

Luther and Inerrancy

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[Joint Conference of the North and South Metropolitan Circuits of the Southeastern Wisconsin District,
November 15, 1982]

Introduction

To try to demonstrate that Martin Luther believed that the Bible is the inerrant Word of God would be carrying coals to Newcastle and finally might easily become a tedious recital of innumerable passages from his works. We will have some of that in the closing paragraphs of this paper.

But it might be of greater profit for us to consider the evidence which is adduced in an attempt to enlist Luther on the side of modern Lutheranism on this question. We will therefore first examine the passages that are used for this purpose.

Christ against Scripture

One of the passages from Luther's writings that has been quoted almost *ad nauseam* as clear and certain evidence that the Reformer did not believe in biblical inerrancy is the 49th thesis from the disputation concerning "Faith and Law" (WA 39, 1, 44ff). That thesis reads, in the American translation, "If the adversaries press the Scriptures against Christ, we urge Christ against Scriptures" (p. 47: *si adversarii scripturam urgerint contra Christum, urgemus Christum contra scripturam*).

When those words are read out of context they seem clearly to imply that the Scriptures may be wrong because their testimony can be countered by an appeal to Christ.

However, one must first of all, remember that this is one of a series of theses drawn up for a disputation at the university. Such theses were generally not constructed to serve as clear statements of doctrine. On the contrary, they were often couched in provocative terms, intentionally obscure in order to call forth debate. When Luther in 1518 wrote to Pope Leo X (WA I, 527-529) to defend himself against the charges of heresy that were being raised against him on account of the wide dissemination of the Ninety-five Theses, he said of the sentences that he had nailed to the church door, "They are discussion statements, not doctrines or dogmas, and are set forth, as is customary, in a rather obscure and enigmatic way. Otherwise, if I had been able to look into the future, I would have taken care for my part, that they would be easier to understand" (p528f: *disputationes enim sunt, non doctrinae, non dogmata, obscurius pro more et enigmaticos positae. Alioqui, si praevidere potuissem, certe id pro mea parte curassem, ut essent intellectu faciliores*). It is surely unjustified, therefore, if these words are pressed to say something that is so obviously opposed to everything that Luther had to say about inerrancy in a thousand other places. It is even worse when Luther is misquoted to say, as is so often done, that he will *quote* Christ against Scripture. *Urgemus* can hardly be translated, "we quote."

How unfair it is to use this sentence as evidence that Luther believed that the Scriptures could disagree with Christ becomes even more evident when we understand clearly what Luther was trying to point out in that thesis. In fact, if Luther is correctly understood, his "rather obscure" words actually become evidence that Luther believed in the inerrancy of the Scriptures.

In his commentary on Galatians Luther uses language which is reminiscent of this thesis. Before we discuss the Reformer's thoughts as expressed in that commentary, however, a little history will be in order. Luther's remark about urging Christ against Scripture is part of a set of thesis drawn up by Luther for a debate scheduled to take place at the University of Wittenberg on September 11, 1535. From August 22 to October 10 of that same year (in other words, from about three weeks before and a month after that debate) Luther delivered eleven lectures on the third chapter of Galatians. It is thus rather obvious that his comments on

Galatians 3:14, which must have been made just about at the time of the debate, are especially apropos for determining what he really wanted to say in that thesis, which is so often misunderstood and misquoted.

In his Galatians lectures Luther discussed the passages which were cited by the scholastic theologians to prove that good works are necessary for justification. Luther admits that there are passages in the Scriptures that speak of justification by works. He says, “There are many passages in the Scriptures, both in the Old Testament and in the New, about works and rewards; our opponents depend on these and think that by means of these they can successfully overthrow the doctrine of faith, which we teach and maintain” (LW, 26, p. 261).

From this it ought to be clear what Luther means when he says that the adversaries press Scripture against Christ. He means that when Scripture is used to denigrate faith in Christ and to try to demonstrate that we are saved not by the merits of Christ alone but also by our own works, then the words of the Bible are being twisted in such a way that they are actually against Christ. The scholastic interpretation of these passages must be wrong because the words are torn out of the context of Scripture in which Christ is set forth as the sole cause of our salvation. Luther makes that point when he says that the opponents stress only a few passages of Scripture and not all of it or even “its most powerful part” (LW 26, p. 295). In that connection he writes,

If He (i.e. Christ) Himself is the price of my redemption, if He Himself was made sin and a curse that He might justify and bless me, I care nothing about passages of Scripture, even if you were to produce six hundred in support of the righteousness of works and against the righteousness of faith, and if you were to scream that Scripture contradicts itself. I have the Author and the Lord of Scripture, and I want to stand on His side rather than believe you. Nevertheless, it is impossible for Scripture to contradict itself except at the hands of senseless and hardened hypocrites; at the hands of those who are godly and understanding it gives testimony to its Lord. Therefore see to it how you can reconcile Scripture, which, as you say, contradicts itself. I shall stay with the Author of Scripture (LW, 26, 295).

We notice how Luther insists that the Bible does not contradict itself. The question that is involved here is rather one of biblical interpretation. Luther believed, as he confesses in the Smalcald Articles, that the chief function of the law of God is to show man how deeply he has fallen and the utter corruption of human nature (SA III, ii, 4). In this way it was to show men their need of a Savior. To try to use the law in order to show man how to be saved would thus be an insult to Christ. Such an interpretation and use of the law would contradict the Gospel and therefore it can not be correct, because Scripture does not contradict itself.

One need not go to the Galatians commentary to see that this is what Luther meant when he spoke of stressing Christ against Scripture. In the 41st of the aforementioned set of theses he had written, “*Scriptura est, non contra, sed pro Christo intelligenda, ideo vel ad eum referenda, vel pro vera Scriptura non habenda*” (WA 39, 1, 47).

When the very words of Scripture are used to give an impression that is contrary to the intention of the Holy Spirit they are no longer the words of the Holy Ghost. When in a Masonic lodge meeting, for example, the assembled members are told, “Ye are all the children of God” (an exact reproduction of the first seven words of Ga 3:26), the words are no longer the words of Paul and the Holy Spirit. They are quoted in a sense that is at variance with the intention of God and therefore, though they are lifted verbatim out of the Bible, they are no longer *vera Scriptura*, true Scripture. This is the same point that the dogmatists wanted to make when they insisted that the essence of the Word of God is not found in the words used by the holy writers but rather in the thoughts that were expressed in those words. If someone therefore were to use the Scriptural law passages, not to persuade men to despair of salvation by works, but to encourage them to believe that by their efforts they could gain God’s favor and a divine verdict of “not guilty,” the very words of Scripture in that man’s mouth would become false doctrine. Either the words of Scripture must promote the doctrine of salvation by faith or they must not be considered “true Scripture.” This is what Luther meant to say in his thesis. And those who use his words in that thesis to try to prove that Luther did not accept inerrancy are either in a mindless and unscholarly way repeating what they have heard others say or they are deliberately twisting Luther’s words

against Luther just as the scholastics twisted the Holy Spirit's words against Christ. Such a use of Luther is either dishonest or stupid.

The Epistle of James

What has been said here also disposes of the second argument that is often employed in an effort to demonstrate that Luther did not believe in the inerrancy of all that Scripture taught. Luther's views concerning the epistle of James have been cited again and again as proof that he was willing to disagree with the Scriptures.

It is, of course, no secret that Luther said some things about the Epistle of James that seem to upset some conservative Lutherans and we may wish that he had never said them. When he threatened to use James to heat up the stove someday, that, at first blush, seems to show a disregard for a biblical book that can hardly be made to agree with a firm conviction concerning the inerrancy of the Bible. What he is reported to have said is this: "*Ich werde einmal mit dem Jekel den offen hitzen*" (WA, TR, 5, 5854).

But the question that is involved here is not that of biblical inerrancy but rather the extent of the biblical canon. When Luther began to operate with the original Scriptural text he soon discovered that the Old Testament apocrypha were not part of the Hebrew Bible, and while he also included the apocrypha in his German translation of the Old Testament he removed them from the Vulgate order of the Old Testament books and published them in a separate section of the German Bible with the statement that these books were good and useful to read but not inspired by the Holy Ghost.

He did something similar in the New Testament. In his German Bible the order of the New Testament books is also changed from that which was followed in the Vulgate and the Greek original. Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation are the last four books in Luther's German New Testament. We all recognize these as four of the seven antilegomena, the New Testament books which were not unanimously accepted by orthodox Christians in the early church. And when we read Luther's preface to James, we sense that he would like to have done with James what he had done with the apocrypha of the Old Testament. He called it an epistle of straw and said that it was certainly not apostolic. Since Luther says that Christ speaks to us through the apostles (and in that he is certainly correct), we are justified in concluding that Luther did not believe that this book was inspired. In fact, in the earliest preface to James he says, "*Ich will yhn nicht haben inn meyner Bibel ynn der zal der rechten hewbtbücher*" (WA, DB, 7, 386: I do not want him in my Bible in the number of the true principal books). For all practical purposes that judgment on James is the same as his judgment on the Old Testament apocrypha.

And when we examine this matter at greater length we discover that Luther's rejection of James is actually a consequence of his strong conviction concerning biblical inerrancy. Luther believed firmly that the Bible could not contradict itself. But he also believed that James contradicted Paul. At one time he expressed the opinion that the author of the epistle of James was a non-Christian Jew, and, if we can trust the *Tischreden* reports, he was not even satisfied with Melancthon's treatment of the words of James concerning justification in the Apology of the Augsburg Confession. He is reported to have said,

Many have worked hard with the epistle of James to reconcile it with Paul. Also Philip Melancthon deals with this matter in the Apology but not in a very serious way. For it is a contradiction to say that faith justifies and faith does not justify. To the man who can reconcile the two I will give my doctor's hat and I will let him call me a fool (WA, TR, 3, 3292).

He evidently did not believe that Melancthon's efforts to that end in the Apology had been successful.

If Paul and James really contradict each other, as Luther believed, and if Romans is without question a part of the biblical canon, as the early church had unanimously held, then it must follow the James cannot be an inspired book, and if it is not inspired then it is not really a part of God's Word. The biblical canon cannot include a book that is not in harmony with the rest of Scripture. Thus it is clear that Luther's low view of James is actually a consequence of his high view of Scripture. It would have been better if Luther could have found the

very simple explanation of the apparent contradiction between James and Paul, but since this explanation evidently eluded him, he really had no choice but to say that James cannot be apostolic, if he wanted to continue to believe, as he did, that the Bible cannot err.

The “Slight Error” in Matthew

The third passage in Luther’s writings which is often cited as evidence that he rejected inerrancy is found in his commentary on Zechariah. In Luther’s Latin commentary on that prophet (WA XIII, 650) he speaks of a “slight mistake” (*levis error*) of which Matthew is guilty when he ascribes the prophecy concerning the thirty pieces of silver to Jeremiah.

If Luther says that there is even a “slight error” in the text of Matthew that seems to demonstrate clearly that he did not believe in biblical inerrancy. This passage is a little more difficult to reconcile with the many statements of Luther in which he most emphatically defends the absolute reliability and inerrancy of the Holy Bible.

There are, however, several things that can be said to defend Luther against the charge that this remark shows he did not believe in inerrancy. First of all, we may remember the many passages in which he says that the Scriptures do not lie and that even the trivialities in the Bible are inspired by the Holy Ghost.

Secondly, it should be remembered that two commentaries on Zechariah are published in the Weimar edition of his works. The first is a Latin commentary which was not published until after Luther’s death. This commentary is based on classroom notes taken by some unknown student who attended Luther’s lectures on the minor prophets in 1525 (Luther’s *opera latina*, Erlangen ed., XXVII, 11). The second is a German commentary which Luther himself prepared for the printer in 1527.

In both commentaries he discussed the question of why Matthew cited Jeremiah rather than Zechariah, but the discussion is much more detailed in the Latin than in the German text. In the Latin version the editor reports that Luther said in his classroom lectures,

Deinde quod citat testimonium tanquam sit ex Hieremia, non habeo aliud quod respondeam, quam commune illud verbum binomium fortassis fuisse prophetam, aut quod pro more aliorum etiam euangelistarum in genere recitarit nihil sollicitus de nomine prophetae. Tractat hunc locum diligenter Augustinus, quem vide. Nec crediderim facile libros prophetarum esse immutatos variatis titulis, deinde fuerunt haud dubie cum Mattheo sancti et eruditi viri pleni spiritu, qui admonuerunt in Zacharia esse illam scripturam, quam citarat non in Hieremia, quorum admonitione admonitus potuisset levem illum errorem emendare, si libuisset aut si putavisset magnopere referre. Sed nihil est, cur his et similibus scrupulis nos anxie torqueamus, cum non sit in illis caput et summa nostrae fidei. Plus satis insaniunt, qui in rebus huiusmodi non necessariis laborant, id quod unum tamen captant prophetae nostrorum temporum, dum in hoc scripturas legunt, ut expiscentur locos huiusmodi, qui possunt disceptandi et controvertendi ansam ac materiem praebere negligentes interim capita religionis, cum tamen vel hoc unum maxime praestandum erat, ut regnantem Christum docerent.

(Finally, to the question of why he cites the testimony as though it came from Jeremiah I have no answer except the common statement that the prophet perhaps had two names, or that, in agreement with the habit of also other evangelists, Matthew quoted in a general way without being concerned about the name of the prophet. See Augustine, who has treated this passage in some detail. It would be difficult for me to believe that the books of the prophets were mixed up by a change in the titles. Besides, there were certainly with Matthew holy and learned men filled with the Spirit, who pointed out to him that the passage which he cited was in Zechariah, not in Jeremiah, and having had it pointed out to him he would have been able to correct this slight mistake if he had wanted to do so or had considered it important. But there is no reason why we

should torment ourselves with these and similar difficulties, since the sum and substance of our faith is not found in them. Those who spend a lot of effort on such insignificant matters are more than insane. Nevertheless this is what our modern prophets try to do when they read the Scriptures to search out matters of this kind which they can then use as an occasion and material for debate and controversy while neglecting the most important religious matters, when they ought to be doing this one thing above all that they teach that Christ is reigning (WA 13, 650).

If we read those words carefully it ought to be evident that when men say, as is so often done, that Luther said that Matthew made a mistake we hear overtones that are not sounded in Luther's actual words. When Luther suggests that it is possible that Zechariah might also have had the name Jeremiah, just as Peter also had the name Simon, he is pointing out that there is not a necessary contradiction here between Matthew and the Old Testament. Nor does he really say that Matthew made a mistake. My own students know that I believe without question or reservation in the inerrancy of Scripture and yet they have also heard me refer to some things in Scripture as contradictions. They know, I hope, that what I really mean is that these appear to others as contradictions and that they are often called contradictions by unbelieving scholars. What Luther had in mind when he spoke of a "slight mistake" becomes clear in the very next sentence where he calls it a difficulty, a *scrupulus*.

In the German version, which was prepared for the printer by Luther himself we do not find any German phrase that corresponds to the Latin "*levem errorem*." That would certainly indicate that a true scholar would use the evidence from the Latin text, which Luther did not edit for publication, with some hesitation, especially since there is so much other, and much stronger evidence, to demonstrate that Luther did not believe that there were errors in the Bible.

Nevertheless, the German text does contain some remarks that make it likely that Luther may very well have spoken of a "slight error" in his classroom lectures. In an appendix to his comments on chapter eleven he writes,

Aus diesem Capitel kompt die frage, warumb Mattheus den Text von den dreyszig sylberlingen dem Propheten Jeremias zu schreibe, so er doch hie ynn Sacharia stehet? Zwar solche and der gleichen fragen bekommern mich nicht hoch, weil sie wenig zur sachen dienen, Und Mattheus gleich gnug thut, das er gewisse schrift furet, ob er gleich nicht so eben den Namen trifft, Syntemal er auch an andern örten sprüche furet and dock nicht so eben die wort setzt, wie sie ynn der Schrift stehen. Kan man nu das selbige leiden, and geschicht on alle fahr des synnes, das er nicht so eben die wort furet, was solts denn hindern, ob er den namen nicht so eben setzt? Sintemal mehr an den worten denn am namen ligt. Und ist auch aller Apostel weise, das sie also thun und der schrift meynung einfuren on solchen zencksschen genawen vleys and fulle des texts Darumb sie viel herter zu fragen weren denn Mattheus hie umb den namen Jeremia. Wer aber müssig gezencke liebet, der frage ymer hin, Er wird mehr finden, das er fragt denn das er antwortet.

(Out of this chapter the question arises why Matthew ascribes this text to Jeremiah although it is written here in Zechariah. Such and similar questions do not greatly disturb me, since they have little to do with the case. Matthew does enough when he uses passages that are certain, even if he does not give the exact name, since also in other places he quotes Scripture without reproducing the words verbatim as they stand in the Bible. If we can tolerate that, and if it does not change the meaning when he does not quote verbatim, what will keep us (from grasping his meaning) even if he does not give the exact name? More depends on the words than on the name. This is the custom of all the apostles who adduce the meaning of Scripture without quarrelsome concern about details and completeness in the text. There are far more difficult questions than the one we find here in Matthew concerning the name Jeremiah. Whoever

delights in idle quarrels can just go ahead and raise questions. He will find more questions than he is able to answer (WA 23, 642)).

Luther makes a point here that we can all take to heart. The inspiration and the inerrancy of the Scriptures are important to every one of us. But it is possible to emphasize inerrancy at the expense of the central message of the Gospel. I find it sometimes very difficult to understand how conservative Lutherans can participate in organizations which defend biblical inerrancy but which are dominated by men who deny the real presence, baptismal regeneration, and the efficacy of the means of grace. After all, biblical inerrancy is above all important because it undergirds our conviction that the words and promises of God which tell us of our salvation in Christ are absolutely reliable. If it were not for the constant attacks that are made on the Scriptures and the repeated charges that it contains mistakes, we probably would not emphasize the doctrine of biblical inerrancy to the extent that this has been done in recent times, and it is the opposition to biblical inerrancy that must in large measure bear the blame if the central doctrines of the Gospel are sometimes crowded into the background. Nevertheless we must constantly be on our guard against the danger of which Luther warns us here.

The whole argument based on Luther's use of the phrase "slight error" reminds me of a modern version of the same type of logic. In the days when the controversy concerning inerrancy was raging in the LC-MS some of the opponents of this doctrine tried to demonstrate that this was a new teaching in the Missouri Synod. As proof for this a remark made by P. E. Kretzmann was cited: Kretzmann says, "A careful comparison of the list as here given and the account found in the Old Testament shows a slight discrepancy" (Popular Commentary, NT, Vol. I, p. 2). It was argued that since Kretzmann said that there was a discrepancy between Matthew and the Old Testament, he could not have believed in inerrancy, and since Concordia Publishing House, whose publications were censored by the Synod, printed this remark, the Synod at the time of publication did not insist on inerrancy being taught.

Like Luther Kretzmann might have been more careful if he had foreseen what use would be made of his remark. But I sat at Kretzmann's feet in many classes at the seminary in St. Louis and I know how vehemently he defended verbal inspiration and inerrancy. And anyone who has read Luther himself rather than those who use Luther to serve their own purposes knows how vehemently he defends the truthfulness of the Holy Bible.

Luther's Insistence on Inerrancy

We do not have the time at this conference to recount all the voluminous evidence that can be garnered from Luther's pen demonstrating that he believed that there are no real errors and contradictions in God's Word. We might begin with the hundreds of passages in his writings in which he teaches verbal inspiration and his constantly repeated refrain that God does not lie.

But for our present purposes we will quote only one or two passages which are representative of many passages in Luther in which he insists that the "insignificant" and "trivial" details in the biblical accounts are also inspired by the Holy Ghost. Commenting on Jacob's trip to Haran he wrote in his Genesis commentary,

You dare not imagine or wonder why it pleases the Holy Ghost to describe these servile and despised deeds. Listen to what Paul says in Romans 15, "Whatsoever was written before; was written to teach us, in order that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." If we believed firmly, as I do, although my faith is weak, that the Holy Ghost Himself, and God, the Creator of all things, is the real teacher in this book and of these things, which seem so trivial to the flesh, we would find the greatest comfort in them, as St. Paul says (WA 43, 618).

When the modern theologian reads these things in the Bible, he immediately dismisses them as a part of the human side of Scripture that can be ignored or even criticized. This is an axiom in the "conservative" use of the historical-critical method. When Luther was unable to see any importance in some of the words of Scripture

he ascribed his lack of insight to his sinful flesh and to the weakness of his faith. In other words, when modern unbelievers who masquerade as Christian scholars find something in the Bible that seems unimportant or inexplicable to them, they immediately assume that there must be something wrong with the Bible. Luther, on the other hand, in a similar situation would come to the conclusion that there was something wrong with him. Luther's attitude is well summed up in the words,

Whoever reads and studies the Holy Scriptures with diligence will consider nothing in it to be so unimportant that it cannot at least serve to improve our life and morals, since the Holy Spirit has seen to it that it was committed to writing (WA 42, 474).

This will suffice to show that for Luther everything in the Bible is produced by the Holy Ghost, and for him it is for that reason a foregone conclusion that there are no contradictions or errors in the Bible.

He said that in so many words hundreds of times. Over and over again we hear him say in his writings, "God does not lie or deceive."

Someone will say that this is something that all men will grant, and no one will deny that God does not lie, but that this does not yet assert the inerrancy of Scripture. Yet invariably, when Luther asserts that God does not lie or deceive he says that to convince his audience that some statement of the Bible is true and reliable and worthy of acceptance. We can go so far as to say that for Luther the inerrancy of Scripture is a logical deduction from the major premise that God does not lie or deceive, and, therefore, since God speaks to us in all the words of Scripture, we will find no lies and deceptions in the Bible.

In the Large Catechism he says many times that God cannot lie or deceive and each time the remark alludes to some statement of Scripture (cp. e.g., LCI, 165; IV, 56-57; V, 14, 76). In his comments on God's promise to reward those who keep the commandments he says,

Let everyone be careful not to regard this as if it were spoken by man... The world does not believe this at all, and does not recognize it as God's Word. For the world sees that those who trust in God and not mammon suffer grief and want and are opposed and attacked by the devil... We must hold on to these words even in the face of this apparent contradiction, and learn that they neither lie or deceive but will yet prove to be true... These *words* stand and prove to be true since *God* cannot lie or deceive (my emphasis, I, 41-42).

What he said in the Large Catechism is only a reflection in miniature of the views that he espoused in everything he wrote. "Scripture does not lie" and "God does not lie" are synonymous statements for Luther. At least twice he quoted with approval the words of Augustine: "I have learned to do only those books called the Holy Scriptures the honor of believing firmly that none of their writers have ever erred. All others I read in such a way that I do not consider what they say to be the truth unless they prove it to me by Holy Scripture or clear reason" (WA 7, 315).

And in his insistence on inerrancy Luther was no "Gospel reductionist." It is true that most of the time when he says that God and the Scriptures do not lie he has in view some Gospel promise or law threat. But we would expect that in a biblical theologian who knows why God gave us His Word.

But Luther asserts the truthfulness of Scripture in regard to matters which some might regard as "trivia." He says, for example, that the days of creation on must be real days for "human beings can err, but the Word of God is the very wisdom of God and the absolutely infallible truth" (WA 42, 92).

He believed that "the Word is so far above criticism that not even the smallest letter is in error in the law and in the divine promises" (WA 40, 2, 531). But he also believed that there were no errors in biblical chronology, for example. He made a special study of the chronology of the Bible and he says in his *Chronicon* that he made use of the secular historians, but that where they disagreed with the Bible he gave preference to the Holy Scriptures. He justifies that procedure by saying that the historians were only men, but in the Scriptures

the true God speaks (WA 53, 27). That one remark makes mincemeat out of the whole historical critical method.

In his Genesis commentary he refers to the fact that St. Jerome had suggested that the time from the announcement of the flood to its beginning was not 120 years. Luther rejects the solution offered by Jerome and says, “We will not make a liar out of the Holy Ghost” (WA 42, 279).

Later in the same commentary he alludes to a difficulty in the chronology of Abraham’s early life. He admits that he cannot solve the problem, but the attitude he displays in that connection is one we can all emulate. He writes,

It is absurd to imitate those audacious geniuses who immediately shout that a manifest error has been committed whenever such a difficulty arises and who without shame dare emend books that are not their own. As yet I have no satisfying answer for this question even though I have diligently computed the years of the world [He is evidently referring to his *Chronicon*]. Therefore with a proper and humble admission of my own ignorance (for it is the Holy Ghost alone who knows and understands all things) I offer the conjecture that in the case of Abraham God in His wisdom wanted these sixty years to be lost, that no one might venture to foretell anything definite about the end of the world (WA 42, 431f).

It is evident that when he asserted the inerrancy of the Bible Luther did not mean that it gives us full information about everything of which it treats. There are difficulties in the Bible we cannot solve, but instead of approaching the Bible with imagined superior wisdom and knowledge, we are to assume that the difficulty lies not in the Bible but in our ignorance. Luther demonstrates that spirit when he says that we are faced with a difficulty when the Bible says that Arphaxad was born when Shem was a hundred years old. Commenting on this he writes,

Various answers are given, but, first of all, no great harm would result even if there were no information about these matters. In the second place, in order that we may give at least some answer, it is not at all inappropriate if one applies to the beginning of the Flood the expression “two years after the Flood,” which Moses uses here. Then the meaning would be that Arphaxad was born two years after the Flood began. The Flood, however, lasted one year and ten days.

But it is objected: “If this is true, how is it that Elam and Asshur were born before Arphaxad, for then three births occurred in one year?” I answer that even this does not cause any difficulty if we assume that there were twins at the first birth. As I said before, our faith is not endangered if we should lack knowledge about these matters (Note that he does not say that our faith is not endangered if the Bible is wrong in such things). This is certain that Scripture does not lie. Therefore answers that are given to preserve the authority of Scripture serve a purpose, even though they (i.e. the “answers”) may not be altogether certain (WA, 42, 426).

In the face of such remarks, which, as we have repeatedly emphasized, could be quoted *ad nauseam*, it is dishonest to use the evidence that we have cited at the beginning of this paper to raise doubts about Luther’s belief in biblical inerrancy. On this point Luther is a “fundamentalist.”