

# What Makes the Bible Unique?

by Dr. John Ankerberg, Dr. John Weldon

## The Crucial Subject

The Bible is clearly the most influential book the world has ever known. Abraham Lincoln called it “the best gift God has given to man.” Patrick Henry said, “It is worth all other books which were ever printed.” Noted British statesman William Gladstone wrote that “an immeasurable distance separates it from all competitors” while the famous philosopher Immanuel Kant declared, “The Bible is the greatest benefit which the human race has ever experienced.” A. M. Sullivan observed, “The cynic who ignores, ridicules, or denies the Bible, spurning its spiritual rewards and aesthetic excitement, contributes to his own moral anemia.”<sup>1</sup>

Why do we think the subject of the reliability of the Bible is such a crucial subject? Because of its implications. Throughout human history virtually all people have searched for God at some point in their lives, because apart from God they intuitively sensed that their lives lacked ultimate meaning. Yet the Bible claims to be the revealed Word of God to man (John 1:12,13; 3:16; 17:3; 1 John 5:9-15). Further, it tells us how we may come to know God personally. If the Bible is true, then in its pages we can find ultimate meaning for our lives and the God we have searched for. We can read of His mighty and gracious acts among people and nations in the Old Testament, and we can especially see His love and compassion in the New Testament. For it is undeniably true that if we want to know who God really is, and what He is really like, we only look at Jesus Christ (John 14:6-11; 12:44,45).

Unfortunately, many people today do not believe in the one true God, and they deny that God has personally revealed Himself in the Bible. They have spawned skeptical theories and written endless volumes attacking the idea that the Bible is an accurate account of God’s intervention in human history and that it reveals His will for man. But even skeptics cannot deny that the Bible’s influence in history is incalculable and that it has literally changed our world—not just Western history but all of history.

This topic is vital because if there is solid evidence that the Bible is God’s Word to us, its critics are wrong. Worse, they are leading astray all those who

listen to them. If the Bible alone is divine revelation, then by definition it is the most important Book in the world. It alone will tell us what God requires of us.

In light of these undeniable facts, to be ignorant of the Bible's claims and contents constitutes an abdication of personal responsibility concerning one's own welfare.

To know that the Bible is reliable is to know that all of what it teaches is reliable. And what it teaches is that the one true God sent His only Son to die for our sins so that we could inherit eternal life as a free gift (John 3:16; Rom. 3:22-26). Such a claim is phenomenal in its uniqueness and profundity. If skeptics are given only one reason to objectively examine the claims of the Bible, this alone should be sufficient, because if these claims are true, then God freely offers us more than we could ever imagine. If the Bible is truly God's Word to us, and if we reject its message of salvation, then no other personal decision they make will be more consequential. Therefore no one can fail to ignore the issue of the reliability of the Bible—not merely its historical reliability but its spiritual reliability as well.

We have written this information so that Christians will be encouraged in their faith and non-Christians will be challenged to investigate the Bible further—to read it, ponder it, and ultimately to accept it for what it is. Our desire for the reader is expressed in the gratefulness of the apostle Paul to the Thessalonians: “We also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe” (1 Thess. 2:13 NIV).

### **The Primary Issue: What is the proper understanding of the biblical doctrine of inerrancy?**

If the Bible is inerrant—that is, without error—then it is certainly entirely unique among all the ancient books of the world, whether religious or secular. Given the tens of thousands of details in the Bible that could be either confirmed or disproved by history, archeology, science, etc., and given the fact that Scripture was written by some 40 authors over a period of 1,500 years in many different places and times, to find the Bible without error and in agreement on essentials and particulars is nothing short of striking. In fact, we think something like this can only be explained through divine inspiration. In the pages that follow we will discuss what inerrancy means and what it does not mean. A good general definition of biblical inerrancy is given by Dr. Paul Feinberg:

Inerrancy means that when all facts are known, the Scriptures in their original autographs and properly interpreted will be shown to be wholly true in everything that they affirm, whether that has to do with doctrine or morality or with the social, physical, or life sciences.<sup>2</sup>

Critics, of course, will immediately point out that we do not have “all the facts” nor do we have the autographs, or original writings, and therefore inerrancy can't be formally proven or rationally defended. While technically it can't be formally proved, inerrancy can certainly be rationally defended. Formal 100% proof is

available only in logic and mathematics. For everything else in life, we must base our decisions on degrees of probability. One hundred percent certainty is not available for anything in life, including life itself, so it can hardly be argued that a 99% degree of probability for inerrancy is irrelevant. People buy houses, drive cars, and get married taking much higher degrees of risk than this.

Our argument is that preponderance of evidence lies so heavily on the side of inerrancy that it cannot reasonably be doubted, if the evidence is handled fairly. True, we don't have all the facts, but we do have an incredibly large number of them which support inerrancy. And we don't have the autographs, but the manuscript copies which we do possess are collectively autographic for all practical purposes. As we shall see, what all this means is that more than sufficient reason exists for belief in inerrancy. Compared to making other important decisions in life, trusting in the inerrancy of the Bible is one of the easiest to make.

Properly defined, inerrancy must apply "equally to all parts of Scripture as originally written."<sup>3</sup> Thus a belief in what is termed "limited inerrancy"—i.e., inerrancy in doctrine and morals, but errancy in science and history—is impossible to maintain logically because accepting errors in the latter category demands accepting errors in the former category. Why? Because biblical doctrine and morality are inseparably bound to biblical history and science, as we document elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> It is impossible to maintain that the Bible has errors in science and history but is without error in theology and ethics because these categories are logically connected.

For example, if we reject a literal Adam as the first man (Gen. 2:5-7; 1 Cor. 15:21,45) and his subsequent fall into sin as an error (in deference to the alleged truth of evolution), we must also logically reject as error the declarations of the apostle Paul concerning these beliefs as well as the imputation of Adam's sin to the human race and its consequences (Rom. 5:12-19). Further, if Adam and Eve never existed, then Jesus was also in error (Matt. 19:4,5) and biblical Christology and salvation along with Him. Further, if Scripture contains errors in those areas we can test on the basis of historical, archeological, and scientific fact, on what logical basis can we assume it doesn't contain errors in those areas we cannot test, such as theology and ethics (the nature of God, salvation, morality, etc.)?

Finally, the assumption of errancy is self-defeating in another way. Given limited inerrancy, it becomes impossible to tell which Scriptures are inerrant and which are not. The Bible assumes its inerrancy throughout and never even hints that some parts of it are errant. So if Scripture errs, then where does it err and how do we know when, if not even a single error has ever been proven in Scripture? In light of this, one wonders why anyone, especially any Christian, would assume that the Bible contains errors? The real issue is usually that some people think Scripture has errors because it teaches something they don't want to believe, or because it conflicts with some personal theory they think is true but really isn't (e.g., rationalism, scientism, evolution, humanism, feminism, universalism).

But there are other important considerations when we examine the doctrine of inerrancy. To be understood and defended properly, inerrancy must not become subject to certain uncalled for misunderstandings. **First, a proper definition of inerrancy does not demand the use of technical language or knowledge of modern science.** This would certainly have kept it a closed book to all those without such knowledge. Ongoing scientific precision constantly changes. Such precision for the twenty-first century would still not make the Bible correct to the nth degree, for which century's precision should inerrancy reflect—twenty-first, twenty-fifth, or thirtieth?

Also, precision may become so precise as to be awkward or useless, practically speaking. To speak of a setting sun is not an error in spite of its scientific imprecision in not referring to the earth's rotation. To cite a biblical example, Jesus said that the mustard seed was "smaller than all other seeds" (Matt. 13:32 NASB). For all we know, humankind has still not discovered the smallest of all seeds. For Jesus a) to have named this seed, or b) to have named the smallest seed currently known to twenty-first century botany would, respectively, leave Him a) in possible error through lack of current scientific confirmation or b) actual error by accommodation to limited twentieth century science. In either case, His hearers would either not have understood Him, or questioned His accuracy, or both. Jesus' obvious meaning was that the mustard seed was the smallest of all seeds known to His hearers, which was true, and reflects how the New International Version translates this verse.

**Second, everyone knows that it is proper to use general statements about things, so long as they do not contain errors.** Inerrancy, for the same reason, does not require strict grammatic, semantic, numeric, or historic precision. For example, September 14, 15, or 16 is correctly referred to as the middle of the month.

**Third, inerrancy does not exclude the use of figurative language** (e.g., allegory, personification, hyperbole) **or various literary genres** (apocalyptic, drama, poetry, parable); to exclude these in favor of a wooden literalism would rob Scripture of much of its richness and universal appeal.

**Fourth, inerrancy does not demand verbatim exactness when the New Testament quotes the Old, assuming a New Testament quotation does not contradict an Old Testament one.** New Testament writers, not to mention the Holy Spirit, had the right to use Old Testament quotations in summary form for purpose of illustration, or other legitimate literary means, just as writers do today.

**Fifth, inerrancy does not demand that any given biblical event or account be exhaustively reported.**

**Sixth, inerrancy assumes the accuracy of what is merely recorded, whether or not it is true** (such as accurately recording a lie from Satan [Gen. 3:4] or an incorrect prophecy by a false prophet).

**Seventh, inerrancy does not assume the inerrancy of non-inspired sources quoted by a biblical writer for purposes of illustration** (Acts 17:28).

In essence, inerrancy means that the Bible, even though speaking in the common language, never deceives us, never contradicts itself, and can be wholly trusted. Inerrancy means that the Bible is without error.

Having examined what inerrancy does and does not teach, let us now briefly see how this doctrine relates to the nature of divine inspiration and the character of God. Then we will look at the Bible itself to show that it does clearly claim to be inerrant.

Inerrancy is inseparably related to the doctrine of inspiration and the righteous character and infinite power of God. **First, the biblical doctrine of inspiration is both verbal and plenary**—i.e., involving the very words of Scripture (Matt. 4:4) and extending to every part of Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16). If a righteous and holy God is incapable of inspiring error, then it is logical to conclude that whatever is inspired must be inerrant. **Second, the Bible reveals that God is omnipotent**—that is, He has absolute power. In other words, He has the means to give His revelation inerrantly.

Thus, if God's inspiration extends to every word of Scripture, then every word of Scripture must be inerrant because of His righteousness. Further, since He is omnipotent He could safeguard the human recipients of inspiration from error, even though His inspiration was given through fallible men.

**Thus the Bible either asserts or assumes its own inerrancy from its first book, Genesis, to its last book, Revelation.** The term "Thus saith the Lord" or similar expressions are used some 2800 times in the Old Testament (e.g., Jer. 1:11; cf. Deut. 18:18; 1 Kgs. 22:14; Amos 3:1; Ex. 34:27; Jer. 36:28; Isa. 8:20). And in many different ways the Old Testament repeatedly asserts its divine authority. For example, "The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever" (Isa. 40:8 NIV). In brief, the Old Testament is either God's Word or a monumental fraud. Inspiration (or inerrancy) is explicitly asserted for 68% of the Old Testament (26 of 39 books). The remaining books have either an implicit claim or a characteristic quality which serves for such an implicit claim. (Where explicit claim is lacking, particular reasons may exist for this.<sup>5</sup>)

New Testament assertions to the verbal, plenary inspiration of the Old Testament provides additional corroboration. Thus, "Twenty of twenty-two Old Testament books (or 90%) have their authority and/or authenticity directly affirmed by the New Testament."<sup>6</sup> As we discuss more fully later, particularly relevant are the declarations of Jesus who was God incarnate (Jn. 1:1; 5:46; 8:14-16; 26, 28; 12:48-50; 14:6; 2 Pet. 1:20; Phil. 2:1-8; Titus 2:13). As God incarnate, Jesus was incapable of teaching error (John 12:48-50; Matt. 24:35). In John 17:17 NASB Jesus said, "Thy Word is truth" and in Matthew 4:4, "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God" (NASB). In both instances He could only have referred to the complete Old Testament canon of the Jews then extant (Luke 24:27). This affirms 100% of the Old Testament as inspired and therefore inerrant.

As Drs. Geisler and Nix correctly point out, "Christ is the key to the inspiration

and canonization of the Scriptures.”<sup>7</sup> Jesus not only confirmed the entire Old Testament as inspired, He pre-authenticated the inspiration (i.e., inerrancy) of the New Testament. Because of Christ’s promise to the disciples that the Holy Spirit “will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you” (John 14:26 NIV; referring e.g., to the Gospels, cf. Matt. 24:35) and that the Holy Spirit “will guide you into all truth” (John 16:13 NIV; cf. vv. 14, 15, referring e.g., to the remainder of the New Testament), it is not surprising that “virtually every New Testament writer claimed that his writing was divinely authoritative.... The cumulative effect of this self-testimony is an overwhelming confirmation that the New Testament writers claimed inspiration.”<sup>8</sup>

Some examples of claims for the inspiration (i.e., inerrancy) of the prophetic New Testament include 2 Timothy 3:16<sup>9</sup>; 2 Peter 1:20,21<sup>10</sup>; 3:2, 16<sup>11</sup>, Revelation 1:1-3<sup>12</sup>; 22:18,19<sup>13</sup>; 1 Thessalonians 4:8<sup>14</sup>. Indeed, the fact that virtually every New Testament writer assumed his writing was as binding and authoritative as the Old Testament asserts a great deal, for such writers were Orthodox Jews who believed that God’s word was heretofore confined to the accepted Old Testament canon. To add to it was a horrible presumption unless divine inspiration were clearly present.

However, the very fact of the arrival of the prophesied new covenant (predicted in Jeremiah, Ezekiel, etc.), coupled with the incarnation and atonement of Jesus, required a corresponding body of divine revelation to explain and expound these events, just as was true for the activity of God in the old covenant. There can be no doubt that the Bible teaches its own inerrancy.

Skeptics, however, reject inerrancy because of the unsupported presuppositions they bring to Scripture. Critics generally assume that miracles are impossible by definition, the unstated corollary being that God doesn’t exist either. But how do they know this with absolute assurance—by infallible knowledge? If many or most of the greatest minds throughout history and today have believed that God exists, how do critics safely assume otherwise? Modern scientific rationalism has explained very little of the heights and depths of the universe. To declare absolutely that God does not exist and that inerrant inspiration is impossible is itself impossible to maintain logically unless one is God and has the omniscience to be absolutely certain of the impossibility. It is merely presumption to assume that an infinite, personal God could never communicate His revelation inerrantly.

Besides, sufficient evidence exists to show that the Bible is divinely inspired. For example, the presence of supernatural prophecy about the future cannot be denied except on the basis of an antisupernatural bias. Thus the internal and external evidence clearly supports a pre-neo-Babylonian composition for Isaiah and a neo-Babylonian composition for Daniel.<sup>15</sup> Yet Isaiah predicts, for example, King Cyrus by name long before he lived (44:28-45:6), and the nature, person, mission, and death of the Jewish Messiah (e.g., 9:6; 53:1-12). Similarly, the prophet Daniel (Matt. 24:15) predicts the Medo-Persian, Greek, and Roman empires so clearly that antisupernaturalists are forced, against all the evidence, to date his book at 165 B.C. and thus imply that it is a forgery (Daniel chapters 2

and 7; cf. 11:1-35 in light of subsequent Persian and Greek history and the dynasties of the Egyptians and Syrians).<sup>16</sup> First Kings 13:1,2 predicts King Josiah 300 years before he was born and Micah 5:2 predicts the very birthplace of Jesus 700 years before He was born. How are we to account for such things if the Bible is not a divine book?

Finally, the person and resurrection of Jesus Christ proves the inerrancy of Scripture, for if Jesus rose from the dead—and this must be accepted as a fact of history<sup>17</sup>—then His claims about Himself must be true. If so, then He must be God incarnate (John 5:18, 21-26; 1:30-38; 11:4, 25; 14:9), and thus His teaching on an inerrant Scripture must be accepted—unless we are to suppose that God lies or contradicts Himself, which He Himself denies (Heb. 6:18; Titus 1:2; 2 Tim. 2:13; Num. 23:19). Indeed, when even a noted Jewish scholar of the New Testament who rejects Jesus' Messiahship accepts His bodily resurrection “as a historical event” and “a fact of history” we can be certain that the resurrection is at least worth even the critics' impartial investigation.<sup>18</sup>

Following Montgomery and Sproul,<sup>19</sup> a logical defense of inerrancy may be constructed based on Christ's resurrection:

1. On the basis of accepted principles of historic and textual analysis the New Testament documents are shown to be reliable and trustworthy historical documents. That is, they give accurate primary source evidence for the life and death of Jesus Christ.
2. In the Gospel records, Jesus claimed to be God incarnate (John 5:18; 10:27-33). He exercised numerable divine prerogatives, and rested his claims on His numerous and abundantly testified, historically unparalleled miracles (John 10:37,38) and His forthcoming physical resurrection from the dead (John 10:17,18).
3. In each Gospel, Christ's resurrection is minutely described, and for 2000 years it has been incapable of disproof despite the detailed scholarship of the world's best skeptics. The simple truth is that the historic fact of the resurrection of Christ proves His claim to deity (Rom. 1:3,4). The resurrection cannot be rejected a priori on antisupernaturalist grounds, for miracles are impossible only if so defined. The probability of a miracle is determined by the cumulative weight of the evidence, and not on philosophical bias.
4. Because Jesus is the Son of God, He is an infallible authority. In this role He taught that Scripture originates from a holy God and is inerrant, since that which originates from an utterly trustworthy God must be utterly trustworthy itself (cf. John Wenham, *Christ and the Bible*).

Our conclusion is that both the claims and the miraculous nature of the Bible, which speak for its inspiration and inerrancy, as well as the infallible pronouncements of God incarnate on an inerrant Scripture, are sufficient reason to accept the proposition that the Bible is inerrant.

## Summary: The Uniqueness of The Bible

1. The Bible is the only book in the world that offers objective evidence to be the Word of God. Only the Bible gives real proof of its divine inspiration.
2. The Bible is the only religious Scripture in the world that is inerrant.
3. The Bible is the only ancient book with documented scientific and medical prevision. No other ancient book is ever carefully analyzed along scientific lines, but many modern books have been written on the theme of the Bible and modern science.
4. The Bible is the only religious writing that offers eternal salvation as a free gift entirely by God's grace and mercy.
5. The Bible is the only major ancient religious writing whose complete textual preservation is established as virtually autographic.
6. The Bible contains the greatest moral standards of any book.
7. Only the Bible begins with the creation of the universe by divine fiat and contains a continuous, if often brief and interspersed, historical record of mankind from the first man, Adam, to the end of history
8. Only the Bible contains detailed prophecies about the coming Savior of the world, prophecies which have proven true in history.
9. Only the Bible has a totally realistic view of human nature, the power to convict people of their sin, and the ability to change human nature.
10. Only the Bible has unique theological content, including its theology proper (the trinity; God's attributes); soteriology (depravity, imputation, grace, propitiation atonement, reconciliation, regeneration, union with Christ, justification, adoption, sanctification, eternal security, election, etc.); Christology (the incarnation, hypostatic union); pneumatology (the Person and work of the Holy Spirit); eschatology (detailed predictions of the end of history); ecclesiology (the nature of the church as Christ's bride and in a spiritually organic union with Him); etc.
11. Only the Bible offers a realistic and permanent solution to the problem of human sin and evil.
12. Only the Bible has its accuracy confirmed in history by archeology, science, etc.
13. The internal and historical characteristics of the Bible are unique in its unity and internal consistency despite production over a 1500-year period by 40-plus authors in three languages on three continents discussing scores of controversial subjects, yet having agreement on all issues.
14. The Bible is the most translated, purchased, memorized, and persecuted book in history. For example, it has been translated into some 1700 languages.
15. Only the Bible is fully one-quarter prophetic, containing a total of some 400 complete pages of predictions.
16. Only the Bible has withstood 2000 years of intense scrutiny by critics and not

only survived the attacks but prospered and had its credibility strengthened by such criticism. (Voltaire predicted that the Bible would be extinct within 100 years, but within 50 years Voltaire was extinct and his house was a warehouse for the Bibles of the Geneva Bible Society.)

17. Only the Bible has molded the history of Western civilization more than any other book. The Bible has had more influence in the world than any other book.
18. Only the Bible has a Person-specific (Christ-centered) nature for each of its 66 books, detailing the Person's life in prophecy, type, antitype, etc., 400 to 1500 years before that Person was ever born.
19. Only the Bible proclaims a resurrection of its central figure that can be proven in history.
20. Only the Bible provides historic proof that the one true God loves mankind.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Citations taken from Frank S. Meade, *The Encyclopedia of Religious Quotations*; Rhoda Tripp, *The International Thesaurus of Quotations*; Ralph L. Woods, *The World Treasury of Religious Quotations*; Jonathan Green, *Morrow's International Dictionary of Contemporary Quotations*.
- <sup>2</sup> Paul D. Feinberg, "The Meaning of Inerrancy," in Norman L. Geisler, *Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids: The Zondervan Corporation, 1979, 1980), p. 294.
- <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 296.
- <sup>4</sup> John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *Ready with an Answer* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1997), ch. 15.
- <sup>5</sup> Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), pp. 66-67.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 91,97.
- <sup>9</sup> 2 Tim. 3:16: "All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,..."
- <sup>10</sup> 2 Pet. 1:20-21: "...knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke *as they were* moved by the Holy Spirit."
- <sup>11</sup> 2 Pet 3:2, 16: "...that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior,..." "...as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable *people* twist to their own destruction, as *they do* also the rest of the Scriptures."
- <sup>12</sup> Rev. 1:1-3: "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified *it* by His angel to His servant John, who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw. Blessed *is* he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time *is* near."
- <sup>13</sup> Rev. 22:18-19: "For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and *from* the things which are written in this book."
- <sup>14</sup> 1 Thess. 4:8: "Therefore he who rejects *this* does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit."
- <sup>15</sup> Gleason Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, revised edition (Chicago: Moody

- Press, 1974), chs. 23-24,28-29.
- <sup>16</sup> Cf. John Walvoord, *Daniel: The Key to the Prophetic Revelation* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1960), ch. 11.
- <sup>17</sup> See our *Knowing the Truth About the Resurrection*; William Lane Craig, *The Son Rises* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), especially pp. 88, 124, 133-41.
- <sup>18</sup> Pinchas Lapide, *The Resurrection of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1983), pp. 92,144,149-50, although he also equivocates on the bodily resurrection (pp. 126-31).
- <sup>19</sup> John Warwick Montgomery, *The Shape of the Past* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1975), pp. 138-39; R. C. Sproul, "The Case of Inerrancy: A Methodological Analysis," in Montgomery: ed., *God's Inerrant Word* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1974), p. 248; cf. 248-60.

## 2 Da Vinci Code What Makes the Bible Unique?