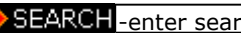


## [Wipe Out Fear and Anxiety, Of Online Dating!](#)

It's easier, safer, and less stressful when you hook-up through a friend -- rather than venture alone into the uncharted waters of online dating. That's the premise behind freindsmeetfriends.com, a new player in the world of Internet matchmaking.

[web hosting](#)[domain names](#)[email addresses](#)

# When Critics Ask

Norman Geisler & Thomas Howe

© 1992

VICTOR BOOKS

Wheaton, Illinois 60187

---

# How to Approach Bible Difficulties

## THE BIBLE: ERRORS, NO!

Critics claim the Bible is filled with errors. Some even speak of thousands of mistakes. The truth is there is not even one demonstrated error in the original text of the Bible. This is not to say that there are not *difficulties* in our Bibles. There are, and that is what this book is all about. It is only to point out that there are not actual *errors* in the Scriptures. Why? Because the Bible is the Word of God, and God cannot err. Come let us reason. Let's put it in logical form and then examine the premises:

GOD CANNOT ERR.

THE BIBLE IS THE WORD OF GOD.

THEREFORE, THE BIBLE CANNOT ERR.

As any student of logic knows, this is a valid syllogism (form of reasoning). So, if the premises are true, the conclusion is also true. As we will show, the Bible clearly declares itself to be the Word of God.<sup>1</sup> It also informs us that God cannot err. The conclusion, then, is inevitable. The Bible cannot err. If the Bible erred in anything it affirms, then God would be mistaken. But God cannot make mistakes.

## God Cannot Err

The Scriptures declare emphatically that "it is impossible for God to lie" (Hebrews 6:18). Paul speaks of the "God who cannot lie" (Titus 1:2). He is a God who, even if we are faithless, "He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself" (2 Timothy 2:13). God is truth (John 14:6) and so is His Word. Jesus said to the Father, "Your Word is Truth (John 17:17). The psalmist exclaimed, "The entirety of Your word is truth" (Psalms 119:160).

## The Bible Is the Word of God

Jesus referred to the Old Testament as the "Word of God" which "cannot be broken" (John 10:35). He said, "until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished" (Matthew 5:18, NIV). It came "from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). Although human authors recorded the messages, "prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:20, NIV).<sup>2</sup>

Jesus said to the religious leaders of His day, "You nullify the Word of God by your tradition" (Mark 7:13, NIV). Jesus turned their attention to the written Word of God by affirming over and over again, "It is written . . . It is written . . . It is written . . ." (Matthew 4:4, 7, 10). This phrase occurs over ninety times in the New Testament. It is a strong indication of the divine authority of the written Word of God. Stressing the unfailing nature of God's truth, the Apostle Paul referred to the Scriptures as "the Word of God" (Romans 9:6). The writer of Hebrews declared that "the Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12, NIV).

## The Logical Conclusion: The Bible Cannot Err

Yes God has spoken, and He has not stuttered. The God of truth has given us the Word of Truth, and it does not contain any untruth in it. The Bible is the unerring Word of God.<sup>3</sup>

## Can the Bible be Trusted in Science and History?

Some have suggested that Scripture can always be trusted on moral matters, but it is not always correct on historical matters. They rely on it in the spiritual domain, but not in the sphere of science. If true, however, this would render the Bible ineffective as a divine authority, since the spiritual is often inextricably interwoven with the historical and scientific.

A close examination of Scripture reveals that the scientific (factual) and spiritual truths of Scripture are often inseparable. For example, one cannot separate the spiritual truth of Christ's resurrection from the fact that His body permanently vacated the tomb and later physically appeared (Matthew 28:6; 1 Corinthians 15:13-19). Likewise, the death of Christ for our sins cannot be detached from His shedding literal blood on the cross, for "without shedding of blood there is no remission" (Hebrews 9:22). And Adam's existence and fall cannot be a myth. If there were no literal Adam and no actual fall, then the

spiritual teaching about inherited sin and eventual or physical death are wrong. (Romans 5:12). Historical reality and the theological doctrine stand or fall together.

Also, the doctrine of the Incarnation is inseparable from the historical truth about Jesus of Nazareth (John 1:1, 14). Further, Jesus' moral teaching about marriage was based on His teaching about God's joining a literal Adam and Eve together in marriage (Matthew 19:4-5). In each of these cases the moral or theological teaching is devoid of its meaning apart from the historical or factual event. If one denies that the literal space-time event occurred, then there is no basis for believing the scriptural doctrine built upon it.

Jesus often directly compared Old Testament events with important spiritual truths, such as His death and resurrection which were related to Jonah and the great fish (Matthew 12:40). Or, His Second Coming as compared to the days of Noah (Matthew 24:37-39). Both the occasion and the manner of that comparison make it clear that Jesus was affirming the historicity of those Old Testament events. Indeed, Jesus asserted to Nicodemus, "If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?" (John 3:12) In short, if the Bible does not speak truthfully about the physical world, then it cannot be trusted when it speaks about the spiritual world. The two are intimately related.

Inspiration includes not only all that the Bible explicitly *teaches*, but also everything the Bible *touches*. This is true whether the Bible is touching upon history, science, or mathematics. Whatever the Bible declares, is true-whether it is a major point or a minor point. The Bible is God's Word, and God does not deviate from the truth in any point. All the parts are as true as the whole that they comprise.

### **If It Is Inspired, Then It Is Inerrant**

Inerrancy is a logical result of inspiration. For, inerrancy means wholly true and without error. And what God breathes out (inspires) must be wholly true (inerrant). However, it is helpful to specify more clearly what is meant by "truth" and what would constitute an "error."<sup>4</sup> By truth we signify that which corresponds to reality. An error, then, is what does not correspond to reality. Truth is telling it like it is. Error is not telling it like it is. Hence, nothing mistaken can be true, even if the author intended his mistake to be true. An error is a mistake, not simply something that is misleading. Otherwise, every sincere utterance ever made is true, even those that were grossly mistaken.<sup>5</sup> Likewise, something is not true simply because it accomplishes its intended purpose, since many lies succeed.

The Bible clearly views truth as that which corresponds to reality. Error is understood as a lack of correspondence to reality, not as intentionally misleading. This is evident from the fact that the word "error" is used of unintentional mistakes (Leviticus 4:2). The Bible everywhere implies a correspondence view of truth. For example, when the Ten Commandments declare "You shall not bear false testimony" (Exodus 20:16), it implies that misrepresenting the facts is wrong. Likewise, a correspondence view of truth is used when the Jews said to the governor about Paul, "By examining him yourself you will be able to learn the truth about all these charges we are bringing against him." In so doing, he adds, "You can easily verify the facts" (cf. Acts 24:8).

### **"Has God Said?"**

Of course, wherever God has made the truth clear, Satan's strategy is to cast doubt on it. "Did God really say that?" he sneers (cf. Genesis 3:1). This confusion often takes the following form. The Bible may be the inspired Word of God in some sense, but it is also human words. It had human authors, and "to err is human." Hence, we are to expect some errors in the Bible. So goes the argument. In short, the clear and simple truth of God has been confused by the lie of Satan, the master of lies (John 8:44).

Let's analyze what is wrong with this reasoning. A simple analogy will help. Consider some parallel but equally faulty reasoning:

- 1) Jesus was a human being.
- 2) Human beings sin.
- 3) Therefore, Jesus sinned.

Any Bible student can readily see that this conclusion is wrong. Jesus was "without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). He "knew no sin" (2 Corinthians 5:21). Jesus was "a lamb without blemish or defect" (1 Peter 1:19). As John said of Jesus, "He is pure" and "righteous" (1 John 2:1; 3:3). But, if Jesus never sinned, then what is wrong with the above argument that Jesus is human and humans sin, therefore, Jesus sinned? Where does the logic go astray?

The mistake is to assume that Jesus is like any other human. Sure, mere human beings sin. But, Jesus was not a *mere* human being. He was a perfect human being. Indeed, Jesus was not only human, but He was also God. Likewise, the Bible is not a mere human book. It is also the Word of God. Like Jesus, it is both divine and human. And just as Jesus was human but did not sin, even so the Bible is a human book but does not err. Both God's living Word (Christ) and His written Word (Scripture) are human but do not err. They are divine and cannot err. There can no more be an error in God's written Word than there was a sin in God's living Word. God cannot err, period.

## THE BIBLE: DIFFICULTIES, YES!

While the Bible is the Word of God and, as such, cannot have any errors, nonetheless, this does not mean there are no *difficulties* in it. However, as St. Augustine wisely noted, "If we are perplexed by any apparent contradiction in Scripture, it is not allowable to say, the author of this book is mistaken; but either the manuscript is faulty, or the translation is wrong, or you have not understood."<sup>6</sup> The mistakes are not in the revelation of God, but are in the misinterpretations of man.

The Bible is without mistake, but the critics are not. All their allegations of error in the Bible are based on some error of their own. Their mistakes fall into the following main categories.

### ***Mistake 1: Assuming that the Unexplained Is Not Explainable.***

No informed person would claim to be able to fully explain all Bible difficulties.

However, it is a mistake for the critic to assume, therefore, that what has not yet been explained never will be explained. When a scientist comes upon an anomaly in nature, he does not give up further scientific exploration. Rather, he uses the unexplained as a motivation to find an explanation. No real scientist throws up her hands in despair simply because she cannot explain a given phenomenon. She continues to do research with the confident expectation that an answer will be found. And, the history of science reveals that her faith has been rewarded over and over again.

Scientists, for example, once had no natural explanation of meteors, eclipses, tornadoes, hurricanes, and earthquakes. Until recently, scientists did not know how the bumblebee could fly. All of these mysteries have yielded their secrets to the relentless patience of science. Neither do scientists know how life can grow on thermo-vents in the depths of the sea. But, no scientist throws in the towel and cries "contradiction!"

Likewise, the Christian scholar approaches the Bible with the same presumption that what is thus far unexplained is not therefore unexplainable. He or she does not assume that discrepancies are contradictions. And, when he encounters something for which he had no explanation, he simply continues to do research, believing that one will eventually be found. In fact, if he assumed the opposite, he would stop studying. Why pursue an answer when one assumes there is none. Like his scientific counterpart, the Bible student has been rewarded for his faith and research. For, many difficulties for which scholars once had no answer have yielded to the relentless pursuits of truth through history, archaeology, linguistics, and other disciplines. For example, critics once proposed that Moses could not have written the first five books of the Bible because there was no writing in Moses' day. Now we know that writing was in existence a couple of thousand years or more before Moses. Likewise, critics once believed that the Bible was wrong in speaking of the Hittite people, since they were totally unknown to historians. Now, all historians know of their existence by way of their library that was found in Turkey. This gives us confidence to believe that the biblical difficulties that have not yet been explained have an explanation and that we need not assume there is a mistake in the Bible.

### ***Mistake 2: Presuming the Bible Guilty Until Proven Innocent.***

Many critics assume the Bible is wrong until something proves it right. However, like an American citizen charges with an offense, the Bible should be presumed "innocent" until it is proven guilty. This is not asking anything special for the Bible, it is the way we approach all human communications. If we did not, life would not be possible. For example, if we assumed road signs and traffic signals were not telling the truth, then we would probably be dead before we could prove they were telling the truth. Likewise, if we assume food labels are wrong until proven right, we would have to open up all the cans and packages before buying. And what if we presumed all the numbers on our currency were wrong? And what if we assumed all restroom signs were wrong? Well, enough is enough.

The Bible, like any other book, should be presumed to be telling us what the authors said and heard. Negative critics of the Bible begin with just the opposite presumption. Little wonder, then, that they conclude the Bible is riddled with error.

***Mistake 3: Confusing Our Fallible Interpretations with God's Infallible Revelation.***

Jesus affirmed that the "Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35). As an infallible book, the Bible is also irrevocable. Jesus declared, "Truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished" (Matthew 5:18, NIV; cf. Luke 16:17). The Scriptures also have final authority, being the last word on all it discusses. Jesus employed the Bible to resist the tempter (Matthew 4:4, 7, 10), to settle doctrinal disputes (Matthew 21:42), and to vindicate His authority (Mark 11:17). Sometimes a biblical teaching rests on a small historical detail (Hebrews 7:4-10), a word or phrase (Acts 15:13-17), or even the difference between the singular and the plural (Galatians 3:16). But, while the Bible is infallible, human interpretations are not. The Bible cannot be mistaken, but we can be mistaken about the Bible. The meaning of the Bible does not change, but our understanding of its meaning does.

Human beings are finite, and finite beings make mistakes. That is why there are erasers on pencils, correcting fluid for typing, and a "delete" key on computers. And even though God's Word is perfect (Psalms 19:7), as long as imperfect human beings exist, there will be misinterpretations of God's Word and false views about His world. In view of this, one should not be hasty in assuming that a currently dominant view in science is the final word on the topic. Prevailing views of science in the past are considered errors by scientists in the present. So, contradictions between popular opinions in science and widely accepted interpretations of the Bible can be expected. But this falls short of proving there is a real contradiction between God's world and God's Word, between God's general revelation and His special revelation. In this basic sense, science and Scripture are not contradictory. Only finite, fallible human opinions about each can be contradictory.

***Mistake 4: Failing to Understand the Context of the Passage.***

Perhaps the most common mistake of critics is to take a text out of its proper context. As the adage goes, "A text out of context is pretext." One can prove anything from the Bible by this mistake procedure. The Bible says "there is no God" (Psalms 14:1). Of course, the context is that "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God'" (Psalms 14:1). One may claim that Jesus admonished us "not to resist an evil" (Matthew 5:39), but the anti-retaliatory context in which He cast this statement must not be ignored. Likewise, many fail to understand the context of Jesus' statement to "Give to him who asks you," as though one had an obligation to give an gun to a small child who asked, or nuclear weapons to Saddam Hussein just because he asked. Failure to note that meaning is determined by context is perhaps the chief sin of those who find fault with the Bible, as comments on numerous passages in this book will illustrate.

***Mistake 5: Neglecting to Interpret Difficult Passages in the Light of Clear Ones.***

Some passages of Scripture are hard to understand. Sometimes the difficulty is due to their obscurity. At other times, the difficulty is because passages appear to be teaching something contrary to what some other part of Scripture is clearly teaching. For example, James appears to be saying salvation is by works (James 2:14-26), whereas Paul taught clearly that it was grace (Romans 4:5; Titus 3:5-7; Ephesians 2:8-9). In this case, James

should *not* be construed so as to contradict Paul. Paul is speaking about justification *before God* (which is by faith alone), whereas James is referring to justification *before men* (who cannot see our faith, but only our works).

Another example is found in Philippians 2:12 where Paul says, "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." On the surface this appears to be saying salvation is by works. However, this is flatly contradicted by a host of Scriptures which clearly affirm that we are "saved by grace through faith, and that not of ourselves; it is a gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). And, "to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness" (Romans 4:5). Also, it "is not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy [that] He saved us" (Titus 3:5-6). When this difficult statement about working out our salvation" is understood in the light of these clear passages, we can see that, whatever it *does* mean, it *does not* mean that we are saved by works. In fact, what it means is found in the very next verse. We are to work salvation *out* because God's grace has worked it *in* our hearts. In Paul's words, "for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13).

### ***Mistake 6: Basing a Teaching on an Obscure Passage.***

Some passages in the Bible are difficult because their meanings are obscure. This is usually because a key word in the text is used only once (or rarely), and so it is difficult to know what the author is saying, unless it can be inferred from the context. For example, one of the best known passages in the Bible contains a word that appears nowhere else in all existing Greek literature up to the time the New Testament was written. This word appears in what is popularly known as the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:11). It is usually translated, "Give us this day our daily bread." The word in question is the one translated "daily" *epiousion*. Experts in Greek still have not come to any agreement either on its origin, or on its precise meaning. Different commentators try to establish links with Greek words that are well-known, and many suggestions have been proposed as to the resulting meaning. Among these suggestions are:

Give us this day our *continuous* bread.

Give us this day our *supersubstantial* (indicating supernatural, from heaven) bread.

Give us this day bread *for our sustenance*.

Give us this day our *daily* (or, what we need for today) bread.

Each one of these proposals has its defenders, each one makes sense in the context, and each one is a possibility based on the limited information that is available. There does not seem to be any compelling reason to depart from what has become the generally accepted translation, but this example does serve to illustrate the point. Some passages of the Bible are difficult to understand because the meaning of some key word appears only once, or very rarely.

At other times, the words may be clear but the meaning is not evident because we are not sure to what they refer. This is true of 1 Corinthians 15:29 where Paul speaks of those

who were "baptized for the dead." Is he referring to the baptizing of live representatives to ensure salvation for dead believers who were not baptized (as Mormons claim)? Or, is he referring to others being baptized into the church to fill the ranks of those who have passed on? Or, is he referring to a believer being baptized "for" (i.e., "with a view to") his own death and burial with Christ? Or, to something else?

When we are not sure, then several things should be kept in mind. First, we should not build a doctrine on an obscure passage. The rule of thumb in Bible interpretation is "the main things are the plain things, and the plain things are the main things." This is called the perspicuity (clearness) of Scripture. If something is important, it will be clearly taught in Scripture and probably in more than one place. Second, when a given passage is not clear, we should never conclude that it means something that is opposed to another plain teaching of Scripture. God does not make mistakes in His Word; we make mistakes in trying to understand it.

### ***Mistake 7: Forgetting that the Bible Is a Human Book with Human Characteristics.***

With the exception of small sections, like the Ten Commandments which were "written with the finger of God" (Exodus 31:18), the Bible was not verbally dictated.<sup>7</sup> The writers were not secretaries of the Holy Spirit. They were human composers employing their own literary styles and idiosyncrasies. These human authors sometimes used *human sources* for their material (Joshua 10:13; Acts 17:28; 1 Corinthians 15:33; Titus 1:12). In fact, every book of the Bible is the composition of a *human writer*--about forty of them in all. The Bible also manifests different *human literary* styles, from the mournful meter of Lamentations to the exalted poetry of Isaiah; from the simple grammar of John to the complex Greek of the Book of Hebrews. Scripture also manifests *human perspectives*. David spoke in Psalm 23 from a shepherd's perspective. Kings is written from a prophetic vantage point, and Chronicles from a priestly point of view. Acts manifests an historical interest and 2 Timothy a pastor's heart. Writers speak from an observer's standpoint when they write of the sun rising or setting (Joshua 1:15). They also reveal *human thought patterns*, including memory lapses (1 Corinthians 1:14-16), as well as *human emotions* (Galatians 4:14). The Bible discloses specific *human interests*. For example, Hosea possessed a rural interest, Luke a medical concern, and James a love of nature.<sup>8</sup> But like Christ, the Bible is completely human, yet without error. Forgetting the humanity of Scripture can lead to falsely impugning its integrity by expecting a level of expression higher than that which is customary to a human document. This will become more obvious as we discuss the next mistakes of the critics.

### ***Mistake 8: Assuming that a Partial Report is a False Report.***

Critics often jump to the conclusion that a partial report is false. However, this is not so. If it were, most of what has ever been said would be false, since seldom does time or space permit an absolutely complete report. Occasionally the Bible expresses the same thing indifferent ways, or at least from different viewpoints, at different times. Hence, inspiration does not exclude a diversity of expression. The four Gospels relate the same story in different ways to different groups of people, and sometimes even quote the same saying with different words. Compare, for example, Peter's famous confession in the Gospels:



Matthew: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (16:16).

Mark: "You are the Christ" (8:29).

Luke: "The Christ of God" (9:20).

Even the Ten Commandments, which were "written with the finger of God" (Deuteronomy 9:10), are stated with variations the second time God gave them (cf. Exodus 20:8-11 with Deuteronomy 5:12-15). There are many differences between the books of Kings and Chronicles in their description of identical events, yet they harbor no contradiction in the events they narrate. If such important utterances can be stated in different ways, then there is no reason the rest of Scripture cannot speak truth without employing a wooden literalness of expression.

***Mistake 9: Demanding that New Testament Citations of the Old Testament Always Be Exact Quotations.***

Critics often point to variations in the New Testament's use of the Old Testament Scriptures as a proof of error. However, they forget that every *citation* need not be an exact *quotation*. It was then (and still is today) a perfectly acceptable literary style to give the *essence* of a statement without using precisely the *same words*. The same *meaning* can be conveyed without using the same *verbal expressions*.

Variations in the New Testament citations of the Old Testament fall into different categories. Sometimes they vary because there is a change of speaker. For example, Zechariah records the Lord as saying, "they will look on *Me* whom they have pierced" (12:10). When this is cited in the New Testament, John, not God, is speaking. So it is changed to "They shall look on *Him* whom they pierced" (John 19:37).

At other times, writers cite only part of the Old Testament text. Jesus did this at His home synagogue in Nazareth (Luke 4:18-19, citing Isaiah 61:1-2). In fact, He stopped in the middle of a sentence. Had He gone any farther, He could not have said as He did, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (v. 21). For the very next phrase, "And the day of vengeance of our God," is a reference to His second coming.

Sometimes the New Testament paraphrases or summarizes the Old Testament text (e.g., Matthew 2:6). Others blend two texts into one (Matthew 27:9-10). Occasionally a general truth is mentioned, without citing a specific text. For example, Matthew said Jesus moved to Nazareth "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, 'He shall be called a Nazarene'" (Matthew 2:23). Notice, Matthew quotes no given prophet, but rather "prophets" in general. So it would be futile to insist on a specific Old Testament text where this could be found.

There are also instances where the New Testament applies a text in a different way than the Old Testament did. For example, Hosea applies "Out of Egypt have I called My Son" to the Messianic nation, and Matthew applies it to the product of that nation, the Messiah (Matthew 2:15, from Hosea 11:1). In no case, however, does the New Testament misinterpret or misapply the Old Testament, nor draw some implication from it that is not validly drawn from it. In short, the New Testament makes no mistakes in citing the Old

Testament, as the critics do in citing the New Testament.

***Mistake 10: Assuming that Divergent Accounts Are False Ones.***

Just because two or more accounts of the same event differ, it does not mean they are mutually exclusive. For example, Matthew (28:5) says there was one angel at the tomb after the resurrection, whereas John informs us there were two (20:12). But, these are not contradictory reports. In fact, there is an infallible mathematical rule that easily explains this problem: wherever there are two, there is always one-it never fails! Matthew did not say there was *only* one angel. One has to add the word "only" to Matthew's account to make it contradict John's. But if the critic comes to the Bible in order to show it errs, then the error is not in the Bible, but in the critic.

Likewise, Matthew (27:5) informs us that Judas hanged himself. But Luke says that "he burst upon in the middle and all his entrails gushed out" (Acts 1:18). Once more, these accounts differ, but they are not mutually exclusive. If Judas hanged himself on a tree over the edge of a cliff and his body fell on sharp rocks below, then his entrails would gush out just as Luke vividly describes.

***Mistake 11: Presuming that the Bible Approves of All it Records.***

It is a mistake to assume that everything contained in the Bible is commended by the Bible. The whole Bible is *true* (John 17:17), but it records some *lies*, for example, Satan's (Genesis 3:4; cf. John 8:44) and Rahab's (Joshua 2:4). Inspiration encompasses the Bible fully and completely in the sense that it records accurately and truthfully even the lies and errors of sinful beings. The truth of Scripture is found in what the Bible *reveals*, not in everything it *records*. Unless this distinction is held, it may be incorrectly concluded that the Bible teaches immorality because it narrates David's sin (2 Samuel 11:4), that it promotes polygamy because it records Solomon's (1 Kings 11:3), or that it affirms atheism because it quotes the fool as saying "there is no God" (Psalms 14:1).

***Mistake 12: Forgetting that the Bible Uses Non-technical, Everyday Language.***

To be true, something does not have to use scholarly, technical, or so-called "scientific" language. The Bible is written for the common person of every generation, and it therefore uses common, everyday language. The use of observational, nonscientific language is not *unscientific*, it is merely *prescientific*. The Scripture were written in *ancient* times by ancient standards, and it would be anachronistic to superimpose *modern* scientific standards upon them. However, it is no more unscientific to speak of the sun "standing still" (Joshua 10:12) than to refer to the sun "rising" (Joshua 1:16). Contemporary meteorologists still speak daily of the time of "sunrise" and "sunset."

***Mistake 13: Assuming that Round Numbers Are False.***

Another mistake sometimes made by Bible critics is claiming that round numbers are false. This is not so. Round numbers are just that-round numbers. Like most ordinary speech, the Bible uses round numbers (1 Chronicles 19:18; 21:5). For example, it refers to the diameter as being about one third of the circumference of something. It may be imprecise from the standpoint of a contemporary technological society to speak of

3.14159265 . . . as the number three, but it is not incorrect for an ancient, non-technological people. Three and fourteen hundredths can be rounded off to three. That is sufficient for a "Sea of cast metal" (2 Chronicles 4:2, NIV) in an ancient Hebrew temple, even though it would not suffice for a computer in a modern rocket. But one should not expect scientific precision in a prescientific age. In fact, it would be as anachronistic as wearing a wrist watch in a Shakespearian play.

***Mistake 14: Neglecting to Note that the Bible Uses Different Literary Devices.***

An inspired book need not be composed in one, and only one, literary style. Human beings wrote every book in the Bible, and human language is not limited to one mode of expression. So, there is no reason to suppose that only one style or literary genre was used in a divinely inspired Book. The Bible reveals a number of literary devices. Several whole books are written in *poetic* style (e.g., Job, Psalms, Proverbs). The synoptic Gospels are filled with *parables*. In Galatians 4, Paul utilized an *allegory*. The New Testament abounds with *metaphors* (e.g., 2 Corinthians 3:2-3; James 3:6) and *similes* (cf. Matthew 20:1; James 1:6); *hyperboles* may also be found (e.g., Colossians 1:23; John 21:25; 2 Corinthians 3:2), and possibly even *poetic figures* (Job 41:1). Jesus employed *satire* (Matthew 19:24 with 23:24) and *figures of speech* are common throughout the Bible.

It is not a mistake for a biblical writer to use a figure of speech, but it is a mistake for a reader to take a figure of speech literally. Obviously when the Bible speaks of the believer resting under the shadow of God's "wings" (Psalms 36:7), it does not mean that God is a feathered bird. Likewise, when the Bible says God "awakes" (Psalms 44:23), as though He were sleeping, it is a figure of speech indicating God's inactivity before He is aroused to judgment by man's sin. We must be careful in our reading of figures of speech in Scripture.

***Mistake 15: Forgetting that Only the Original Text, Not Every Copy of Scripture, Is without Error.***

When critics do come upon a genuine mistake in a manuscript copy, they make another fatal error—they assume it was in the original inspired text of Scripture. They forget that God only uttered the original text of Scripture, not the copies. Therefore, only the original text is without error. Inspiration does not guarantee that every copy of the original is without error. Therefore, we are to expect that minor errors are to be found in manuscript copies. But, again, as St. Augustine wisely noted, when we run into a so-called "error" in the Bible, we must assume one of two things—either the manuscript was not copied correctly, or we have not understood it rightly. What we may not assume is that God made an error in inspiring the original text.

While present copies of Scripture are very good, they are not without error. For example, 2 Kings 8:26 gives the age of king Ahaziah as twenty-two, whereas 2 Chronicles 22:2 says forty-two. The later number cannot be correct, or he would have been older than his father. This is obviously a copyist error, but it does not alter the inerrancy of the original (see Appendix 2 for further examples).

Several things should be observed about these copyist errors. First of all, they are errors

in the copies, not the originals. No one has ever found an original manuscript with an error in it. Second, they are minor errors (often in names or numbers) which do not affect any doctrine of the Christian faith. Third, these copyist errors are relatively few in number, as will be illustrated throughout the rest of this book. Fourth, usually by the context, or by another Scripture, we know which one is in error. For example, Ahaziah (above) must have been twenty-two, not forty-two, since he could not be older than his father. Finally, even though there is a copyist error, the entire message can still come through. In such a case, the validity of the message is not changed. For example, if you received a letter like this, would you understand the whole message? And would you collect your money?

**"#OU HAVE WON THE FIVE MILLION DOLLAR  
READER'S DIGEST SWEEPSTAKES."**

Even though there is a mistake in the first word, the entire message comes through--you are five million dollars richer! And if you received another letter the next day that read like this, you would be even more sure:

**"Y#O HAVE WON THE FIVE MILLION DOLLAR  
READER'S DIGEST SWEEPSTAKES."**

Actually the more mistakes of this kind there are (each in a different place), the more sure you are of the original message. This is why scribal mistakes in the biblical manuscripts do not affect the basic message of the Bible. So, for all practical purposes, the Bible in our hand, imperfect though the manuscripts are, conveys the complete truth of the original Word of God.

### ***Mistake 16: Confusing General Statements with Universal Ones.***

Critics often jump to the conclusion that unqualified statements admit of no exceptions. They seize upon verses that offer general truths and then point with glee to obvious exceptions. In so doing, they forget that such statements are only intended to be generalizations.

The Book of Proverbs is a good example of such an issue. Proverbial sayings by their very nature offer only general guidance, not universal assurance. They are rules for life, but rules that admit of exceptions. Proverbs 16:7 is a case in point. It affirms that "when a man's ways please the Lord, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him." This obviously was not intended to be a universal truth. Paul was pleasing to the Lord and his enemies stoned him (Acts 14:19). Jesus was pleasing the Lord, and His enemies crucified Him! Nonetheless, it is a general truth that one who acts in a way pleasing to God can minimize his enemies' antagonism.

Another example of a general truth is Proverbs 22:6, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." However, other Scripture passages and experience show that this is not always true. Indeed, some godly persons in the Bible (including Job, Eli, and David) had some very wayward children. This proverb

does not contradict experience because it is a general principle that applies in a general way, but allows for individual exceptions. Proverbs are not designed to be absolute guarantees. Rather, they express truths that provide helpful advice and guidance by which an individual should conduct his or her daily life.

It is simply a mistake to assume that proverbial wisdom is always universally true. Proverbs are *wisdom* (general guides), not *law* (universally binding imperatives). When the Bible declares "You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy" (Leviticus 11:45), then there are not exceptions. Holiness, goodness, love, truth, and justice are rooted in the very nature of an unchanging God and therefore admit of no exceptions. But wisdom takes God's universal truths and applies them to specific and changing circumstances which, by their very nature as changing, will not always yield the same results. Nonetheless, they are still helpful guides for life, even though they may admit of an occasional exception.

### ***Mistake 17: Forgetting that Later Revelation Supersedes Previous Revelation.***

Sometimes critics of Scripture forget the principle of progressive revelation. God does not reveal everything at once, nor does He always lay down the same conditions for every period of time. Therefore, some of His later revelation will supersede His former statements. Bible critics sometimes confuse a *change* of revelation with a *mistake*. The mistake, however, is that of the critic. For example, the fact that a parent allows a very small child to eat with his fingers, only to tell them later to use a spoon, is not a contradiction. Nor is the parent contradicting himself to insist later that the child should use a fork, not a spoon, to eat his vegetables. This is progressive revelation, with each command suited to fit the particular circumstance in which a person is found.

There was a time when God tested the human race by forbidding them to eat of a specific tree in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:16-17). This command is no longer in effect, but the later revelation does not contradict this former revelation. Also, there was a period (under the Mosaic law) when God commanded that animals be sacrificed for people's sin. However, since Christ offered the perfect sacrifice for sin (Hebrews 10:11-14), this Old Testament command is no longer in effect. Here again, there is no contradiction between the latter and the former commands. Likewise, when God created the human race, He commanded that they eat only fruit and vegetables (Genesis 1:29). But later, when conditions changed after the flood, God commanded that they also eat meat (Genesis 9:3). This change from herbivorous to omnivorous status is progressive revelation, but it is not a contradiction. In fact, all these subsequent revelations were simply different commands for different people at different times in God's overall plan of redemption.

Of course, God cannot change commands that have to do with His unchangeable nature (cf. Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 6:18). For example, since God is love (1 John 4:16), He cannot command that we hate Him. Nor can He command what is logically impossible, for example, to both offer and not offer a sacrifice for sin at the same time and in the same sense. But these moral and logical limits notwithstanding, God can and has given noncontradictory, progressive revelation which, if taken out of its proper context and juxtaposed with each other, can be made to look contradictory. This, however, is just as much a mistake as to assume the parent is contradicting herself when she allows a child to stay up later at night as he gets older.

After forty years of continual and careful study of the Bible, one can only conclude that those who think they have discovered a mistake in the Bible do not know too much about the Bible--they know too little about it! This does not mean, of course, that we understand all the difficulties in the Scriptures. But it does lead us to believe that Mark Twain was correct when he concluded that it was not the part of the Bible he did not understand that bothered him the most, but the parts he did understand!

## NOTES

1. For a more complete discussion, see Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible: Revised and Expanded* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), chapters 3-6.
2. See *ibid.*, chapters 1-11.
3. For a defense of the inerrancy of the Bible by a coalition of evangelical scholars, see Norman L. Geisler ed., *Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979).
4. For further discussion of this, see Norman L. Geisler, "The Concept of Truth in the Inerrancy Debate" in *Bibliotheca Sacra* (Oct-Dec, 1980).
5. This is the mistake of G.C. Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) and Jack Rogers, *Biblical Authority* (Waco, TX: Word, 1978). Defining error as what misleads, rather than what is mistaken, they make all sincere errors unfalsifiable.
6. St. Augustine, *Reply to Faustus the Manichaeon* 11.5 in Philip Schaff, *A Select Library of the Nicene and Ante-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), vol. 4.
7. For a proponent of verbal dictation see John R. Rice, *Our God-breathed Book--The Bible* (Murfeesboro, Tenn: Sword of the Lord, 1969).
8. The biblical authors include a lawgiver (Moses), a general (Joshua), prophets (Samuel, Isaiah, et. Al.), kings (David and Solomon), a musician (Asaph), a herdsman (Amos), a prince and statesman (Daniel), a priest (Ezra), a tax collector (Matthew), a physician (Luke), a scholar (Paul), and fisherman (Peter and John). With such a variety of occupations represented by biblical writers, it is only natural that their personal interests and differences should be reflected in their writings.



[web hosting](#) • [domain names](#)

Powered by [Ampira](#)