



# “Understanding the Bible”

## Section 4: Why Can We Trust the Bible?

### Unit 4.1: The Issues and Implications of Inerrancy



#### I) Blind Men Can Still Hear an Elephant

- As we now enter the fourth section of our study on *Understanding the Bible*, for the next six units we will attempt to address the most lingering debate in modern day Christianity: “Why can we trust the Bible?” A fitting way to begin this journey is to consider the words of an ancient Indian parable about six blind men and an elephant. The parable teaches that each man approached and groped an elephant to decide what it is like since none of them could see it with their eyes. The first man grabbed the trunk and said it was like a snake; the second man reached for its ear and said it was a fan; the third man felt its leg and said it was like a tree trunk; the fourth man touched its side and said it was like a wall; the fifth man felt its tail and said it was like a rope; and the sixth man touched the elephant’s tusks and said it felt like a spear. The story is supposed to illustrate that God is like the elephant: Although we may know something about Him in part, we are too blind to see the sum total of His actual identity. While this may seem like a compelling argument, there is a fatal flaw in its logic. The whole analogy breaks down if the elephant speaks and says, “I’m an elephant.” As we addressed back in Unit 1, we have overwhelming evidence that God has spoken loud and clear about who He is in His Holy Word. And because the Scriptures are breathed out from His very mouth (2 Timothy 3:16), and inspired by His Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21), we can trust everything His Word has to say.

#### II) Turning to a Trustworthy God

- In our effort to address the trustworthiness of the Bible, we need to begin by considering the underlying issue: *The trustworthiness of God*. As we read through the 66 books of the Bible penned over a span of 1,500 years, we see throughout Holy Scripture that God wants to be known by His people. And if God wants to be known through the pages of Scripture, He is more than capable of producing and preserving the truth that He desires to disclose to us. In John 17:17, Jesus said to the Father in His priestly prayer for the disciples, “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.” Psalm 119:16 also says, “The sum of your word is truth, and every one of your righteous rules endures forever.” When we question Scripture as trustworthy, it is really God who we begin to question as trustworthy.

#### III) Looking Through the Lens of Logic

- Another way of looking at the truth of Scripture philosophically is to consider a simple syllogism made famous by Dr. Norman Geisler. According to Geisler, “God cannot err; The Bible is the Word of God; Therefore, the Bible cannot err.” The first two premises are clearly taught in Scripture. We also went to great lengths in Units 1 and 2 to support our claims that the Bible is divinely inspired. So, if there is a God who divine and free from error and He reveals Himself through a book, then that book is also free of error and the final authority to identify who He is. Therefore, if God is real, has spoken through divine revelation, and cannot err, the Bible must also be error free or it would be a contradiction to His nature.

#### IV) Standing Firm on the Fundamentals

- As the foundation of our faith, Dr. Geisler reminds us that the Bible is “*The fundamental of the fundamentals*.” This is why the trustworthiness of Scripture is key to our growth in the Christian faith. To establish this trustworthiness of God’s Word, evangelical Christians have coined a phrase called “inerrancy.” Inerrancy is simply the doctrine that the Bible is without error in all that it affirms. As we explore this concept, we do need to be aware of two distinctions regarding inerrancy: (1) The original manuscripts written by the prophets and apostles known as the “autographs” are inerrant but not Bible translations; and (2) The Bible is inerrant in relation to each passage’s specific context and intended authorial purpose to express truth about reality.

## V) The Backdrop of Our ‘Battle for the Bible’

- The controversy over God’s Word being trustworthy is as old as sin itself. The Fall of mankind in Genesis 3 can be traced back to the moment Adam and Eve fell prey to Satan’s deceptive words: “*Did God really say?*” However, more recently in American church history the issue of Scripture’s trustworthiness has also taken many unexpected turns. The most heated debate over the inerrancy of Scripture in the last fifty years of American Christianity took place on the campus of Fuller Theological Seminary in the 1960s and 70s. Despite its conservative beginnings, many faculty members at Fuller began rejecting biblical inerrancy and it eventually sparked a book written by Fuller professor Dr. Harold Lindsell in 1976 entitled *The Battle for the Bible*. This book brought national attention to the inerrancy debate, and it motivated conservative evangelical leaders all over America to boldly re-affirm the Church’s historic stance of an error-free Bible.

## VI) A Meeting That Made a Statement

- Shortly after Lindsell’s book, a collection of 300 evangelical scholars met in Chicago, Illinois in 1977 and formed the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy (ICBI). The ICBI then drafted a statement on their convictions of biblical inerrancy and it has simply become known as the “Chicago Statement.” This statement transcends denominational borders and has become the clear and standard view of conservative churches across America. The statement affirms that “*Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching, no less in what it states about God’s acts in creation, about the events of world history, and about its own literary origins under God, than in its witness to God’s saving grace in individual lives.*” The document also reiterates the danger for churches and individuals who reject this doctrine stating, “*The authority of Scripture is inescapably impaired if this total divine inerrancy is in any way limited or disregarded, or made relative to a view of truth contrary to the Bible’s own.*”

## VII) The Response of a Conservative Resurgence

- Of all the Christian denominations in America that were affected by the inerrancy debate of the 1970s, no denomination has made a more dramatic turn-around from liberalism back to conservatism than the Southern Baptist Convention. This conservative resurgence was accomplished through the intentional appointments of key leaders who chose to stand firm on biblical inerrancy. When renowned pastor Adrian Rogers was elected Southern Baptist President in 1979 at age 47, it began a theological shift back to the right that would take until the mid-90s to fully take shape. The biggest impact took place in the Southern Baptist seminaries, where school presidents such as Dr. Al Mohler and Dr. Paige Patterson required that each faculty member affirm the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy. The SBC’s conservative resurgence eventually culminated with the revision of the denomination’s articles of faith entitled the Baptist Faith and Message (BFM) in 2000. According to the BFM article on the Bible, it states, “*The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is God’s revelation of Himself to man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter. Therefore, all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy.*”

## VIII) Learning to Let the Lion Out

- Perhaps the best argument for an inerrant Bible can be made simply by witnessing the supernatural power of Scripture itself. In a sermon entitled “Christ and His Co-Workers” Charles Spurgeon once said this about defending the trustworthiness of the Bible: “*A great many learned men are defending the gospel; no doubt it is a very proper and right thing to do, yet I always notice that, when there are most books of that kind, it is because the gospel itself is not being preached. Suppose a number of persons were to take it into their heads that they had to defend a lion. There he is in the cage, and here come all the soldiers of the army to fight for him. Well, I should suggest to them, if they would not object, and feel that it was humbling to them, that they should kindly stand back, and open the door, and let the lion out! I believe that would be the best way of defending him, for he would take care of himself; and the best apology for the gospel is to let the gospel out. Never mind defending Deuteronomy or the whole of the Pentateuch; preach Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Let the lion out, and see who will dare to approach him. The Lion of the tribe of Judah will soon drive away all his adversaries.*”