

# PART TWO: DIVINE ORIGIN OF THE BIBLE

## CHAPTER 5

### HOW TO UNDERSTAND THE "ERRORS" OF THE BIBLE?

God desires our salvation. That is: that **we know Him, that we are in communion of love with Him and that we obtain eternal salvation after this life.** And that is the goal of the Bible: to lead human beings to salvation. Let us listen to the teaching of the Catechism of the Catholic Church:

“God himself is the autor of Sacred Scripture. For this reason it is said to be inspired and to teach without error those truths which are necessary for our salvation”.

(Compendium of the Catechis of the Catholic Church, 18)

In this sense the Bible is never wrong: it teaches us, without error, the way to reach a holy, pure, clean life. For God, its author, is holy and pure, and will only transmit purity and holiness to us so that we may be with Him and attain eternal salvation.

*Remain faithful to what you have learned and believed...  
that from infancy you have known (the) sacred scriptures, which are capable  
of giving you wisdom for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.*

*All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for refutation,  
for correction, and for training in righteousness*

*(2 Timothy 3, 14-16)*

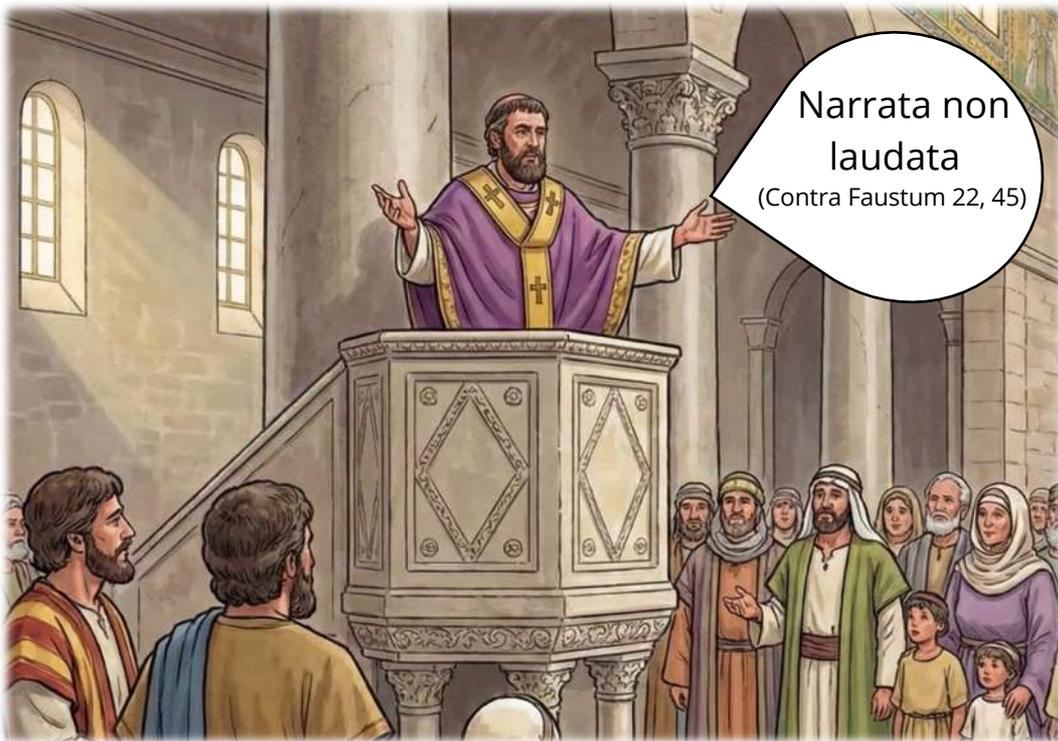
"And then," some say, "why do we find errors in the Bible? If the Bible cannot be wrong, why are there errors in it?" Let's examine these supposed "errors" to explain how they can be compatible with the Christian claim that the Bible has no error.

The first thing we must clarify, as we have already seen, is that what the Bible teaches in a true and unerroneous way are all those truths that human beings need to know in order to be saved. In things that are not necessary to save us there could be inaccuracies.

## 1.-NARRATION OF UNEDIFYING FACTS

"If the Bible is a holy book," some say, "why does it narrate sins and dishonest actions of some characters (especially in the Old Testament)?" Obviously, God, in inspiring the narratives where these mistakes and moral errors of some people are spoken of, is not because he wants to recommend such acts, but because in this way he reveals to us the weakness that is found in human beings because of sin, encouraging us to be vigilant and attentive so as not to lower our guard in our fight against sin.

Just because an episode appears in the Bible does not mean that it is an event praised or recommended by God. St. Augustine, a fourth-century bishop, one of the saints who studied the Bible the most and explained it the most, put it in a simple Latin phrase that is very well understood:



It means: "What is narrated in the Bible is not praised for it." For this very reason, the Bible's general praise of a character does not imply approval of all his actions. For example, Holy Scripture generally praises King David and the Apostle Peter, even though they both committed grave sins (King David committed adultery and murder, and the Apostle Peter denied Jesus three times on the night of Holy Thursday). General praise does not mean approving those sins (by the way: both King David and Peter deeply repented of their sins and asked God for forgiveness, becoming an example of how we should repent and turn from our sins).

## 2.-ERRORS ABOUT THE MATERIAL OR PHYSICAL WORLD

As we have explained, the Bible has no errors, because it teaches us the truth. But the truth in order to our salvation. Those things which refer to the physical and natural order, and are not Directly attached to our salvation, they need not be taught with total certainty.

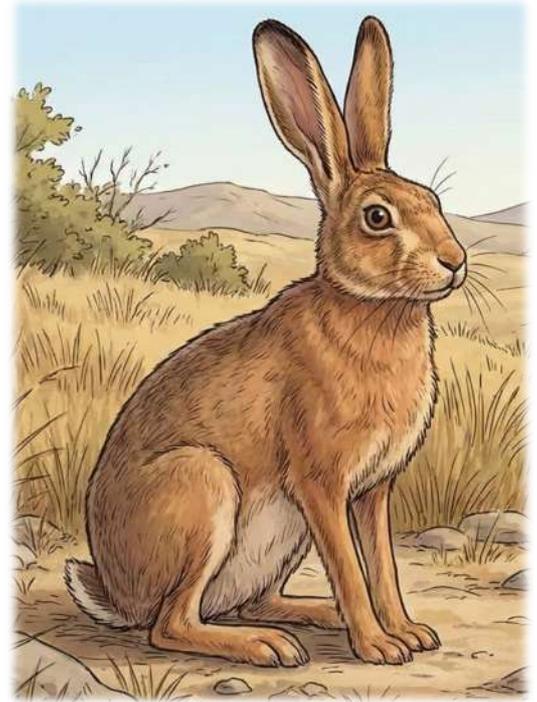
St. Augustine expressed it clearly:

The Lord did not promise the Holy Spirit to instruct us  
on the course of the sun and the moon;  
He wanted to make Christians, not mathematicians

(St. Augustine, De Gen. Ad litt. 2,9)

That is why the biblical authors spoke of the objects around them as perceived by their senses, with a conventional language according to the time.

If some natural or physical fact was linked to a truth necessary for our salvation (e.g., the universe was created by God out of nothing) **then divine inspiration helped them to express it without error**. Other facts not attached to truths necessary to save us were expressed according to the common usages of that time. And so, when in the Bible the hare is classified as a ruminant (*Lev 11:6*) (which is a natural inaccuracy) it is because at that time it was what was commonly accepted, and because such a natural description does not affect salvation (since for our union with God and our eternal salvation it does not matter much what kind of animal a hare is).



### 3.-HISTORICAL ERRORS

The same principle can be used when the Bible apparently narrates inaccurate historical facts. Every historical fact linked to a truth of faith (for example: the first human beings sinned, the Son of God became man at a specific historical moment...) is narrated without error by the Bible, since the truth of faith includes that these events really occurred (faith is not a fantasy). Any historical fact, on the other hand, that is not directly linked to a truth revealed for our salvation, could be narrated inaccurately.

However, **we must be careful** not to cheerfully say that this or that fact narrated in the Bible is not true because there is no historical or archaeological evidence. First, because the mere absence of evidence does not mean that it did not happen. And second, because such evidence could end up appearing. An example: in the Gospel of John there is talk of a pool in Jerusalem with five porticoes (*cf. Jn 5:1-18*). For many centuries it was said that it was a non-historical account, merely symbolic, because there was no such pool in Jerusalem. But in the nineteenth century, excavations carried out deeper discovered this pool, as described in the Gospel. The Bible was right. And this has happened in other cases. Therefore, we should not be too quick to deny a biblical historical fact simply because we do not currently have evidence or some historian considers it improbable.