

## STEPHEN'S SPEECH: A CASE STUDY IN RHETORIC AND BIBLICAL INERRANCY

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The speech delivered by Stephen before the Jerusalem Sanhedrin bristles with perplexing problems for any who would approach it exegetically. Some have concluded that its lengthy character forms a foreign intrusion into the well-balanced progression of Acts.<sup>1</sup> Others, more favorable to the present speech text, have puzzled over the apparent divergency between the text and the judicial allegations it was supposed to have addressed.<sup>2</sup> Although these problems prove quite real, the speech of Stephen empties even a larger basket of difficulties on the heads of those who posit a factually inerrant text of Scripture, for this speech alone contains approximately fifteen apparent historical inaccuracies and other blunders.<sup>3</sup>

These problems in the speech have coaxed many conservatives into redefining the relationship of inerrancy to the speech as a unit, even though a number of those same scholars have carefully displayed solutions for the other apparent inaccuracies in Scripture. Their approach, followed by an expanding number of expositors and apologists, is to relegate the content of the speech to the realm of "allowable errancy," while preserving actual inerrancy only for Luke's accuracy in recording the speech.<sup>4</sup>

This approach, posit many of its adherents, preserves the doctrine of factual inerrancy by limiting the inerrancy claim only to Luke's scrupulously accurate record of what Stephen had said before the Sanhedrin. The speech may thus be admitted as having as many errors as Stephen was inclined to commit, for inerrancy extended not to *Stephen*, but only to *Luke* as an author of Scripture.

The implications for this kind of approach to the difficulty are large, for by placing Stephen's speech on the shelf of secondary authority these scholars have removed that speech from the pool of revelational data suitable for constructing Biblical history and systematic theology. The data gleaned by theologians from the speech as revela-

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<sup>1</sup>F. J. Foakes Jackson, "Stephen's Speech in Acts," *JBL* 49 (1930) 283-286; B. W. Bacon, "Stephen's Speech: Its Argument and Doctrinal Relationship," *Biblical and Semitic Studies* (New York: Yale, 1901) 213-229.

<sup>2</sup>For a brief survey of these difficulties see L. W. Barnard, "St. Stephen and Alexandrian Christianity," *NTS* 7 (1960) 31-32.

<sup>3</sup>R. B. Rackam cites fifteen difficulties in his *Acts of the Apostles* (14th ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1964) 99-102, while H. J. Cadbury is content to leave them at ten in *The Book of Acts in History* (New York: Harper, 1955) 102-103.

<sup>4</sup>C. H. Pinnock, *Biblical Revelation* (Chicago: Moody, 1971) 78-79.

tional support for specific doctrines, such as the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch (drawn from 7:22),<sup>5</sup> the aseity of God (7:25),<sup>6</sup> the "church" of Israel (7:38),<sup>7</sup> the sin-restraining work of God (7:51),<sup>8</sup> and the truth that the striving of the Holy Spirit does not lead to repentance at times (7:51)<sup>9</sup> would have to be gained from other Biblical texts. The historical statements frequently taken from the speech as further revelation or clarification of OT accounts (such as the call of Abraham while in Ur as against an initial call in Haran, Acts 7:2; cf. Gen 12:1) would need to be posited merely as erroneous ideas that were held by Hellenistic Jewish Christians—or, more precisely, by Stephen—and not as being true per se as a part of direct, inerrant divine revelation.

This problem of Stephen's speech uncovers a greatly neglected area in the study of Biblical inerrancy. Little has been done to construct a working formula for determining how to approach rhetorical content in Scripture theologically.<sup>10</sup> Should all Biblical speeches be taken as some would take Stephen's, or should all be deemed inerrant in what they teach? Or, better yet, is there some criterion that if consistently applied would help us know which rhetoric in Scripture is or is not to be considered divinely authoritative? It is the purpose of this paper to seek answers to these crucial questions regarding the application of inerrancy by looking closely at its application to Stephen's speech as a working model.

#### I. SECONDARY INERRANCY AND STEPHEN'S SPEECH

Several lines of support have been mustered to release Stephen's speech from a claim to its own inerrancy. The first factor lies in the necessity of this kind of approach in other portions of Scripture. Clark Pinnock refers to the recorded speeches of liars in the Book of Job as a parallel issue.<sup>11</sup> The content of those speeches cannot be claimed as inerrant, but the historical actuality of the recording must be; hence, a distinction of approach *must* be employed. A more obvious example may be observed in the blatant lies spoken by the serpent

<sup>5</sup>A. H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Valley Forge: Judson, 1907) 169.

<sup>6</sup>L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (4th ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1939) 58.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 409, 572.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 442.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.* Thiessen argues along a similar line from this last Stephenic statement. *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949) 144.

<sup>10</sup>I know of only two unpublished sources that deal seriously with the question: L. Myers, "Acts 7:15-16" (M. Div. thesis; Grace Theological Seminary, 1969), and A. B. Walton, "Stephen's Speech" (Th. D. dissertation; Grace Theological Seminary, 1972). C. Pinnock touched on the issue in *Biblical Revelation*, pp. 78-79, but did not explore to the fullest the difficulties involved.

<sup>11</sup>Pinnock, *Revelation*, p. 78. Cf. C. W. Carter and R. Earle, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1969) 96.

in the garden (Gen 3:1-3).<sup>12</sup> His words contradict God and are manifestly intended to deceive. Inerrancy, if applied to *all* of Scripture,<sup>13</sup> must here be further refined in view of context and author use. A distinction is therefore legitimately suggested between primary inerrancy of speech *content* and secondary inerrancy of speech *occurrence*.

The statement of the Amalekite before David affords a further example. Clearly, the unity of the Books of Samuel and the immediate contexts denote that the Amalekite invented his tale of slaying Saul with the intention of gaining David's favor (2 Sam 1), yet this lie is also recorded as God-breathed Scripture. A distinction between inerrancy of content and occurrence again solves the dilemma. The conclusion must be that the phenomenon of rhetoric as a form in Scripture allows for the possibility of viewing all rhetorical statements as mere inerrant records rather than as inerrant, divinely-approved revelation.

In addition to the necessity of taking this kind of approach on occasion, the value of acknowledging the difficulties of Stephen's speech as obvious errors is alleged by Stokes as a solid confirmation of the truth of Biblical inerrancy. Stokes' reasoning follows these lines:

... surely any man composing a speech to put into the mouth of one of his favorite heroes and champions would not have represented him as making such grave errors when addressing the Jewish senate... We conclude, then, that the inaccuracies reported as made by St. Stephen are evidences of the genuine character of the oration attributed to him.<sup>14</sup>

The difficulties of Acts 7 are not deftly pushed away as phenomenological disclaimers for inerrancy, but rather are carefully roped and dragged into the corral as support for the doctrine as a whole.<sup>15</sup>

The implications of this transfer of Stephen's message into the realm of secondary inerrancy are manifold. One of the implications ties in with the motive and methodology of any who would seek reconciliation, who are held to employ "strange and forced expedients of an exegetical and critical nature."<sup>16</sup> Stokes curtly sparks his attitude on the matter: "I would not waste the time endeavoring (if I was able) to reconcile such a variance."<sup>17</sup> Those who look upon themselves

<sup>12</sup>W. R. Cook, *Systematic Theology in Outline Form* (Portland: Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, 1970), 1. 44.

<sup>13</sup>This follows as a logical outgrowth of the plenary doctrine of 2 Tim 3:16.

<sup>14</sup>G. T. Stokes, *The Acts of the Apostles* (New York: Armstrong, 1837) 311-312.

<sup>15</sup>This is particularly supportive in view of the apparent Thucydidean historical procedure of "supplying" speeches for his characters (*History*, 1.22): "My habit has been to make the speakers say what was in my opinion demanded of them by the various occasions, of course adhering as closely as possible to the general sense of what was said." Thucydides, *The History of the Peloponnesian War* (trans. Richard Crawley; New York: Dutton, 1960).

<sup>16</sup>H. A. W. Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Acts of the Apostles* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1883) 145.

<sup>17</sup>Stokes, *Acts*, p. 317.

as valiant apologetes of Scripture suddenly emerge as those who pervert the intent of Scripture, a common allegation against those who try to reconcile difficult phenomena with the doctrine of Biblical inerrancy.<sup>18</sup>

In addition to this accusation of artificiality that hovers over the necks of those who would attempt a reconciliation, a more serious implication arises. As noted previously, a deletion of inerrancy claims from Stephen's speech ejects that portion of Scripture from the source-pool of revelation utilized by Biblical theologians. While this endangers no cardinal point of doctrine *per se*,<sup>19</sup> it should demand a much closer analysis of the bases for such a rejection in view of the implications carried for other doctrinal sources in Scripture.

In view of these implications, and the clear reality that some rhetorical statements of Scripture are explicable only as secondarily inerrant, a close analysis of this viewpoint is necessary.

## II. ANALYSIS OF A SECONDARY INERRANCY

To begin with, it must be admitted that some rhetorical statements in Scripture must be deferred into secondary inerrancy. This does not mean, however, that *all* rhetorical statements must be. The issues to be dealt with, then, are (1) the bases for determining which speeches must be so relegated, and (2) those criteria as applied specifically to Stephen's speech.

Two difficulties lie in the path of those claiming the ejection approach: first, a tendency not to distinguish between intentions of the Biblical writers in quoting their sources; and second, a failure to apply this in Luke's case in order to discern accurately his intention in using Stephen and his defense.

### A. Failure in Source-Quote Distinctions

There must be some way to distinguish the inerrancy claim of a given rhetorical statement in Scripture. Although some statements are clearly untrue (as shown earlier), it may be demonstrated that some speakers and writers used as a source are clearly understood to be true and correct in their teaching by the Biblical authors. A few of the more obvious examples of the nonrhetorical type are the quotations from the books of Jashar (Josh 10:12, 13) and of the Wars of Yahweh (Num 21:14). These statements, since given author sanction in the specific texts quoted,<sup>20</sup> must be viewed as having divine sanction as well and hence as partaking of the quality of inerrancy, irrespective

<sup>18</sup>Mounce refers to this approach to inerrancy as artificial. R. A. Mounce, "Clues to Understanding Biblical Accuracy," *Eternity* 17/6 (June, 1966) 16-18.

<sup>19</sup>I say this with caution, due to the use of Stephen's speech as a sole source of appeal by some theologians for particular doctrines.

<sup>20</sup>This, of course, does not mean that all the books from which quotes are extracted receive sanction by the authors.

of any phenomenological difficulties contained in the quotation.<sup>21</sup> To relegate all quoted material with inexplicable phenomena to the labyrinths of secondary inerrancy may fail to exert adequately the critical criterion of discernment.

#### B. *Failure in Determining Clear Criteria*

If it is admitted that a distinction must be enforced among the extra-scriptural quoted material, the immediate problem becomes that of determining the criteria for accepting or rejecting a given quotation as valid, inerrant revelational data. If the only criterion is the presence of some sort of difficulty within the quote, then the same arguments may be applied that are set forth against those who insist that difficulties demand an alteration of the entire doctrine of inerrancy. E. J. Young has stated the weakness of this kind of reasoning:

The fundamental assumption, often uncritically adopted, is that the mind of man, without the assistance of divine revelation, can make pronouncements as to whether certain parts of the Bible are from God or not.<sup>22</sup>

There are enough *unquoted* phenomena of the Scriptures that are beyond the scope of natural man to accept; so how can one judge whether a quoted portion is revelational simply by the presence of phenomenological problems?

One way around these difficulties has been proposed by Leonard Myers in his study of the problem. Realizing the importance of some sort of distinguishing standard in handling the different speeches in Scripture, Myers concludes with the following reasoning:

The question we must now ask is how far down the line we must go before we cut off those whose pronouncement is not to be regarded as infallible truth? Between Jesus and John, or John and Stephen, or Timothy and the Samaritan woman, or who? This is the crux of the problem. The answer is that only what God Himself says is to be regarded infallible. The only exception to this is that which God Himself sanctions as coming from Him. The lies of Satan do not lie in any of these categories, so they are to be regarded as not infallible. The same goes for the book of Ecclesiastes. However, there is much which can fall in the category of infallibility: the "thus saith the Lord's" of the Old Testament, the record of biblical history, church epistles, etc. Even the apostles in their public teaching were regarded as infallible, as shown by the upper room discourse. But this infallibility does not extend beyond the apostolic circle. Therefore, Peter's sermon in Acts 2 is to be regarded as infallible, inerrant, but not Stephen's in Acts 7. Luke was granted inerrancy in recording the events in the book of Acts (inerrancy of speaking and recording are two different things). Thus Luke inerrantly records what Peter had inerrantly spoken on the day of Pentecost and inerrantly records what Stephen had errantly spoken in Acts 7.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup>Thus the "standing still" of the sun at Gibeon must be viewed as actual history because of the author's approval of that quote in spite of the scientific tremors it causes some.

<sup>22</sup>E. J. Young, "Scripture—God-breathed and Profitable," *Grace Journal* 7/3 (Fall, 1966) 4.

<sup>23</sup>Myers, "Acts," pp. 28-29.

The essence of Myers' approach is that only God's direct statements in Scripture and the direct statements of those whom he specifically sanctions as authoritative spokesmen (i. e., prophets, apostles, etc.) may be viewed as infallible and inerrant. Myers, however, fails to realize that inerrancy essentially applies to the inspired text of Scripture as the concurrent result of God's superintending breath and the literary work of men. In speaking of delegated men, he has been forced to distinguish between "inerrancy of speaking and recording" and has lost sight of the fact that inspiration does not simply cover recorded history but also instruction in the truth of that history. This instruction comes from the inspired writers themselves, many of whom "externally" would not have had God's sanction since they were not apostles or prophets.<sup>24</sup>

In a recent dissertation on Stephen's speech, Arthur B. Walton has confronted this difficulty of quotation-distinction as it relates to the phenomena in the speech. He begins by noticing the two poles that are clearly distinguishable, the lies of Satan in Genesis 3 (inerrantly recorded) and the words of Jesus (inerrantly recorded and inherently inerrant). Between these two, he notes, are the words of mortal men. He suggests that they may be distinguished by the following criteria:

- (1) If the character of the speaker is inherently evil, his words may well be false, as in the words of Satan;
- (2) if the character of the speaker is shown by the Scripture to be deficient in spiritual perception, the statements may well be false, as in Psalm 53:1, "the fool hath said . . .";
- (3) the context of a passage may reveal that the contents are erroneous, as in the case of Job's friends and in the case of the natural reasoning recorded in Ecclesiastes;
- (4) a rebuke may reveal the fallacy of a statement by one who elsewhere makes divinely directed inerrant statements, illustrated by the rebuke of Peter by Christ (Matt. 16:23).<sup>25</sup>

Walton's analysis shows keener insight than Myers' into the issues involved, but it still leaves the door open somewhat for subjective decisions. The first criterion, for example, bases choice on character. This criterion could, if not carefully applied, delete the magnificent speech of Nebuchadnezzar from authoritativeness (hence inerrancy) as to its contents:

I blessed the Most High  
and praised and honored Him who lives forever;  
For His dominion is an everlasting dominion,  
and His kingdom endures from generation to generation.  
And all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing,  
but He does according to His will in the host of heaven  
and among the inhabitants of the earth;  
And no one can ward off His hand  
or say to Him, "What hast Thou done?"<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup>Luke himself serves as an example. Even though both Luke and Mark gain external authority due to their association with specific apostles, that association does not give them intrinsic apostolic authority. The same holds true for other canonical yet nonprophetic or nonapostolic books.

<sup>25</sup>Walton, "Speech," pp. 202-203.

<sup>26</sup>Dan 4:34b-35 (NASB).

Although it may be argued that this statement came after a regeneration experience, that is hardly demonstrable since that point is absent from the text.<sup>27</sup> The only conclusion to be drawn, then, is that the speech is given by one who is "inherently evil." If the text of the speech teaches correct, inspired truths about God, then that factor cannot be gained by the character of the speaker itself.<sup>28</sup>

Walton hit upon what appears to be the answer but did not capitalize on it: The only way hermeneutically to determine what God intends to communicate in a particular passage (and thus what substance is to partake of the quality of inerrancy) is objectively to determine what the Biblical author intends to communicate.<sup>29</sup> If this principle is true, then Walton's third criterion is the primary and only valid principle for analyzing cited material. When fully employed, this principle thus supplies the contextual basis for discovering the data needed to determine whether the speaker is "deficient in spiritual perception," or his character is "inherently evil," or he is "rebuked" for a statement.

The central principle, then, for determining how to understand a quotation used by a Biblical writer (whether in brief or extended rhetorical statement) is this: If the author gives tacit approval to a quoted text in his manner of citation, then God gives it tacit approval; hence, it must partake of the characteristic of inerrancy. Pinnock came to the same basic conclusion regarding a criterion for differentiation:

This rule would seem to be a safe one: Where the sacred writer records data in such a way that it is apparent he regards it to be true and expects us to take it as such, we must assume that it is. Inspiration is posited in reference to writing. For that reason, whatsoever it asserts as true and free from error is to be received as such.<sup>30</sup>

This principle preserves quotations of unknown, pagan, or evil men, and allows them to be viewed as inerrant statements of divine truth. Paul thus uses the pagan writer Epimenides with patent approval of his words (Acts 17:28;<sup>31</sup> Titus 1:12), Jude incorporates material from the apocryphal book of Enoch with matter-of-fact certainty as to the truth of those statements (Jude 14), and the author of Daniel employs a beautiful quotation of the pagan Nebuchadnezzar in Dan 4:34-35.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>27</sup>All that the text states is that his "reason" returned to him after he had been humbled by God, and he blessed God for it.

<sup>28</sup>An even clearer example is the beautiful inspired truths implanted in the Balaam oracles by God himself *against* the "inherently evil" prophet's will (Num 22-24).

<sup>29</sup>Unless, of course, the text itself states that the author did not understand what he was writing (e.g., some apocalyptic literature; cf. Rev 17:6, 7).

<sup>30</sup>Pinnock, *Revelation*, pp. 78-79.

<sup>31</sup>A verse taken by many theologians as divine revelation on the immensity/omnipresence of God. See A. H. Strong, *Theology*, p. 280, and L. Berkhof, *Theology*, p. 61.

<sup>32</sup>A verse taken by theologians to teach the *independentia* of God; Berkhof, *Theology*, p. 58.

Each of these quotations, then, should be deemed inerrant based on the principle of author sanction.

The validity of this sole principle as a dividing line between that which is primarily inerrant and that which is secondarily inerrant among Biblical quotations may be observed in its application to several questionable texts. In Gen 3:1, for example, the author notes that the "person" about to speak to Eve was "more subtle than any other wild creature that the LORD God had made" (*RSV*). From this introductory note, it is evident that the author does not expect the reader to express much confidence in the character of the serpent; hence, the serpent's statements are not to be looked on as reliable in the absolute sense. They must be relegated to the sphere of secondary inerrancy.

Another example may be evinced from the statement of the Amalekite in 2 Sam 1:10. Here the Amalekite is recorded as saying that he killed Saul, although the preceding narrative in 1 Samuel 31 depicts Saul's self-invoked death by his armor-bearer on Gilboa. The unity of the Books of Samuel may be called on as a clear factor in determining whether the Amalekite's claim before David is to be regarded as true by the reader. The author's gruesomely detailed narrative of Saul's death reveals that he was obviously not ignorant of the facts, yet the narrator gives no hint that the report of that death had been relayed to David.

In order to depict the conveyance of the information to David in the next chapter (2 Sam 1), the author shows David returning from his skirmish against the Amalekites. The victory over the Amalekites at this time is described by the author as a vengeful slaughter due to David's painful loss to them at Ziklag (1 Sam 30:1-6). The tenor is clearly anti-Amalekite at this point, yet the one who shuttles the report of Saul's death to David is himself an Amalekite. The overt inference is that the Amalekite, gazing into David's fuming eyes, had ulterior motives of putting himself in David's favor; thus, he boasts that he killed David's nemesis.

In view, then, of the author's selection of words and distinct emphases, it becomes apparent that he did not intend the Amalekite's story to be taken as an actual account of Saul's death. The context demands that we understand the Amalekite as an enemy of David and a deliberate liar.<sup>33</sup> Here too, then, the author did not intend the statement to be regarded as true, so secondary inerrancy may be fairly posited.

In like manner the speeches of Job's comforters must be viewed. The claims they set forth regarding the character of Job and God in their verbal tête-à-tête runs *against* the direct statements of the author in his narrative of the first two chapters. In addition, the falseness of

<sup>33</sup> "His description of himself as an Amalekite, twice repeated, must have made his action seem all the more horrible in the eyes of David and his men, newly returned from the battle against Amalek. Amalekites remain Amalekites, even if they are sojourning in Israel; these born robbers do not even shrink from the Lord's anointed! Doubtless this is the only way the narrative was understood and judged. . . . Moreover, the man betrays himself as an obvious liar, out for what he can get. True, it is not expressly said that David sees through him and therefore holds him responsible. But the narrator seems to think that his death is just punishment." H. W. Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel: A Commentary* (trans. J. S. Bowder, Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964) 237.

their words may be seen in the conclusive verdict delivered by God himself: "My wrath is kindled against you [Eliphaz] and your two friends; for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has" (Job 42:7, *RSV*). By virtue of the author's intention in the context of his book, it is clear that the speeches in the narrative given by the "comforters" are not to be viewed as infallible; thus, secondary inerrancy finds its home here as well.

### C. Conclusion

The observation has been made that the crux of the matter in determining the inerrancy of a given rhetorical quotation in Scripture is not the difficulty of any phenomena that may appear in that quotation, nor is it the character of the speaker, nor is it the speaker's implicit rank or delegated divine authority attributed to him as an individual. The only valid, testable and objective criterion for ascertaining the inerrancy of quoted material (extrabiblical or not) is this: "Does the writer condone or approve the substance of the statement quoted?" It now remains to apply this criterion to the presentation of Stephen's speech by Luke.

## III. STEPHEN'S AND LUKE'S INERRANCY

There is sufficient evidence to demonstrate that Stephen received a strong backing of approval by Luke and, hence, to posit that we must take Stephen's speech in an inerrant sense. Five factors tilt the scales in this direction: (1) Luke's portrait of Stephen's character; (2) Luke's editorial comments on Stephen; (3) Luke's judicial foil; (4) Luke's nontendency toward error; and (5) Luke's speech usage in Acts.

### A. Stephen's Character

Stephen's entrance into the forefront of Luke's narrative is relatively rapid. His first appearance in Acts 6:5 is melted into the list of seven particularly noteworthy men who were put forth by the multitude of believers for the distributionary task. This clearly denotes that he was acknowledged by the group and ratified by the apostles (6:6) as having attained the threefold character requirements previously set forth. Stephen, as one of the seven, was recognized by the Christian community as possessing "good repute" and as being "full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom" (6:3). Although this in itself is not an independent criterion for determining the inerrancy of Stephen's speech, it does show that Luke as an author paints a positive portrait of Stephen.

### B. Luke's Comment

Although this portrait in itself initiates a positive tenor to Stephen's character, a further factor arises in Luke's treatment of Stephen in his catalog of the seven. Not only does Luke begin the list with Stephen, but Stephen also is one of two in that list with Lukan comments attached

to his name. The other one, Nicolas, receives the added note concerning his distinct station as a proselyte to Judaism. Stephen, however, receives an expansion on the integrity of his character. Luke does not merely list him as "Stephen," but "Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit" (6:5). The very fact that he would reiterate these issues almost to the point of redundancy shows that Luke himself holds Stephen in a unique place among the seven noteworthy men.

### C. *Luke's Judicial Foil*

A third factor in the narrative demonstrates that Luke intends to put his stamp of approval on Stephen. Luke devotes a full paragraph to the activities that sparked his arrest and gives no hint that the arrest was legally justifiable. On the contrary, he goes to notable lengths to bring to the reader's attention the fact that the arrest was totally unjust. In 6:8, Luke describes Stephen's activities as motivated by the fact that he was "full of grace and power," while in v 10 he notes that the verbal attack on Stephen was curtailed because the opposition "could not withstand the wisdom and Spirit with which he spoke." The negative tenor in this introductory section does not apply to Stephen, but is instead slapped upon those who are in opposition to Stephen. Luke records that this sinister group "secretly instigated men" (v 11), "stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes" (v 12), and "set up false witnesses" against Stephen (v 13).

From the foregoing, it is clear that Luke intended to show that Stephen's was a mock trial on "trumped-up" charges.<sup>34</sup> There is no hint that Luke intended to display Stephen in a bad light at his trial. The *contrary* is true, however, for after painting his portrait of the opposition with such dark colors Luke focuses his narrative on Stephen and records that even the opposition noticed that "his face was like the face of an angel" (v 15).<sup>35</sup> This strong contrast within the trial backdrop itself gives fair indication that Luke was siding himself personally with Stephen and his cause. It seems highly improbable that Luke would do this sort of thing and yet place the central contribution of Stephen—his speech—into the narrative, knowing that his hero was teaching erroneous Biblical history. Luke must have accepted what Stephen taught as true. Walton observes the logical outgrowth of this data:

Yet, neither his character, nor the context of the speech, nor Luke's treatment of the speech, suggest that his words were to be questioned.

<sup>34</sup>This leads to the further possibility that Luke was intending to show a definite correlation between the trial of our Lord and the trial of Stephen. This certainly appears to be a valid correlation in view of the singularly unique statements of both our Lord and Stephen as they are at the point of unjust execution. Luke records that Stephen stated, "Lord, do not place this sin against them," which is remarkably similar to our Lord's statement, recorded by Luke alone, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). Although many (including B. M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* [London: United Bible Societies, 1971] 180) question the Lukan origin of this reading, its genuineness as a logion of Christ is still acceptable.

<sup>35</sup>This same contrast between Stephen and his opponents is depicted at the conclusion of the speech, when the opposition "were enraged and ground their teeth at him," but he, "full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God . . ." (v 55).

Indeed, it seems clear that Luke included the speech of Stephen in detail and at length, without criticism, but with obvious approval, because he considered the teachings of Stephen to be his own. This is one of the strongest arguments for inerrancy in the content of the speech.<sup>36</sup>

#### D. *Luke and Possible Error*

In view of Luke's presentation of positive character in the person of Stephen, it has been concluded that Luke approved of Stephen. Earlier it was argued by Stokes as a chief proponent of the secondary inerrancy school that the multiplicity of error within the speech commends the doctrine of Biblical inerrancy by showing Luke's scrupulous objectivity. However, with Luke's clear approval of Stephen's character as a deliberate backdrop to the speech, this conclusion proves untenable. Alexander has written a more probable conclusion to the phenomena of multiple difficulties at this point in the speech:

This last hypothesis, that Stephen erred, even if admissible in the case of exegetical necessity, is far less natural than either of the others. With respect to the concurrence or accumulation of supposed inaccuracies in this one verse (as to Jacob's burial, that of the patriarchs and Abraham's purchase), so far from proving one another, they only aggravate the improbability of real errors having been committed in such quick succession, and then gratuitously left on record, when they might have been so easily corrected or expunged.<sup>37</sup>

In view, then, of Luke's presentation of Stephen's character and innocence, the probability of known factual error in the speech is low.

#### E. *Luke and the Speeches*

Luke's general handling of the speeches in Acts in correlation to the Gospel words of our Lord forms the final argument against assuming that Luke acknowledged and integrated factual error into the speech. Bruce notes the necessity that "the speeches in *Ac.* must not be considered in isolation from those in *Lk.*, where we have the other Synoptists for comparison."<sup>38</sup> At this point the attitude of Luke toward recording the words of our Lord may serve as a viable pattern for determining his attitude toward the words of the apostolic band in Acts. Concerning Luke's treatment of the Lord's discourses, Bruce notes that "it is agreed by Synoptic students that Luke reports with great faithfulness the sayings and speeches which he found in his Gospel sources."<sup>39</sup> Longenecker has made this same observation:

Comparing the third Gospel with the first, it can be demonstrated that Luke did not invent sayings for Jesus. On the contrary, he seems to have

<sup>36</sup>Walton, "Speech," p. 203.

<sup>37</sup>J. A. Alexander, *The Acts of the Apostles Explained* (3rd ed.; New York: Scribners, 1864), I, 268-269.

<sup>38</sup>F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text* (Chicago: Intervarsity, 1952) 18-19.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*

been more literally exact in the transmission of the words of Jesus than in the recording of the events of His life.<sup>40</sup>

The relationship of Luke's scrupulousness in his Gospel to his record in Acts implies that extreme care would be afforded the recording of a proclamation in Acts by virtue of parallel intent and continuity of message. Longenecker concludes the relationship in this way:

There is, therefore, it must still be insisted, a presumption in favor of a similarity of treatment in Luke's recording of the words of Jesus and his recording of the addresses of Peter, Stephen, Philip, James and Paul. And though it is certainly true that his respect for the latter never rivaled his veneration for the former, it is difficult to believe that such a difference would have appreciably affected his desire for accuracy of content, if not also of word, which he evidences in his Gospel.<sup>41</sup>

Given the reality of similarity of treatment between the two works, and given the high priority Luke gives to the place of Christian proclamation in his book of apostolic history, it becomes extremely unlikely that Luke would insert a speech that is a defense of the universal scope of that faith knowing that it contained clear and observable historical errors.

#### F. Conclusion

In view of the foregoing data, it seems quite clear that Stephen's speech fits the essential criterion of author sanction, which demands that we take the speech as primarily inerrant and not simply secondarily inerrant.

We have used Stephen's speech as a pivotal test case to hammer out a suitable method for approaching rhetorical content in Scripture theologically. The only scientific approach is an objective criterion that is detachable and applicable to all the speech-segments in Holy Writ. It has been concluded that the simplest and safest criterion is author sanction. Stephen's speech receives author sanction. Therefore we must use the content of his speech as another source-pool of divinely revealed truth.

<sup>40</sup>R. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) 82.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 82-83.