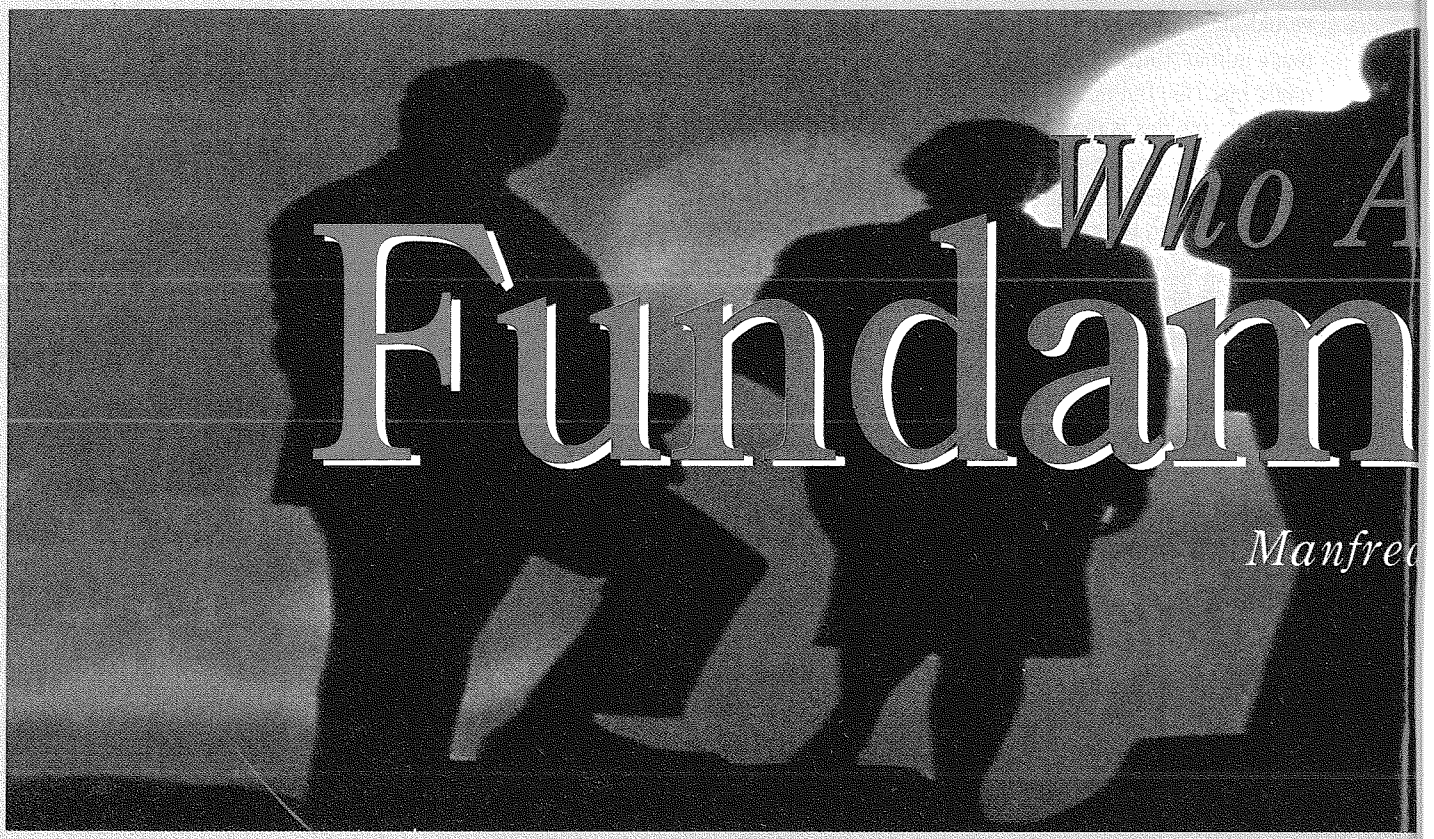

Who A Fundam

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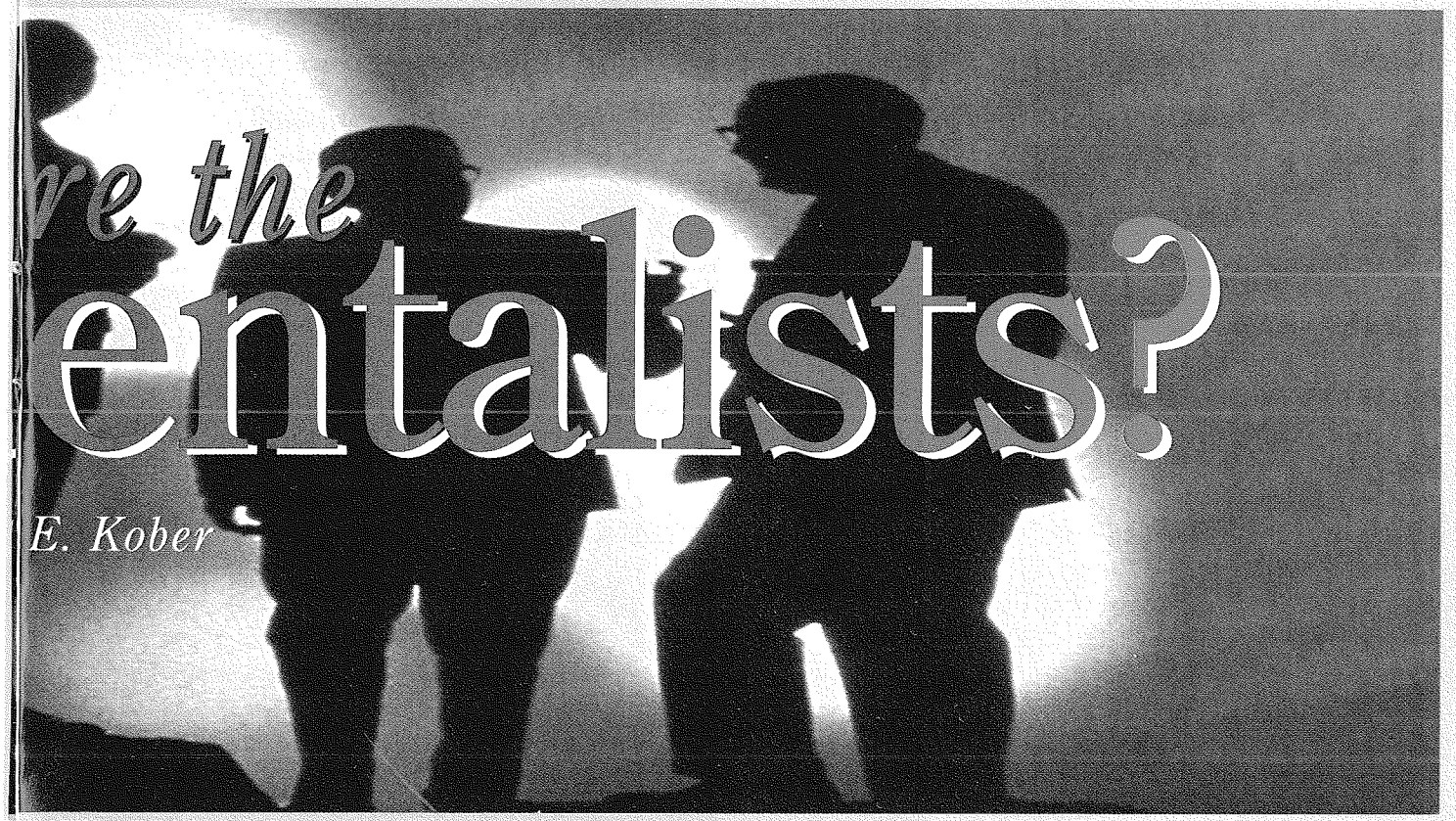
An unabridged response to an opinion article in the Des Moines Register. *A professor answers a critic of fundamental believers in Christ.*

Former Des Moines (Iowa) city attorney Ivan T. Webber launched an all-out attack against the fundamentalists in the Des Moines Register *on Sunday, November 12, 1995 ("Protesting Fundamentalism").*

Regrettably the author, although a lawyer, was unable to do even a modest amount of homework before launching into a scathing attack of people of whom he is obviously totally ignorant. At least one would expect the writer to define his terms. Nowhere does he give a definition of the fundamentalists. They are simply described as "those who believe in an inerrant and literally true Bible," those who are dead wrong in their interpretation because the Bible "is composed of allegory, poetry and other literary forms."



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E. Kober

In truth, whereas there have always been sincere Christians who espoused the concept of an inspired and thus inerrant Bible, fundamentalism is a movement of relatively recent origin. Late last century, American believers met together in Bible and prophecy conferences to combat the theological liberalism that had infiltrated most mainline denominations.

Beginning in 1909, several booklets titled *The Fundamentals* were published and widely distributed. The term "fundamentalism" is derived from those publications, which in a scholarly way defended the fundamentals of the faith: (1) the inspiration of the Bible, (2) the virgin birth of Christ, (3) His deity, (4) His substitutionary death and (5) His physical resurrection and any-moment return. Any dictionary of church history would have provided this information.

Webber refers to fundamentalists as having a "reactionary agenda," attempting to impose their views of an inerrant Bible on the rest of the nation. Of course, he offers no proof for his accusation. Fundamentalism "is out of step with the intellectual and spiritual growth of Western religion," and "most important is the point that makes fundamentalism absolutely untenable: idolatry." In his thinking, fundamentalism worships the Bible and thus is guilty of bibliolatry.

One wonders: *Has Mr. Webber ever met a fundamentalist?*

How does one refute in limited space the above false statements and Webber's repeated charges of gross errors in the Bible? One is reminded of the words of Bishop Thomas Hartwell Horne, who observed almost 200 years ago, "Pertness and ignorance may ask a question in three lines which it will cost learning and ingenuity thirty pages to answer; and when this is done, the same question shall be triumphantly asked again the next year, as if nothing had ever been written on the subject." Often, when fairly answered and refuted, these authors unfortunately still maintain their position, demonstrating the truth of the homely old maxim, "A man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still."

Throughout Webber's attack on the fundamentalists, pejorative comments and preposterous charges abound. Unfortunately, not a single statement about the Bible or a single characterization of fundamentalists is true. How could a lawyer, who presumably is conversant with legal evidence and logical reasoning, go that far afield?

Take, for instance, Mr. Webber's charge that the fundamentalist's concept of "an inerrant and literally true Bible is an American phenomenon developed over the last two centuries." It would be difficult to think of an assertion that is more easily refuted. It might be helpful to give a sampling of testimonies to the inerrancy of the Scriptures throughout church history.

Irenaeus wrote in the second century that "the Scriptures are indeed perfect, since they were spoken by the Word of God and his Spirit."

The church father Augustine testified in the fifth century, "I believe most firmly that no one of those authors [of the canonical Scriptures] has erred in any respect in writing."

Luther in the sixteenth century unfailingly asserted the inerrancy of Scripture. He wrote, "The Scriptures have never erred." And again, "It is impossible that Scripture should ever contradict itself; it appears so only to the senseless

and obstinate hypocrites."

Calvin, the famous Genevan reformer, wrote in the sixteenth century that believers ought to fully "embrace the Word of God," namely, the Word of Him "who is the true God, who cannot lie and whose truth is immutable."

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, rejected the idea that the human writers of Scripture made mistakes. "Nay, if there be one mistake in the Bible there may as well be a thousand. If there be one falsehood in that book, it did not come from the God of truth."

John Locke, the English philosopher (1632–1704), wrote in his famous treatise *The Reasonableness of Christianity* concerning the infallible Bible: "It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth without any admixture of error for its matter."

The verdict of historic evangelical Christianity in every generation is unequivocal in these matters. Sincere believers have always subscribed to the inspiration and inerrancy of the Scriptures. That is not a debatable point. The evidence to an unprejudiced mind should be clear. Why does not Mr. Webber acknowledge the obvious? (Anyone interested in irrefutable testimony of the church to inerrancy would do well to consult the helpful volume *Inspiration and Interpretation,* edited by John F. Walvoord.)

One suspects that such baseless claims—that the Bible is contradictory, irrelevant and erroneous—are motivated by an ill-concealed desire to justify declinations from Biblical authority. If the Bible is indeed true, then every man is responsible to God for his moral actions. The tendency of the natural man is to flee from the suggestion that he is a sinner in need of a Savior. It is natural for the unconverted—and we all were in that spiritual condition at one time—to reject spiritual truth and repudiate those who offer it. Only the Holy Spirit of God can illuminate the darkened mind and infuse divine truth.

While Mr. Webber is entitled to express his opinion, the reader should recognize that his charges of errors in the Bible lack substance. Any standard book on Bible difficulties, such as *Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible* by John W. Haley or *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* by Gleason Archer, would have cleared up matters that are fair for discussion but have been answered so often that one wonders why someone trained as a lawyer would not look at explanations before making charges.

As an example of one of Mr. Webber's Bible errors is the statement ". . . the Bible's view [is] that the sun revolves around the earth rather than the other way around." He refers to Joshua 10:12 and 13 as an illustration. Apparently he assumes that the words "Sun, stand still" is evidence that the Bible teaches that the sun revolves around the earth. The context is about a miracle, not about the revolution of either the sun or the earth.

The language used in this passage is the common, everyday expression we still use to describe the motion of the sun. In the same issue of the *Register* in which Mr. Webber's article appears, we note on page 3B that "Sunrise is 7:00 am; sunset is 4:58 pm." Does the sun actually "rise" and "set"? Is the *Register* proclaiming that the sun revolves around the earth? Obviously not. The *Register,* like the Bible, uses phenomenological language. Mr. Webber's criticism is totally unfounded.

Webber is also confused about Galileo's controversy with the Church. The prevailing scientific view prior to the sixteenth century was that the earth was the center of the universe. Claudius Ptolemaeus had formulated a complicated system of orbits for the planets, and Aristotle had proposed theories of motion based on "logical" axioms to accommodate this cosmology. The Church accepted those views as a confirmation of its interpretation of certain passages in the Bible. Copernicus was one of the first to criticize those theories. Later Galileo ran into trouble with the Church when he also questioned those theories. Galileo's "sin" was that he advocated making observations and doing experiments before drawing conclusions or proposing theories. His "inductive" method is now the norm for scientific research. Such methods do not conflict with the teaching of the Bible, which, as Webber notes, ". . . tells us how to go to heaven and not how the heavens go."

As another example of a Bible error, Webber cites the description of Solomon's cast metal basin. He refers to 2 Chronicles 4:2. In the King James Version this passage reads, "Also he made a molten sea of ten cubits from brim to brim, round in compass, and five cubits the height thereof; and a line of thirty cubits did compass it round about." Since the circumference is not given as 31.416, Webber deduces, "A God who made and who sustains the universe knows the value of Pi; whoever wrote Second Chronicles did not." Again, Mr. Webber's criticism is unfounded.

What should have been the correct number for the circumference? 31.416 to 50 or more decimals or 31.42 to two decimals or 31 to no decimals or 30 to one significant figure? Mr. Webber should have noted in verse 5 that ". . . the thickness of it [the basin] was an handbreadth, and the brim of it like the brim of a cup. . . ." Where the measurements were made is not stated. Any assumption is only a guess. Considering the significance of the measurement would make a circumference of 30 cubits quite likely. God does indeed know Pi, and the writer of 2 Chronicles knew significant numbers!

Webber charges that "either Jesus lied" about being three days and three nights in the heart of the earth or the Bible is wrong, because the period from Friday to Sunday does not include three 24-hour days (Matt. 12:40). (Webber erroneously cited Matthew 13:40; also Mark 15:2–5 rather than Mark 16:2–5). One wishes that Mr. Webber would have consulted a Bible commentary for an obvious explanation. The Church Father Jerome observed that the "three days and three nights" is "to be explained by a figure of speech called *synecdoche* by which a part is put for the whole; not that our Lord was three whole days and three nights in the grave, but part of Friday, part of Sunday, and the whole of Saturday were reckoned as three days."

This idea was not superimposed on the Bible by some fundamentalist. Rather, in Jewish time reckoning, according to the

Jewish Talmud, a day and a night together made up an *onah;* any part of such a period is counted as a whole. Who is right—Mr. Webber or the Bible? (Incidentally, Biblical evidence seems to support a Thursday crucifixion.)

Webber denies that the Bible teaches its own inerrancy. He cites 2 Timothy 3:16, which states that "all scripture is given by inspiration of God" and observes that you have to read into the passage the idea of inerrancy. Not really! The literal Greek wording is "All scripture is God breathed. . . ."

Since God is a God of truth Who cannot lie (John 17:3) and the Scriptures have their direct source in Him, they partake of His truthfulness and are therefore true and inerrant. Christ, Who claimed that He is "the truth" (John 14:6), testified that the Word of God is truth (John 17:17).

Christ further insisted that His Word is infallible, for "the scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35). It is so accurate in every detail that "one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law" (Matt. 5:18). (The jot is the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet; the tittle is the smallest distinguishing feature between Hebrew letters.) Rather than rejecting inerrancy, Christ affirmed it. Is it wrong to believe as Christ believed?

The Christian approaches the Bible with the premise that it is God's Word, and since He is a God of truth, His Word is characterized by His veracity. Those who so flippantly criticize the inerrant Bible should keep the following in mind. In order to demonstrate an error or contradiction in the Bible, one must show that the translation is absolutely correct, that the critic's interpretation is the only possible interpretation and that a harmonization of the problem is totally impossible. Unfortunately, Bible critics generally lack this kind of cautious approach.

Webber cites the apostle Paul in an effort to disprove the inerrancy of the Bible. If he had taken the time to look at the passages closely, he would have discovered in 1 Corinthians 7:12 that the apostle Paul was not denying inspiration when he wrote, ". . . to the rest speak I, not the Lord." He was simply stating that on this matter, the Lord had not yet spoken. He could not quote the Lord on it. At other times, the apostle Paul put himself in the position of an ungodly individual to emphasize a point (see 2 Corinthians 11:17).

Triumphantly, Mr. Webber uses a two-pronged philological argument against fundamentalists when he asserts, "Even if one could find an original version of [the Bible] it would be impossible to make an English translation that would be fully consistent in meaning with the original text." Furthermore, he maintains that "it is impossible to be absolutely accurate in the expressions of any natural language."

A few observations are in order. (1) Language is God's gift to man, and when God reveals Himself, the vehicle of communication is adequate to convey exactly what He wanted man to know. (2) Christ, the incarnate Son of God, conversed with men in a way that was precise and understandable. When, by way of illustration, He told His disciples "how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day" (Matt. 16:21), the meaning was abundantly clear, although few believed Him at the time. (3) Christ, in refuting Satan during His temptation, used quotations from a Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament (the Septuagint). The words of the Old Testament translation were so potent that they rendered Satan powerless and speechless. Our literal English translations are also adequate in rendering literal meaning. Admittedly, the Bible is not always easy to comprehend because it is a communication from God's mind, and His thoughts are higher than our thoughts (Isa. 55:8). On the other hand, while the prophet Isaiah frankly acknowledged the remoteness of God, we can understand the divine invitation: "Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon" (Isa. 55:6, 7). Whether one reads this statement in Hebrew, English, German or Swahili, it means the same thing. Fundamentalists, along with Christians throughout history, have had a life-changing experience by trusting in God's promise of salvation, presented to them in their native language. They may not understand everything about God, but they do know that they need redemption; and once redeemed, they know what God desires for them to do.

Nothing is more untrue than Webber's charge that fundamentalists are guilty of "the idolatry of the Pharisees" by worshiping the Bible rather than Christ. Sincere evangelicals have only one desire, and that is to worship the Lord Whom the Bible reveals, the One Who gave His life a ransom for man's sin (Matt. 20:38). The Bible is only His mouthpiece, written by Spirit-filled men to make Christ known to us. The writers of Scripture were kept from error by the supernatural superintendence of the Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:20, 21).

If Mr. Webber wants to meet some fundamentalists, he is welcome to visit our campus at Faith Baptist Bible College and Theological Seminary in Ankeny. None of us fits his description. We are not out of step intellectually with the Western world. The majority of our faculty have earned doctorates from reputable institutions. Three of my colleagues have two earned doctorates. Our professor in the area of science and computers, Dr. David Boylan, was for eighteen years the dean of the engineering school at Iowa State University in Ames, Iowa. He is a member of the Creation Research Society, which boasts the membership of six hundred individuals, all of whom have advanced graduate degrees. Are fundamentalists ignorant idolaters who twist the Scriptures? Visit our campus and form your own opinion. We are traditional fundamentalists. The ones in Mr. Webber's article are straw men. ■

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