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## Inerrancy. Does it matter?

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# INERRANT DOES IT MATTER?

## Do Florida Southern Baptists affirm the doctrine of inerrancy?

Totally Agree Agree Disagree Totally Disagree

(Q1) Do you feel all the accounts/stories in Bible are true? 61.0% 31.5% 5.2% 2.4%

(Q2) Do you feel all the books of the Bible are true? 69.5% 28.9% 0.8% 0.8%

(Q4) Do you feel Bible is true and trustworthy in all matters? 62.5% 30.1% 5.2% 2.0%

(Q7) Do you feel Bible contains errors? 6.4% 8.4% 34.7% 50.6%

### Sub-topic (1): Do Florida Southern Baptists affirm the deity of Christ?

Totally Agree Agree Disagree Totally Disagree

(Q8) Do you feel Jesus was born of a virgin? 74.5% 23.5% 0.4% 1.4%

(Q14) Do you feel Jesus was a man and fully God? 67.9% 25.1% 4.8% 2.0%

### Sub-topic (2): Do Florida Southern Baptists affirm the doctrine of the Trinity?

Totally Agree Agree Disagree Totally Disagree

(Q12) Do you feel the doctrine of the Trinity is taught in the Bible? 69.1% 23.9% 3.2% 3.8%

### Sub-topic (3): Do Florida Southern Baptists affirm the resurrection of Jesus Christ?

Totally Agree Agree Disagree Totally Disagree

(Q17) Do you feel Jesus died by crucifixion on a cross? 82.7% 15.9% 0.4% 1.0%

(Q20) Do you feel Jesus arose from the dead after three days in the grave? 78.3% 16.9% 2.6% 1.8%

### Sub-topic (4): Do Florida Southern Baptists affirm the miracles reported in the Bible?

Totally Agree Agree Disagree Totally Disagree

(Q24) Do you feel God, through Moses, changed the Nile River into blood? 66.9% 25.9% 3.8% 3.4%

(Q25) Do you feel Jonah was inside of a whale/fish for three days? 69.9% 23.7% 4.6% 1.8%

(Q28) Do you feel Moses crossed the Red Sea and Israel walked on dry ground? 67.1% 25.7% 4.8% 2.2%

### Sub-topic (5): Do Florida Southern Baptists affirm the supernatural events reported in Genesis?

Totally Agree Agree Disagree Totally Disagree

(Q35) Do you feel dinosaurs lived on the earth millions of years ago? 34.3% 27.9% 25.7% 12.2%

(Q40) Do you feel humans evolved from ape-like creatures? 13.9% 1.2% 28.5% 56.4%

(Q41) Do you feel because of science, the earth is millions/billions of years old? 16.3% 25.5% 38.2% 19.7%

### Sub-topic (6): Do Florida Southern Baptists affirm the authority of the Bible in their personal lives?

Totally Agree Agree Disagree Totally Disagree

(Q49) Do you feel Bible is the final authority in my life when I make decisions? 54.4% 36.3% 7.2% 2.2%

(Q57) Do you feel living with your boy/girlfriend before marriage is acceptable? 5.2% 19.7% 39.2% 35.7%

(Q58) Do you feel Christian marrying a non-Christian is acceptable to the Bible? 10.8% 26.1% 41.2% 21.9%

(Q62) Do you feel Bible permits women to be pastors just like men? 22.7% 21.9% 37.3% 17.7%

(Q54) Is there ever a time when abortion is acceptable? Yes 17.9% No 51.8% Idk 20.7%

LUTZ (FBW)—Driven to discover what the average Florida Baptist in the pew thinks about the Bible, a religion professor and longtime Florida Baptist embarked on a study in 2011 to explore the topic in relation to completing an advanced degree.

By **JONI B. HANNIGAN**  
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David A. McGee, a member of Idlewild Baptist Church in Lutz and a candidate for the doctor of education at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., recently completed research used in his dissertation titled "A Mixed-Methods Study of the Variables that Influence Florida Southern Baptists' Affirmation of the In-

errancy of the Bible." "Do FSB affirm the deity of Christ?" "Do FSB affirm the doctrine of the Trinity?" "Do FSB affirm the resurrection of Jesus Christ?" "Do FSB affirm the miracles reported in the Bible?" "Do FSB affirm the supernatural events reported in Genesis?" and "Do FSB affirm the authority of the Bible in their personal lives?"

Results confirm some seem to deny the supernatural events recorded in Genesis and the authority of the Bible in their personal lives, McGee said in his report. And yet, more than 90 percent of respondents agree that the Bible is their final authority for making life decisions.

Specifically McGee asked respondents about questions in Genesis that contained information about historic

events contained in Genesis chapters 1-11. In his summary, McGee concludes the study reveals "a large percentage of Florida Southern Baptist church members affirm the doctrine (of inerrancy), but the underlining beliefs are not always consistently acknowledged." He stated more research is needed.

What follows is a synopsis of McGee's research that he prepared, excerpts of his dissertation, and information and charts he prepared for publication:

EXCERPT: One of the historical positions of Southern Baptists, as stated by Bush and Nettles in their book *The Baptists and the Bible*, is the belief in the inerrancy of the Bible. They explored the history of Southern Baptists' belief of the authority, inspiration, and infallibility of the Bible and concluded that the Bible is and also has been the highest authority for Southern Baptists. Through the 1980s and 1990s, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) was in the midst of a political struggle over the Bible. Within the denomination were two groups—conservatives and moder-

ates. Conservatives believed in biblical inerrancy that is the Bible is without error while moderates were strong Bible believers, but allowed more leeway for biblical interpretation. In 1979, led by Paige Patterson and Judge Paul Pressler, the conservatives sought to elect Southern Baptist presidents who would affirm inerrancy of the Bible. In 2000, the Baptist Faith and Message 2000 (BFM 2000) was craft and approved by the SBC. Within the area of scripture the phrase "therefore, all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy and all Scripture is a testimony to Christ, who is Himself the focus of divine reve-



errancy of the Bible."

The research was sparked by McGee's interest in understanding if a historic struggle over the inerrancy of Scripture—largely played out among Southern Baptists during the Conservative Resurgence in the latter part of the 20th Century—affects the way in which congregants today not only view the Bible but live according to biblical principles.

"The assumption is that Southern Baptist Church members affirm the doctrine of inerrancy, but to-date limited research has been provided to substantiate the validity of this assumption," McGee told the *Witness*.

Certain that leadership in the Southern Baptist Convention settled the question after political struggles in the 1980s and 1990s over the affirmation of the Baptist Faith & Message 2000 (BF&M 2000) statement on doctrine was drafted and approved by messengers to the SBC, McGee wasn't certain about what rank and file Florida Baptists believe.

McGee drafted a 68-question survey and used a research company to assist him in obtaining random samples from 502 Florida Southern Baptists.

The survey questions were aimed at discovering what Florida Southern Baptists (FSB) believed about the doctrine of inerrancy and were further grouped into six sub-categories for

events contained in Genesis chapters 1-11.

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ation" was added and the phrase "the criterion by which the Bible is to be interpreted is Jesus Christ" was removed. With this change the SBC had attempted in more precise language to affirm the inerrancy of the Bible through the BFM 2000.

Since that time, the existing literature revealed a gap in the research. Namely, the general membership within the SBC had not been surveyed to determine the degree to which, if any, they affirmed the doctrine of inerrancy. The leadership and delegates within the SBC had affirmed the BFM 2000, but what was not known was if the general membership affirmed this belief and to what degree. A study was conducted in 2013 and a sample population of Florida Southern Baptist membership was selected.

Highlighted findings of the survey are listed below:

### Demographics, Observations, and Historical Implications

**Demographics.** A majority (69.3%) of those surveyed were between the age of 31 and 60. A significant num-

**When truth hits home, are Florida**



# INERRANCY. DRIFT? AFTER?

were female (69.5%). The level of education (87.0%) was largely clustered around those with a (1) high school diploma, (2) some college education, and (3) associate or technical degree. Approximately one-half (52%) attend church once-a-week and over one-half (51.6%) read their Bibles one time per week or less.

**Observations.** The encouraging observations are that a large percentage of FSB do affirm the doctrine of inerrancy. These percentages range between 85.3% and 98.2%. Between 95.2% and 98.2% affirm the deity of Christ. In addition, the doctrine of the Trinity is affirmed at 93.0%, the resurrection of Jesus

at 93.0%, the resurrection of Jesus

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Christ is affirmed with percentages ranging between 95.6% and 98.6%, the miracles reported in the Bible affirmed with percentages ranging between 92.8% and 93.6%. The conflicting observations are the beliefs of some who seem to be denying the supernatural events reported (or logical inferences) in Genesis and the authority of the Bible in their personal lives. For example in the area of supernatural events reported in Genesis roughly 6 out of 10 (62.2%) Totally agree or agree the earth is millions of years old (Q35). Over half (54.9%) agree or Totally disagree that dinosaurs lived with Adam and Eve (Q40). When asked "Do you feel because of science that the earth is millions/billions of years?" 41.8% either Totally Agree or Agree (Q41). In the area of Biblical authority 85.3% either Totally agree or Agree the Bible is their final authority for making life decisions (Q49). Yet, 38.6% responded "Yes" or "I don't know" if there is an acceptable time to perform an

Master of Theology (Th.M.) at Dallas Theological Seminary and has successfully defended his dissertation to earn a Doctor of Education (D.Ed.) at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, NC. He graduates in the spring of 2014.

**About the research:** The data was gathered by America's Research Group, Limited, Inc. (www.argconsumer.com) and then analyzed by the researcher, David A. McGee. The survey was 68-questions and 502

randomly selected Florida Southern Baptists completed the survey.

The purpose of this study was to understand to what degree Florida Southern Baptists affirm the doctrine of inerrancy. In addition, there were six sub-topics that were designed to give clarity to their degree of belief in the doctrine of inerrancy. (1) Do FSB affirm the deity of Christ? (2) Do FSB affirm the doctrine of the Trinity? (3) Do FSB affirm the resurrection of Jesus Christ? (4) Do FSB affirm the miracles reported in the Bible? (5) Do FSB affirm the supernatural events reported in Genesis? (6) Do FSB affirm the authority of the Bible in their personal lives?

Approximately 14 phone calls were made to complete one survey. This equals around 7,028 phone calls to gather 502 completed surveys. Also, this study was delimited to those participants who were able to answer the survey in English.



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## Florida Baptists willing to be different?