

IS THE OLD TESTAMENT TRUE OR IS IT FICTION?

Many people today view the Old Testament with a great deal of skepticism. Some believe that parts of the Old Testament are deeply flawed and fall short of the truth. There are also many who give the Bible—both Old and New Testament—no credence because they do not believe in God. Some others believe that many of the Bible's stories are myths that have been preserved to teach gospel principles, but that the stories of the Old Testament have little basis in fact. Some others believe the Old Testament may have some truth in it, but that it is not relevant to our times because, as they say, everything in the Old Testament message was superseded by the New Testament. Some believe that even the Ten Commandments are out of date.

Another point of view relates to the fact that we have the Bible today courtesy of the Jews, a people known for their ancient myths, many of which were nothing more than legends, superstitions, and folklore. The Talmud, for example, which includes many strange and unusual accounts, was developed from centuries of Jewish oral tradition and written to help the people understand the Jewish Bible (the Tanakh). The Tanakh consists of three parts: the law (or the Torah), the prophets (Nebiim), and the writings (Kethubim). And some so-called authorities believe that the Talmud was just an extension of the writings in the Tanakh and that the Old Testament writings, especially the early chapters of Genesis, are the true beginning of Jewish mythology. And certainly there are other variations of belief on this issue. There are lots of reasons people find to neglect the Old Testament.

On the other hand, many other people believe the Bible is perfect and inerrant. They claim that God's hand so carefully shepherded the writing, preservation, compilation, translation, and transmission of the scriptural text that every word must be considered as the absolute word of God.

The Mormons (and perhaps others, contrary to the stand taken by their churches) believe that the Bible is the word of God "as far as it is translated correctly." The word "translated," as used here, seems to mean much more than rendering the text from one language to another, but rather the whole process that brought the Bible from its ancient originators down to us. This position is frequently misinterpreted or misstated to convey the notion that they (the Mormons) do not believe that any of it was "translated" correctly—which is an unfortunate misunderstanding.

As one looks carefully at various Bible translations, it is apparent that there are errors in the text, as well as some significant differences between the various translations. There are also contradictions when the same story is told by two (and sometimes three) different Biblical authors. One example of an error is in 2 Samuel 21:8. From the text of this verse, it is clear that King Saul's second daughter Michal was named when it should have been Merib, Saul's first daughter. The scripture mentions the five sons of Michal "whom she brought up for Adriel the son of Barzillai." It could not have been Michal because (1) she had no children and (2) it was Merib who was married to Adriel. Many other examples could be cited.

Another point to consider has to do with the not-so-ancient Hebrew language texts from which all modern translations of the Old Testament have been made. In the First Century AD, when the

scriptural canon was finally set, there were no Hebrew texts in existence—only the Greek Septuagint texts. Sensing the significance of this problem, scholars in the Third Century took the Greek Septuagint Bible, created five centuries earlier, and translated it back into Hebrew. And, as if the problems of translating the text into another language were not enough, consider also that the Hebrew language of the Third Century AD was quite different from the Hebrew language of the Third Century BC.

It is truly amazing—perhaps nothing short of a miracle, in my opinion—that there are not many more problems with the Old Testament than there are. God surely had a hand in this.

Another important thing to consider is that some Old Testament stories are told with the use of symbolism, a practice well documented in the prophecies. An excellent example of this is the story of the Creation. The Creation story is a true story. God did indeed create the earth and all things on its face. God also created mankind in His own image and likeness from the dust (i.e., the elements) of the earth. There is no doubt about the actuality of the creation, but the Biblical account tells the story with the use of symbolism. God apparently has not seen fit to share with us the specific details of how He did it.

Some people will tell you that there was no such person as Adam—that the story of Adam is only symbolic. However, the absence of Adam would have serious ramifications for us. Consider what the situation would be like if there had been no Adam. If that were the case, then there would have been no Fall. And if there had been no Fall, there would have been no need for an Atonement. And if there were no Atonement, we would have no need for a Savior. And, if there were no Savior, there could be no resurrection. So—carrying this thought to its logical conclusion—if there is no resurrection, why do we make so much fuss about Easter? Is it all about Easter bonnets and bunny rabbits? But, thankfully, there was an Adam; he was a very real person.

Then we might ask if God really took a rib from Adam's side to create Eve? I do not believe he did, but he did create her, and the symbolism of Eve being created from Adam's rib is glorious. Adam saw the significance of this and recognized the essential oneness of himself and Eve as husband and wife when he said, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called woman because she was taken out of Man." And then God Himself added some insight: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Genesis 2:23-24; see, also Matthew 19:4-6). What a glorious symbol this is of the noble relationship between a husband and wife, equally yoked together both physically and spiritually—physically in the procreative consecration of a God-ordained marriage, and spiritually in their righteous, united worship of their Creator.

Much more could be written on this subject and many more examples could be given, but suffice it to say that the Old Testament messages are true and they are relevant, not only for our time but for all time. Those who are unable to accept this fact do not understand the Old Testament—perhaps because of insufficient study, lack of faith, uninspired intellectual over-analysis, or some combination of these factors.