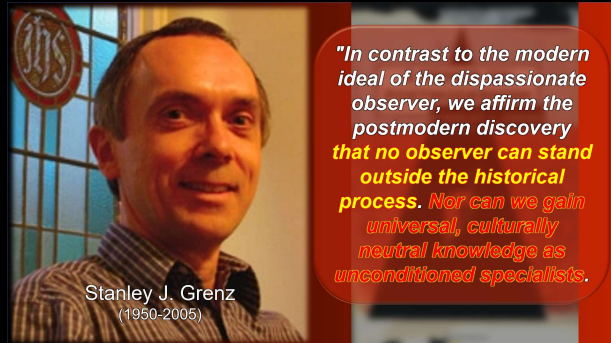
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Stanley J. Grenz
(1950-2005)

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If what Grenz says is true, then his own statement itself does not come from an observer who stands "outside the historical process" and, thus, the statement is not itself "neutral knowledge" coming from an "unconditioned specialist."



If what Grenz says is true, then his own statement itself does not come from an observer who stands "outside the historical process" and, thus, the statement is not itself "neutral knowledge" coming from an "unconditioned specialist."

Since this is the case, why should we believe that it is objectively true?





Stanley J. Grenz
(1950-2005)

*"On the contrary, we are participants in our historical and cultural context, and **all our intellectual endeavors** are unavoidably conditioned by that participation."*

[Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 166]



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*"On the contrary, we are participants in our historical and cultural context, and **all our intellectual endeavors** are unavoidably conditioned by that participation."*

[Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 166]



If "all our intellectual endeavors" are "unavoidably conditioned" then Grenz's own statement is itself "unavoidably conditioned."

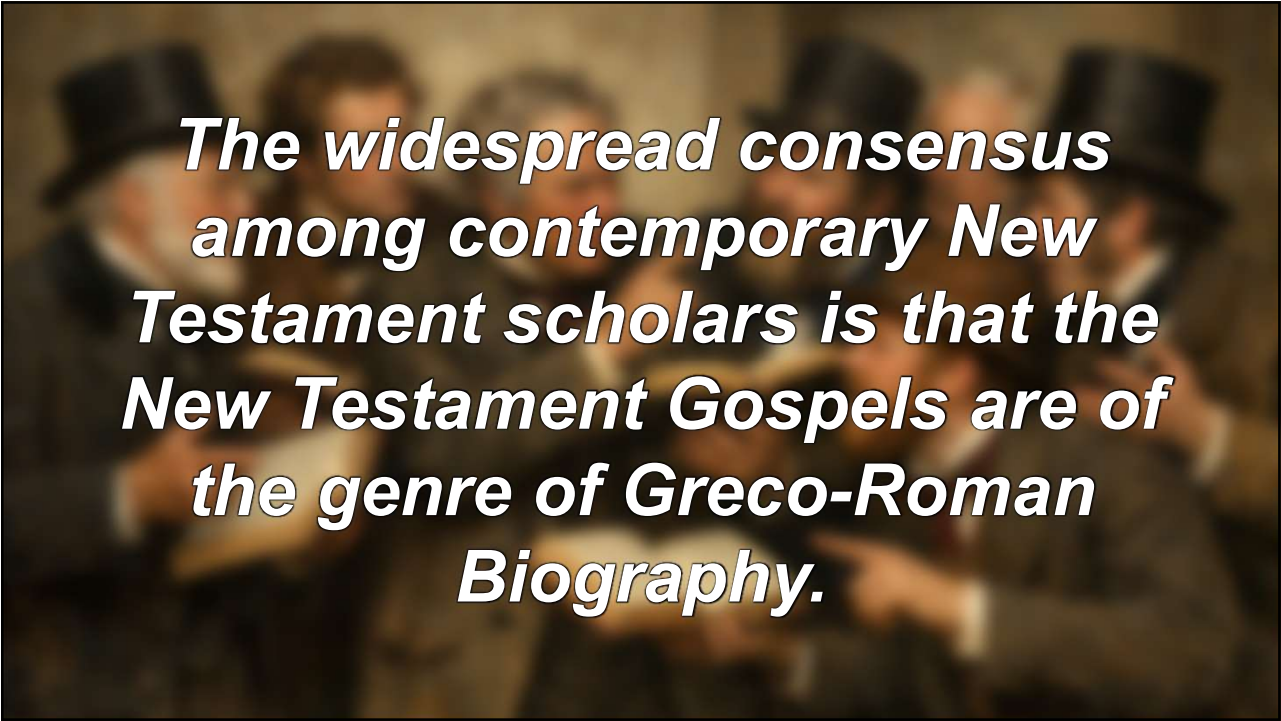


If "all our intellectual endeavors" are "unavoidably conditioned" then Grenz's own statement is itself "unavoidably conditioned."

But if his statement is "unavoidably conditioned," then why should we take it as objectively true?



Current Evangelical Controversies: Ancient Biography



***The widespread consensus
among contemporary New
Testament scholars is that the
New Testament Gospels are of
the genre of Greco-Roman
Biography.***

One important characteristic of Greco-Roman Biography is how it allowed (if not expected) the biographer to be somewhat loose with the facts.



The poster for the NCCA 2019 conference features a blue background with a faint circular pattern. At the top center is the NCCA 2019 logo. Below it, a yellow-bordered box contains the title "WHY TRUTH STILL MATTERS" in large white letters, with the dates "OCT 11-12 / CHARLOTTE, NC" underneath. Further down, the text "2 DAYS / 45+ SPEAKERS / 90+ SESSIONS" is displayed in yellow and white. Below this is the website "Conference.SES.edu" and the phone number "(704) 847-5600" in yellow. The word "Including" is written in white. At the bottom, a white rectangular box contains two circular headshots of men. Below the headshots, the text "DIALOG: What Does It Mean to Say the Bible is Inerrant?" is written in blue.

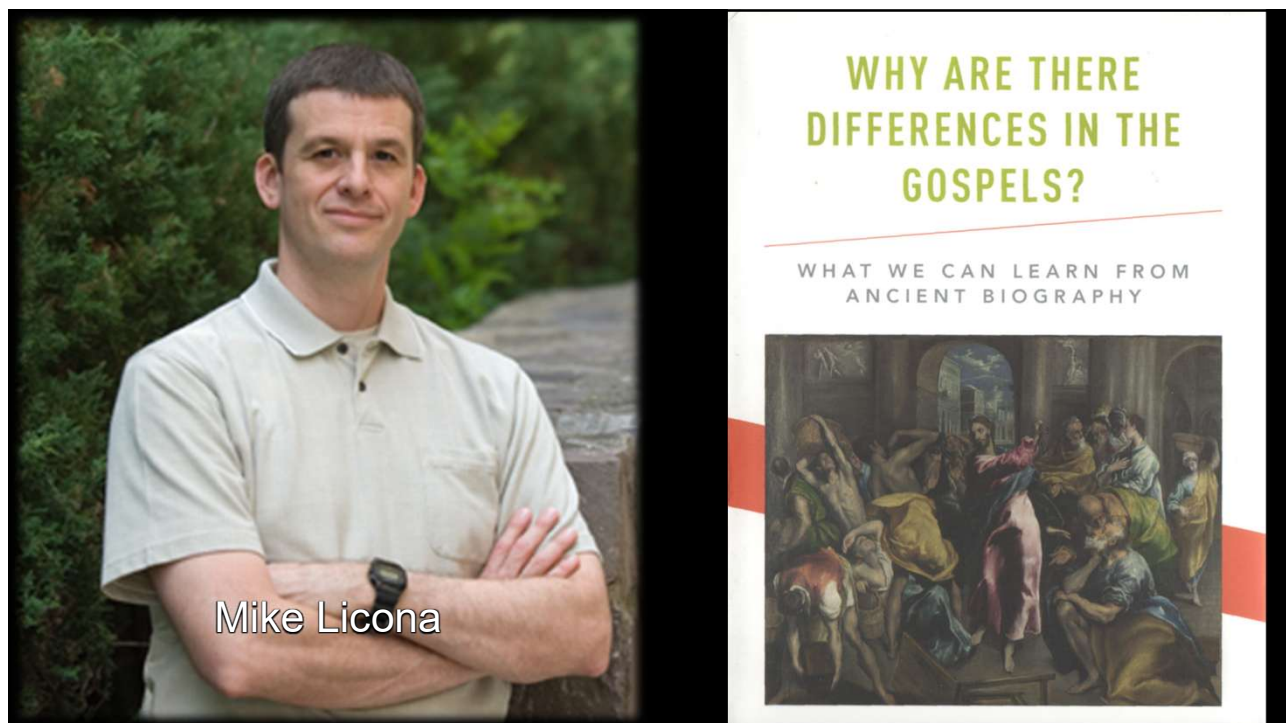
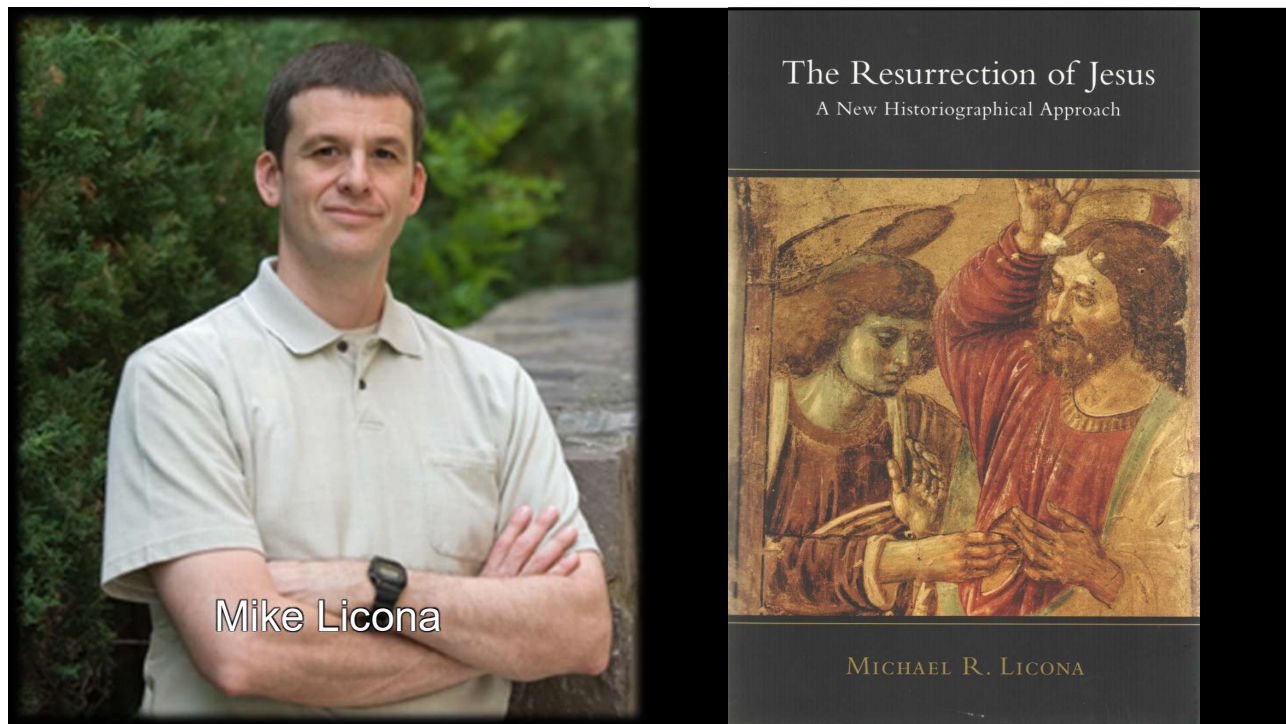
NCCA
2019

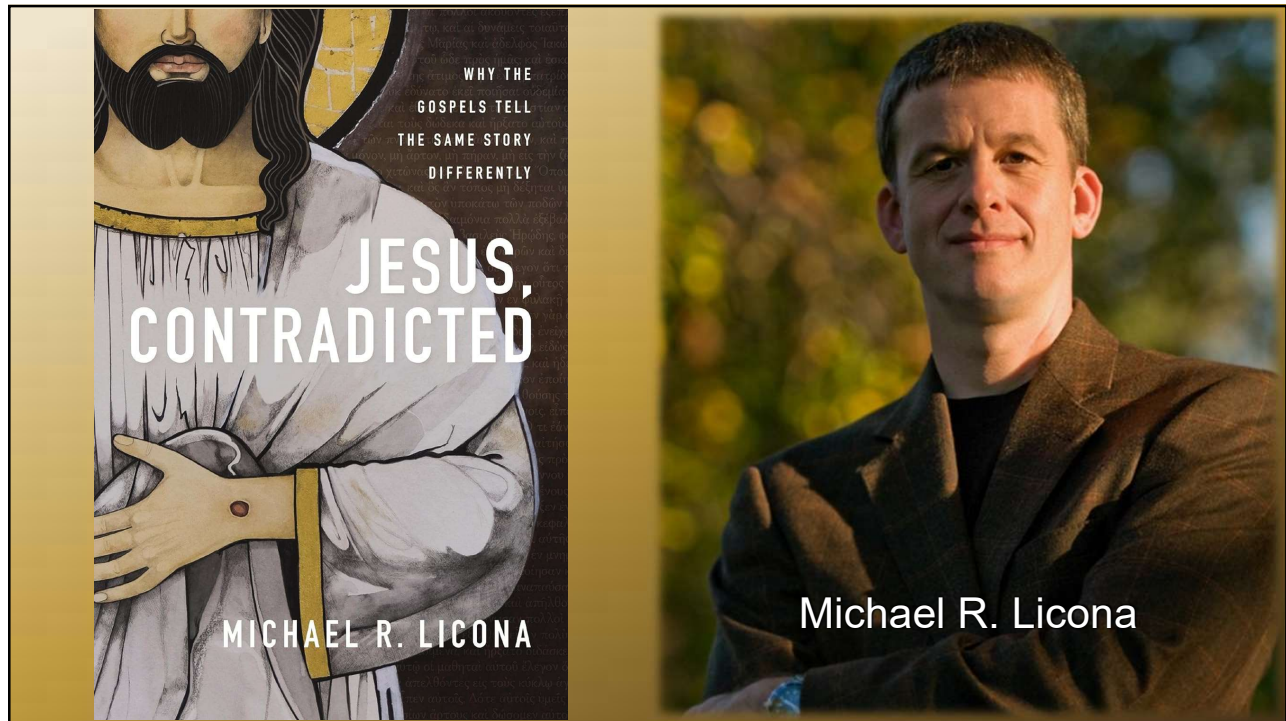
**WHY TRUTH
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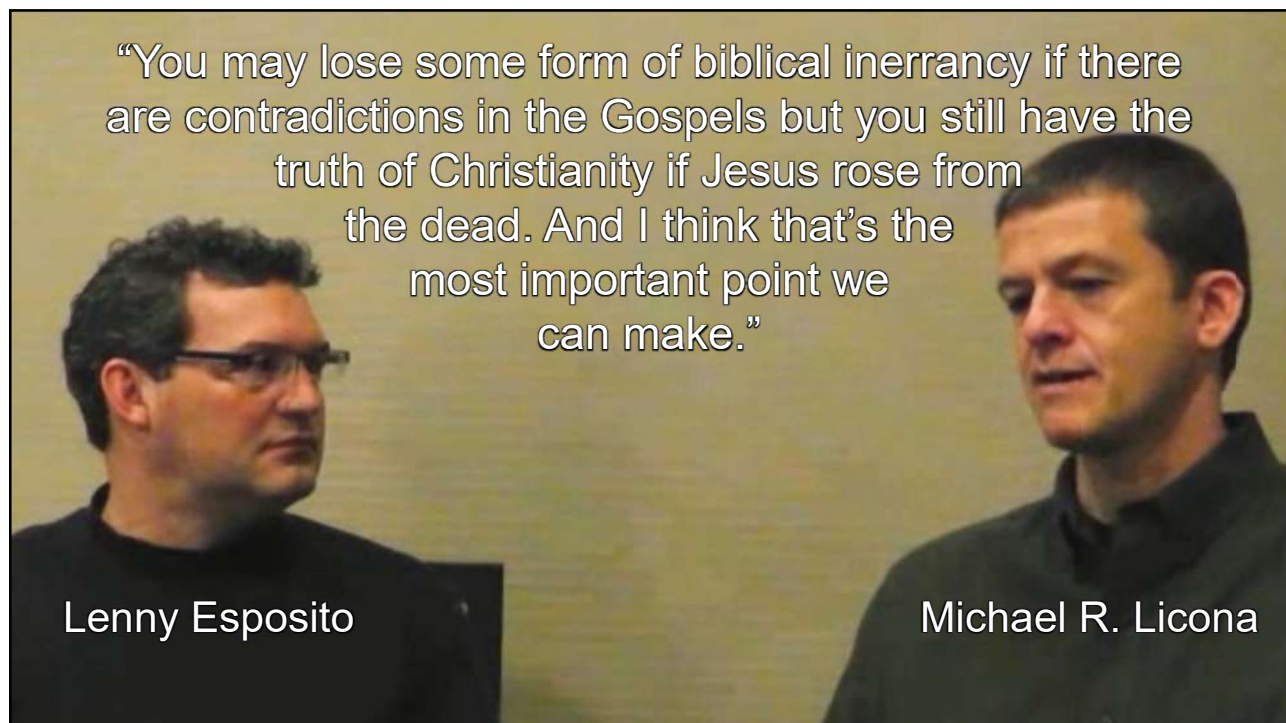
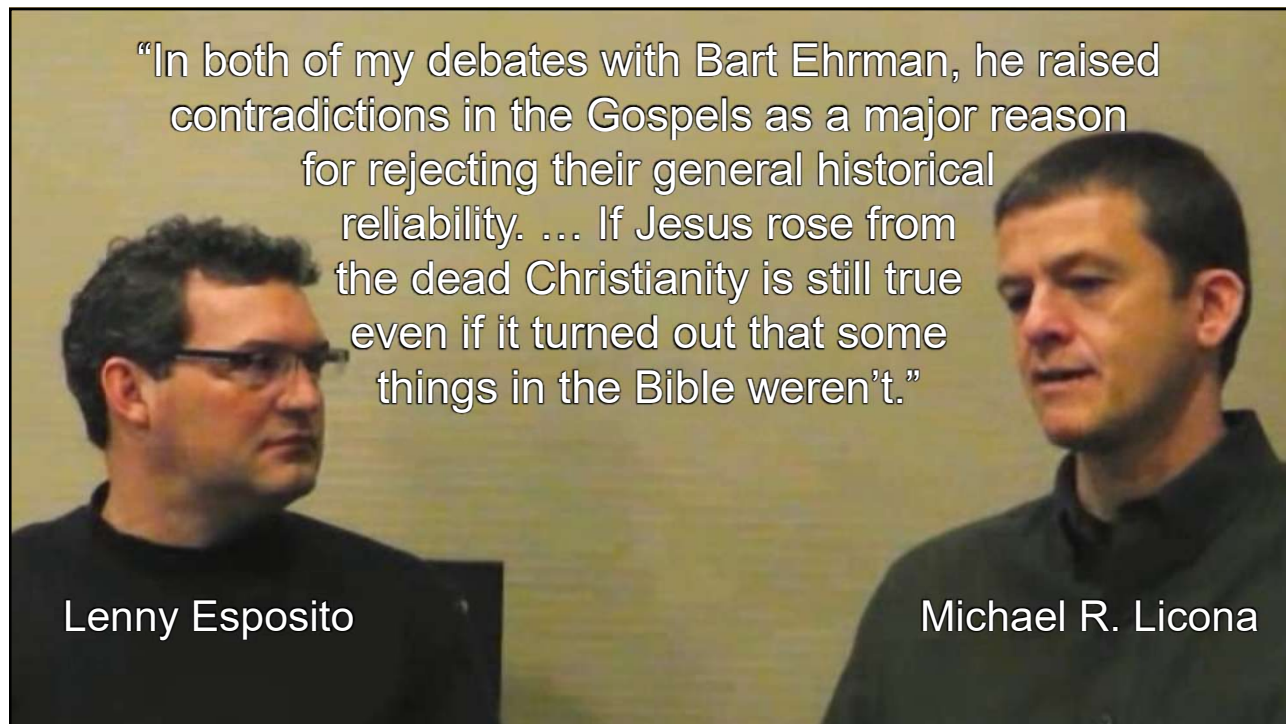
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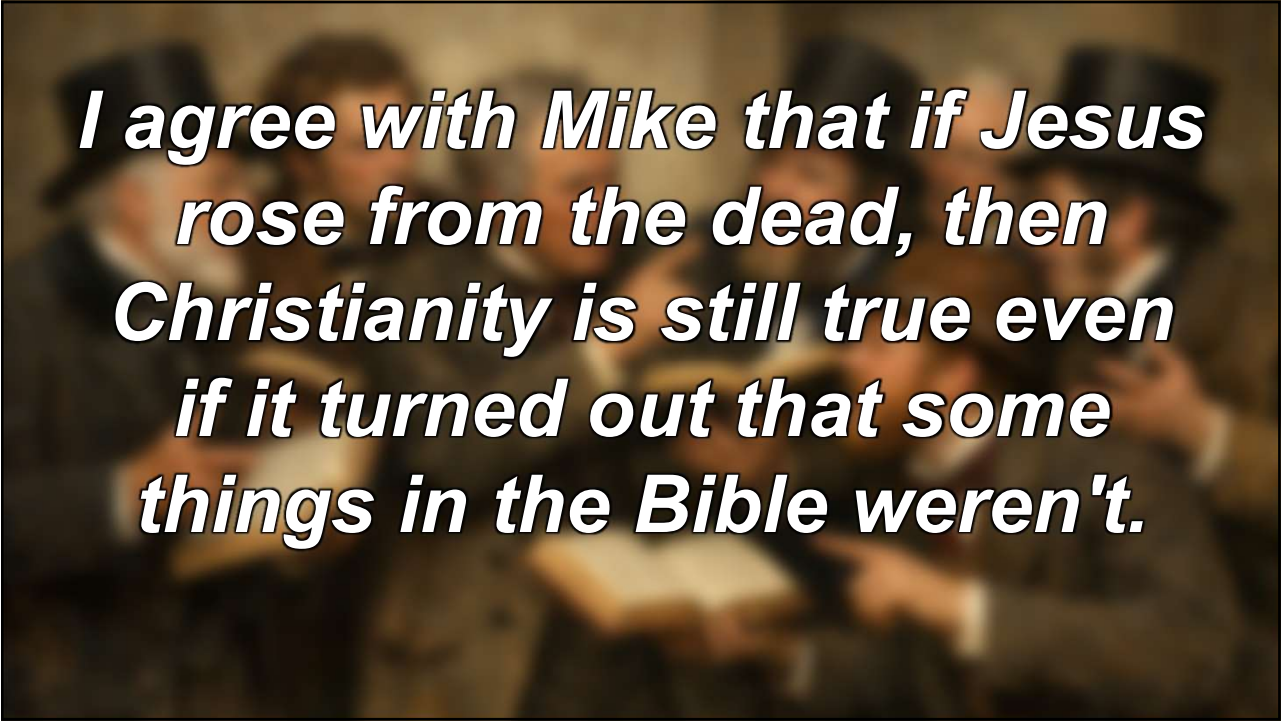
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DIALOG: What Does It Mean to Say the Bible is Inerrant?

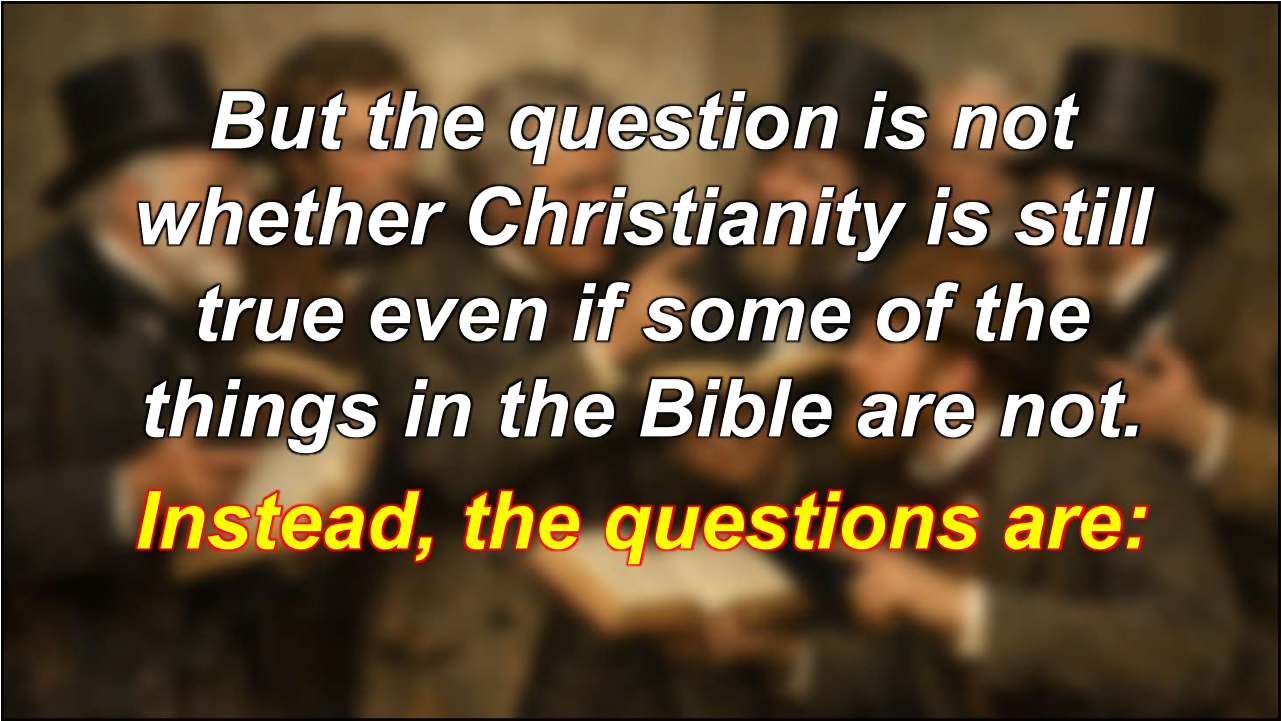








***I agree with Mike that if Jesus
rose from the dead, then
Christianity is still true even
if it turned out that some
things in the Bible weren't.***



***But the question is not
whether Christianity is still
true even if some of the
things in the Bible are not.
Instead, the questions are:***

1. Is **inerrancy** still true even if it turns out that some of the things in the Bible are not?

*The answer would have to be 'no' unless you have a **qualified notion** of what truth is, and, by implication, **what it means to not be true.***

2. Is **inspiration** still true even if it turns out that some of the things in the Bible are not?

*The answer would have to be 'no' given a proper understanding of **inspiration** and a proper understanding of **the nature of God.***

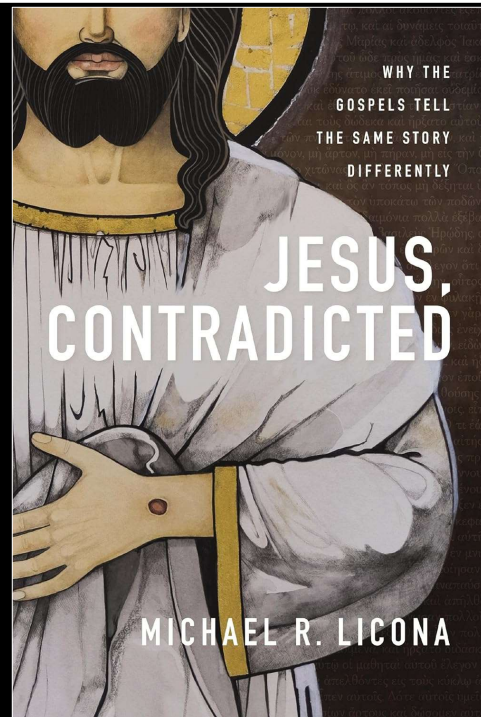
1. Is **inerrancy** still true even if it turns out that some of the things in the Bible are not?

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2. Is **inspiration** still true even if it turns out that some of the things in the Bible are not?

The answer would have to be 'no' given a proper understanding of inspiration and a proper understanding of the nature of God.



1. Is **inerrancy** still true even if it turns out that some of the things in the Bible are not?

The answer would have to be 'no' unless you have a qualified notion of what truth is, and, by implication, what it means to not be true.

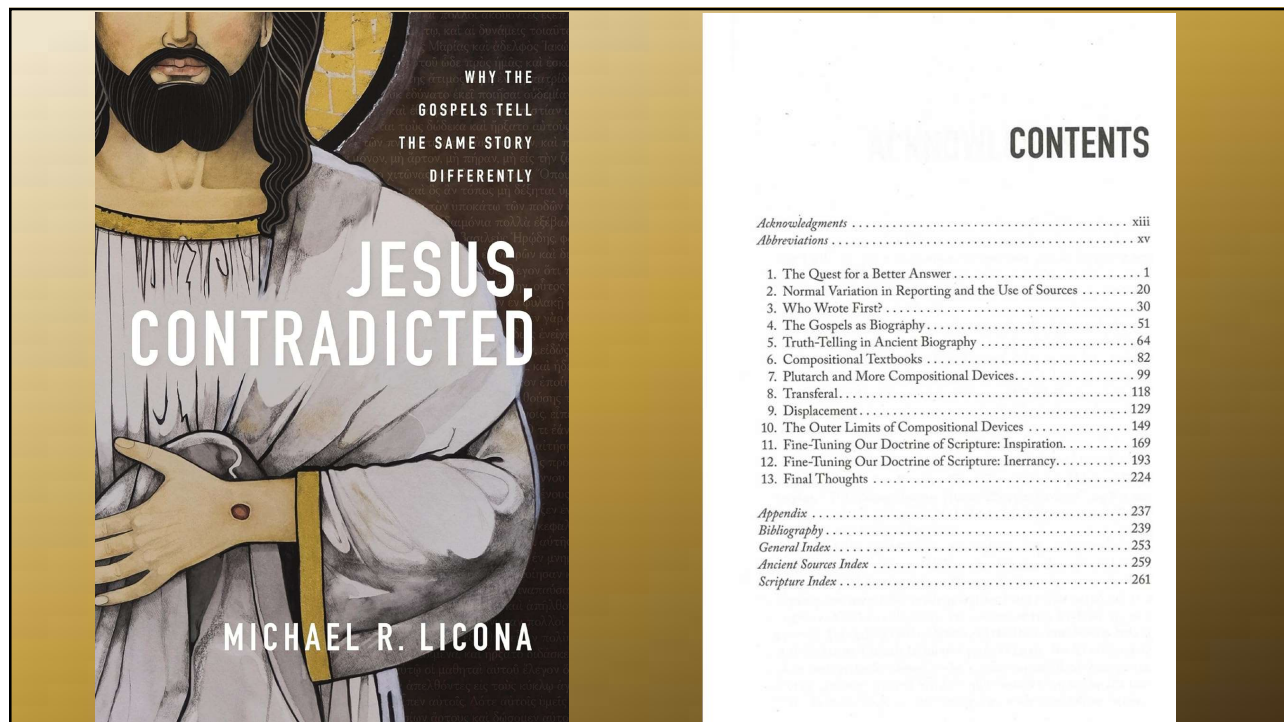


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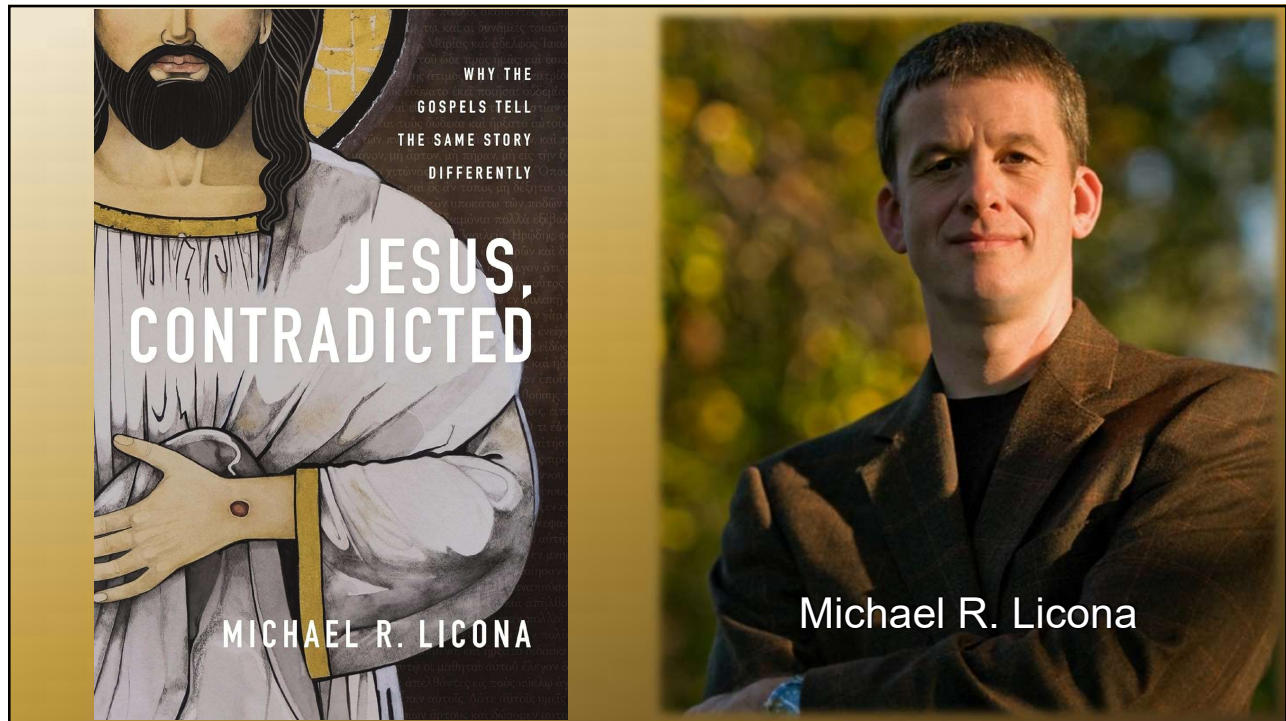
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In his book *Jesus Contradicted*, Mike explains his definitions of both 'inerrancy' and 'inspiration.'



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"In my view, this does not undermine the overall reliability of the literature in which they appear, as long as we have the understanding that what we are reading was most often intended to convey an accurate gist of the people and events described rather than preserving details with the precision of a legal transcript."

[Licona, *Jesus Contradicted*, 67]

Licona has muddled the issue before us by committing the false of false dilemma.

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In fact, the point that the biblical text is overall reliable is the first premise in our case for Christianity.

DEBATE

Can Historians Prove Jesus Rose From The Dead?

LICONA vs EHRMAN

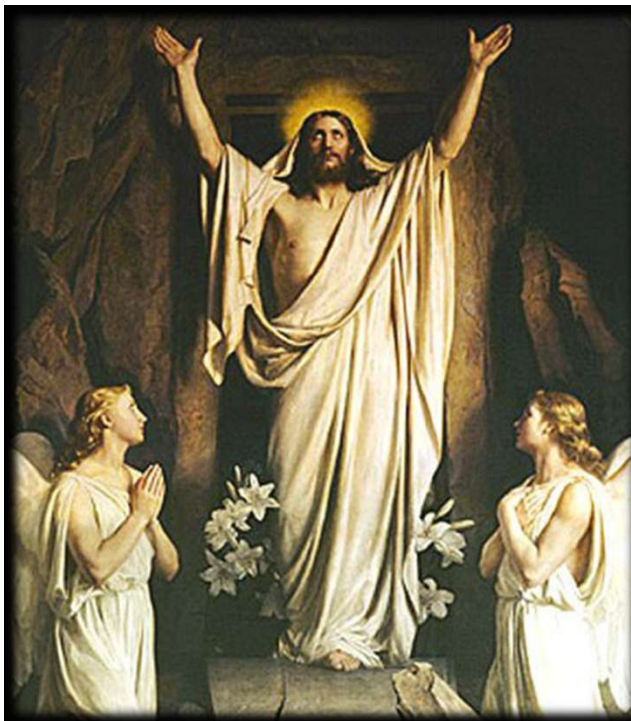
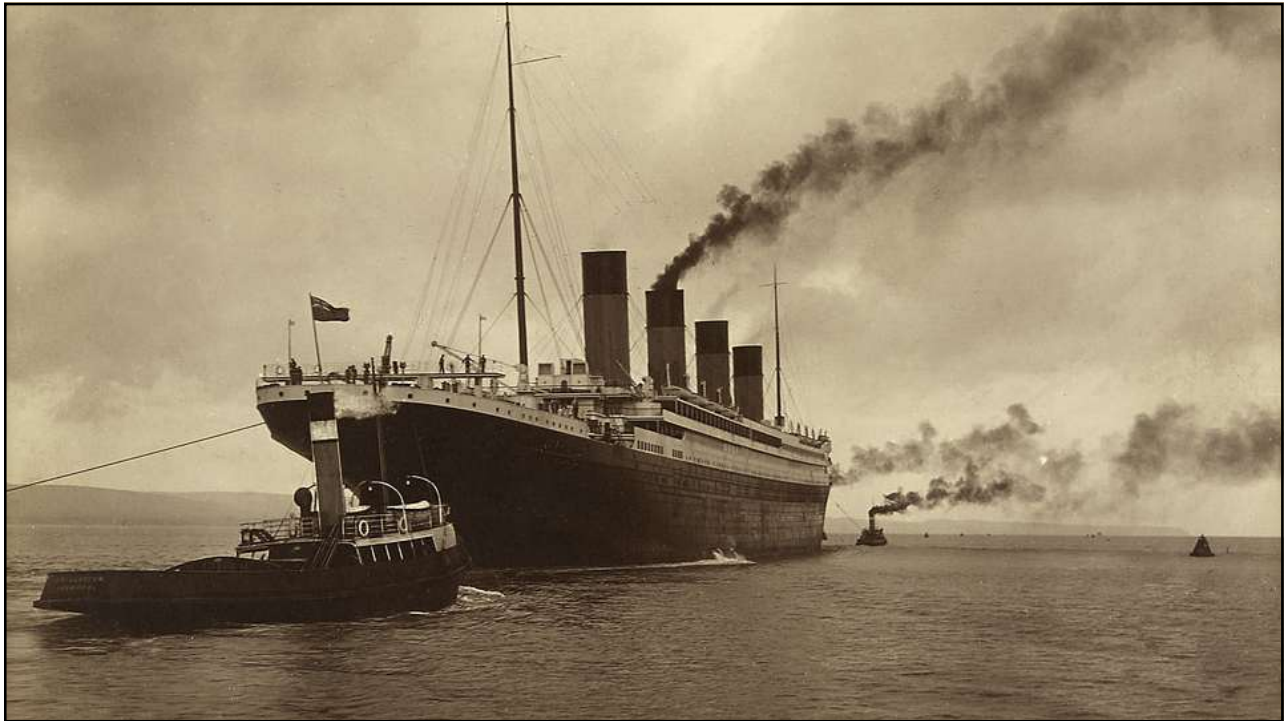
APRIL 2, 2009
DEBATE
HELD AT SOUTHERN
EVANGELICAL SEMINARY



MIKE LICONA, PH.D.
Coauthor of
The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus



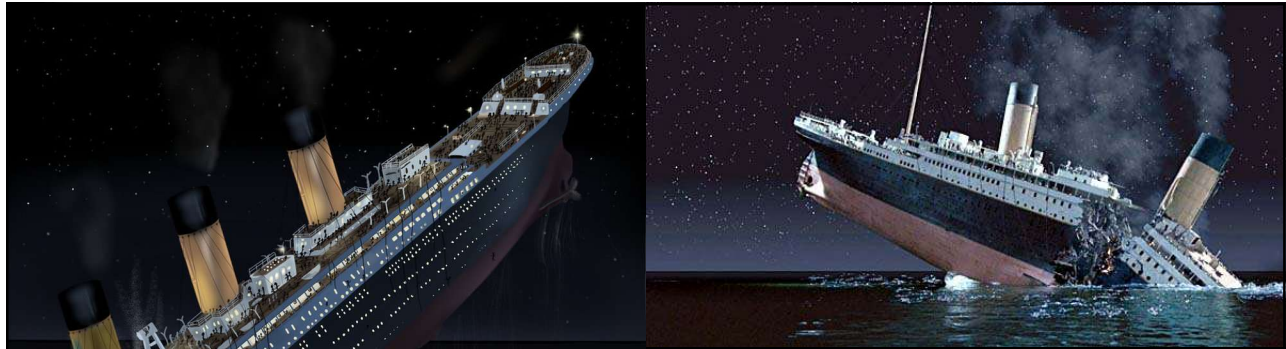
BART EHRMAN, PH.D.
Author of
Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why



**Mike's point from the
Titanic example is
well taken.**

**Even if there were
contradictions in the
Gospel accounts, this
does not prove that Jesus
did not rise from
the dead.**

However . . .



While it is true that contradictory eyewitness accounts do not prove that the Titanic did not sink, it does prove that the eyewitnesses were not inerrant and, thus, their writings are not inspired by God.

Mike Licona · Jun 2, 2014 · 23 min read

ON CHICAGO'S MUDDY WATERS



Mike Licona (June 2, 2014)

Many of us have had the driving experience of moving along peacefully when we become startled by the sudden appearance of flashing blue lights in our rear-view mirror. We pulled over to the side of the road and waited for the police officer to approach our car and inform us what law we had just broken. We wondered, "How much is this ticket going to cost me? Am I going to get any points on my driving record that will result in a higher auto insurance premium?"

Of recent, some having an overly wooden view of what an inerrant Bible should look like



Michael R. Licona

*"Would it be possible for God to ensure that certain messages He regarded as having great importance were preserved accurately while He allowed ... **a deliberate altering of data for theological reasons** resulting in a portrayal of events in ways not reflective of what we would have seen had we been there?"*

[Mike Licona, "On Chicago's Muddy Waters," <https://www.risenjesus.com/post/chicagos-muddy-waters>, accessed 10/08/26]

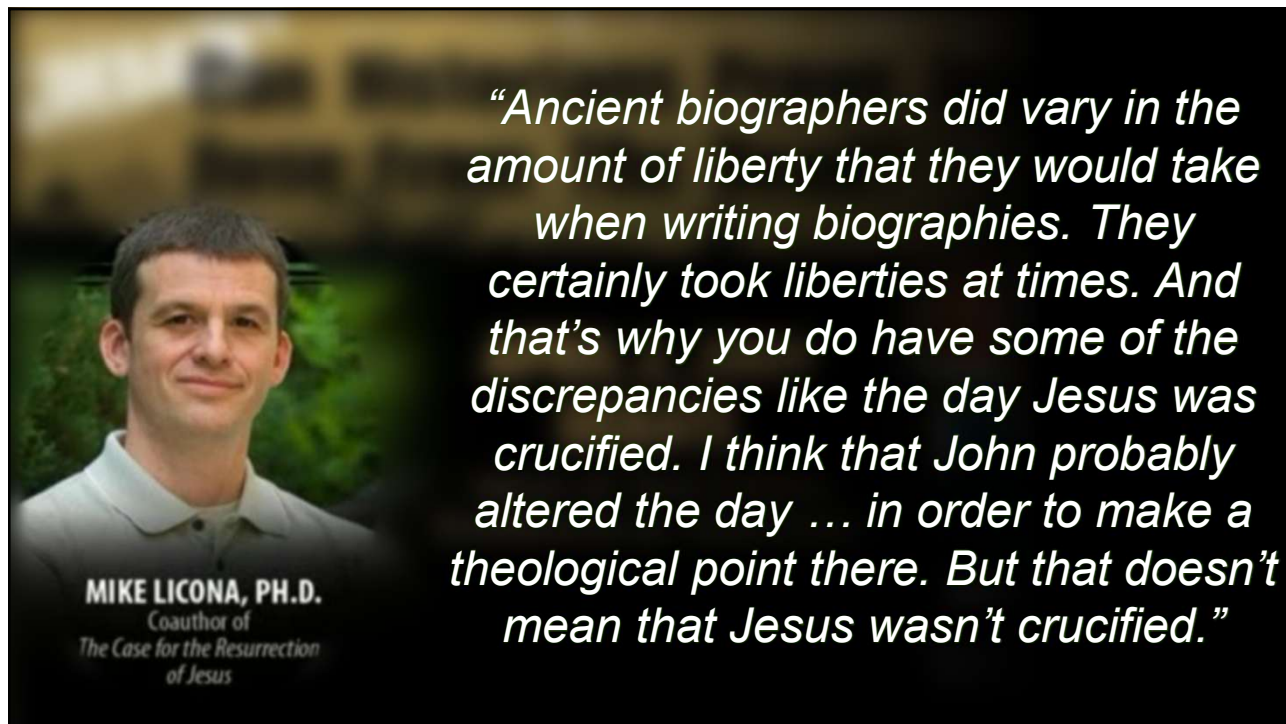
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DEBATE **Can Historians Prove Jesus Rose From The Dead?** **LICONA vs EHRMAN**

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"Ancient biographers did vary in the amount of liberty that they would take when writing biographies. They certainly took liberties at times. And that's why you do have some of the discrepancies like the day Jesus was crucified. I think that John probably altered the day ... in order to make a theological point there. But that doesn't mean that Jesus wasn't crucified."



Dr. Al Mohler
President, Southern
Baptist Theological
Seminary

"It would be nonsense to affirm real contradictions in the Bible and then to affirm inerrancy."

Dr. Al Mohler
President, Southern
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Seminary

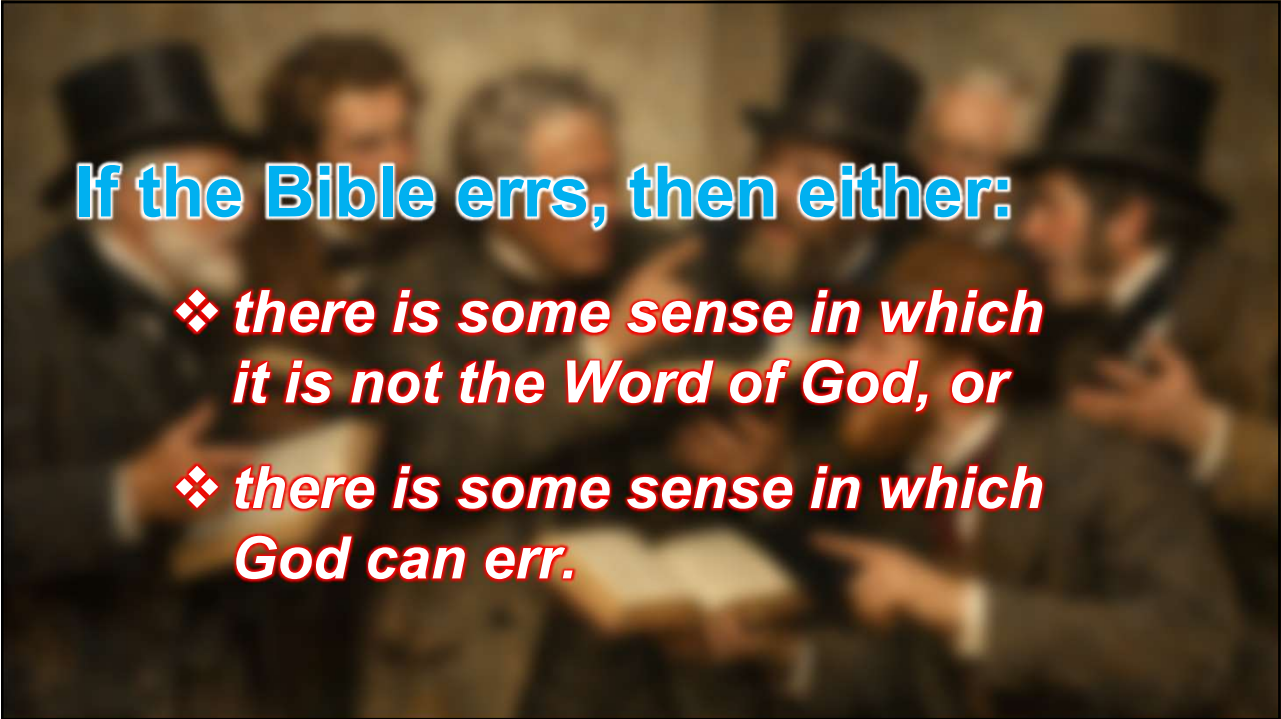
"Even Dr. Licona concedes that we 'may lose some form of biblical inerrancy if there are contradictions in the Gospels,' what you lose is inerrancy itself. ... An actual contradiction is an error."

[quoted in Erin Roach, "HBU's Licona addresses Bible's 'contradictions,'" <https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/hbus-licona-addresses-bibles-contradictions/>, accessed 06/21/26]

1. The Bible is the Word of God.

2. God cannot err.

3. Therefore, the Bible cannot err.



If the Bible errs, then either:

- ❖ *there is some sense in which it is not the Word of God, or*
- ❖ *there is some sense in which God can err.*

🌀 Conclusion 🌀

Allowing for the possibility that there are conflicting or contradictory statements in the Bible as the Functional Theory of Truth, Postmodernism, and Greco-Roman Biography do, is incompatible with a sound understanding the doctrines of Inspiration and Inerrancy.

