

View

"...Having the eyes of your heart enlightened..." Ephesians 1:18

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The Bible: Myth or History?

The Bible is either the product of God or the product of men. Christians believe that the Bible is from the hand of God and that it is to be believed and obeyed in order to have a good life now and Heaven in eternity. There have always been those who oppose God and His way. This opposition has come in varied forms. Some have been and are opposed to the idea of God; thus, they are "atheists" (the "a" negates "theist," a believer in God). There are those who accept the idea of God but reject His interaction with man in revelation or divine authority. These are known as "deists." The opposition to the Bible as the revelation of God to man has been around for centuries, but it is now becoming more and more prevalent. As humanism advances, so does opposition to the Bible. Humanism and the Bible cannot co-exist. One or the other must fall.

One form of this opposition to Jesus and to the Bible comes with the charge that the Bible is made up of myths that have been foisted upon people by priestly castes in order that priests might control the masses. Our purpose in this writing is to examine the charge that the Bible is made up of myths and fables.

The Charges

First, let us look at some of the charges that are made against the Bible: "The Gospels do not contain the history of an actual man, but only the myth of the god-man Jesus, clothed in a historical dress."¹

"The Bible is not 'the word of God,' but stolen from pagan sources. Its Eden, Adam and Eve were taken from the Babylonian account; its Flood or Deluge is but an epitome of some four hundred flood accounts; its Ark and Ararat have their equivalents in a score of Deluge myths; even the names of Noah's sons are copies, so also Isaac's sacrifice, Solomon's judgment, and Samson's pillar

act; its Moses is fashioned after the Syrian Mises; its laws after Hammurabi's code. Its Messiah is derived from the Egyptian Mahdi, Savior, certain verses are verbatim copies of Egyptian scriptures. Between Jesus and the Egyptian Horus, Gerald Massey found 137 similarities, and those between Christ and Krishna run into the hundreds. How then can the Bible be a revelation to the Jews?²

Mr. Graham expresses his humanism by saying, "It's time this scriptural tyranny was broken that we may devote our time to man instead of God, to civilizing ourselves instead of saving our souls that were never lost."³

Another quote from him will show how rabid is his opposition to God as he advances his humanistic philosophy:

"Had Christ known the nature of Reality he would not have taught the love of God for man or its reverse. Yet the Gospels have him say: 'And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment' (Mark 12:30). It is not the first of an enlightened Christ by only of a priesthood that needed it professionally. God being but the ruthless creative power, man has no right to love it, since from it spring all his pain and suffering, his savagery and war. If he would escape from these he must not only cease pretending to love it but oppose and conquer it. Mythologically man rebelled against this one—to become human; he must now rebel against it mentally and morally to become divine."⁴

It is obvious from these quotations that Graham "errs, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God." However, humanists and atheists are not the only ones to regard the Scriptures as filled with myths. The Interpreter's Bible commentary is considered to be one of the most scholarly works in its field. We quote:

"Obviously, the book [Genesis] begins in that misty region of tradition and transmitted myth in which imagination precedes knowledge. Few will suppose that Adam and Eve and the Garden of Eden belong to factual history. Cain and Abel and

Lamech and Nimrod and Methuselah and Noah-- these also come down to us as legends rather than as persons identifiable in the literal history of a particular time."⁵

"Not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God" has led many to look upon the Biblical accounts as myths. Hermann Gunkel wrote toward the end of the last century:

"The clearest criterion of legend is that it frequently reports things which are quite incredible... Thus many things are reported in Genesis which go directly against our better knowledge: we know that there are too many species of animals for all to have been assembled in any ark; that Ararat is not the highest mountain on earth... And however cautious the modern historian may be in declaring anything impossible, he may declare with all confidence that animals-- serpents and she-asses, for instance--do not speak and never have spoken, that there is no tree whose fruit confers immortality or knowledge..."⁶

In Response

It is impossible to reply to all the various charges that the Biblical account contains myths in this one paper. However, I shall address some questions of significance in response.

The Biblical Claim

Let it be understood that the Biblical writers did not regard the Genesis account or the person of Jesus as mythical. The New Testament writers quote from Genesis numerous times, thus placing their stamp of approval upon what was recorded in Genesis. If the New Testament writers were inspired (and I affirm that they were), then it follows that the account given in Genesis is historically accurate. Geisler and Nix give a list of thirty-two people and events of the Old Testament which are referred to as historical by New Testament writers. Fifteen of these are from the first twelve chapters of

Genesis:

- Creation of the universe (Gen. 1), John 1:3; Col. 1:16
- Creation of Adam and Eve (Gen. 1-2), 1 Tim. 2:13-14
- Marriage of Adam and Eve (Gen 1-2), 1 Tim. 2:13
- Temptation of the woman (Gen 3), 1 Tim 2:14
- Disobedience and sin of Adam (Gen. 3), Rom 5:12; 1 Cor.15:22
- Sacrifices of Abel and Cain (Gen. 4), Heb. 11:4
- Murder of Abel by Cain (Gen. 4), 1 John 3:12
- Birth of Seth (Gen. 4), Luke 3:38

- Translation of Enoch (Gen. 5), Heb. 11:5
- Marriage before the flood (Gen. 6), Luke 17:27
- The flood and destruction of man (Gen. 7), Matt. 24:39
- Preservation of Noah and his family (Gen. 8-9), 2 Peter 2:5
- Genealogy of Shem (Gen. 10), Luke 3:35-36
- Birth of Abraham (Gen. 11), Luke 3:34
- Call of Abraham (Gen. 12-13), Heb. 11:87

In this sample survey, several things should be noted. (1) Most of the controversial passages of the Old Testament are referred to, for example, the creation, fall, flood, miracles of Moses and Elijah, and Jonah in the great fish. These are not just alluded to, they are authenticated as historical events by the New Testament. If these major miraculous events are authentic, there is no difficulty in accepting the rest of the events of the Old Testament.⁸

There are many effective ways to respond to the claims that the Bible either contains or is made up of myths. For example, we can show that the Scriptures have the mark of inspiration totally (plenary inspiration). We can show that prophecy helps to prove the authenticity of the Scriptures. However, the approach that I want to use has to do with the person of Jesus Christ. If we can show that Jesus was a historical person, we will have proven that He was not a myth. If we can show that the claims that He made for Himself are valid, we will have shown that His disciples did not, after His leaving this earth, manufacture the claims of His Deity. If we can show that Jesus is from God, then we will have also shown that Genesis is an inspired account because Jesus looked upon Genesis as actual history. We might state our approach in this manner:

1. Was Jesus a historical person or was He a myth?
2. If Jesus was a historical person, was He who He claimed to be—Deity?
3. If Jesus is Deity, then Genesis is not a myth.

Was Jesus A Historical Person?

"Comparatively few recent scholars postulate that Jesus never lived. Such positions are usually viewed as blatant misuses of the available historical data."⁹

It is not within the scope of this paper to elaborate upon the historical trustworthiness of

the four gospels. However, they will bear the scrutiny of the severest historical critic. They give testimony to the fact that Jesus was a historical person.

All of the New Testament narratives were completed within sixty years or so of the Lord's death, and of the twenty-seven New Testament books, no less than ten were penned by personal companions of Jesus.

Paul, an eye-witness of Christ, wrote at least thirteen of the remainder. It used to be fashionable in liberal circles to ascribe most New Testament books to the second century A.

D., but interestingly, even liberal critics are now admitting that the New Testament documents are first-century sources of information. For example, modernistic theologian John A. T. Robinson of England, in his book, *Redating the New Testament* (1977), conceded that all of the New Testament books were written within seventy years of the death of Christ, and by men whose names they bear!¹⁰

Most skeptics claim that they want non-biblical proof of the existence of Jesus. This, too, can be given.

While some believe that we know almost nothing about Jesus from ancient, non-New Testament sources, this plainly is not the case. Not only are there many such sources, but Jesus is one of the persons of ancient history concerning whom we have a significant amount of quality data. His is one of the most-mentioned and most-substantiated lives in ancient times.¹¹ (One book that contains much information about the historical Jesus is *He Walked Among Us* by Josh McDowell, Here's Life Publishers, San Bernardino, Ca. See pages 35-70 for information on historical sources dealing with Jesus.)

The following information is from *A Ready Defense* (Josh McDowell, Here's To Life Publishers, San Bernardino, Ca., pp 198 - 208).

IF WE CAN SHOW THAT JESUS IS FROM GOD, THEN WE WILL HAVE ALSO SHOWN THAT GENESIS IS AN INSPIRED ACCOUNT BECAUSE JESUS LOOKED UPON GENESIS AS ACTUAL HISTORY.

Ancient Secular Writers

Cornelius Tacitus was born circa A.D. 52-54 and was a Roman historian. He alluded to the death of Jesus and to Christians in Rome when he wrote:

"Hence to suppress the rumor, he (Nero) falsely charged with the guilt, and punished with the most exquisite tortures, the persons commonly called Christians, who were hated for their enormities. Christus, the founder of the name, was put to death by Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea in the reign of Tiberius; but the pernicious superstition, repressed for a time broke out again, not only through Judea, where the mischief originated, but through the city of Rome also" (Annals, XV.44).

Lucian of Samosata was a satirist of the second century. He spoke of Christ as "the man who was crucified in Palestine because He

introduced this new cult into the world... Furthermore, their first lawgiver persuaded them that they were all brothers one of another after they have transgressed once for all by denying the Greek gods and by worshipping that crucified sophist Himself and living under His laws" (*The Passing Peregrinus*).

Flavius Josephus was born A.D. 37 and was a noted Jewish historian. He is quoted as saying

"Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call Him a man, for He was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to Him both many of the Jews, and many of the Gentiles, He was the Christ, and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men among us, had condemned Him to the cross, those that loved Him at the first did not forsake Him; for he appeared to them alive again in the third day; as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning Him. And the tribe of Christians so named from Him are not extinct at this day" (Antiquities, xviii. 33.).

In another place he refers to Jesus when he speaks of James "the brother of the so-called Christ." (Antiquities XX 9:1) Seutonius was another Roman historian and a court official under Hadrian. He said, "As the Jews were making constant disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus [another spelling of

Christus], he expelled them from Rome" (*Life of Claudius*, 25. 4).

McDowell quotes from Pliny the Younger, Tertullian, Thallus, Phlegon and from a letter by Mara Bar-Serapion all showing the historical evidence that Jesus was an historical person.

Jesus was not a myth. He was a historical person who lived during the first century. "Very few scholars hold the view that Jesus never lived. Even Rudolf Bultmann, one of the most influential critical theologians of the twentieth century and exponent of demythologizing the Scripture, said, 'By no means are we at the mercy of those who doubt or deny that Jesus ever lived.'"¹²

Virtually no writers have asserted that Jesus did not exist or have attempted to cast virtually total doubts and obscurity on his life and ministry. But, such efforts are refuted by the early and eyewitness testimony presented by Paul and others, by the early date of the Gospels, by the corresponding historicity and trustworthiness of the Gospels, and by the failure of the mystery religions to explain the Christian faith.¹³

Was Jesus Who He Claimed To Be?

It is the claim of skeptics that Jesus was given the attributes of "a god" by fanatical disciples who decided to pattern Jesus after the Greek mythical gods. However, there is not proof that there was teaching of a mythical deity being raised from the dead "...was taught prior to the late second century A. D. Thus, it is certainly a plausible thesis that the mystery religions borrowed this aspect from Christianity, not the reverse."¹⁴

The Old Testament pointed to a Messiah who would be "the Mighty God" (Isa 9:6) born of a virgin (Isa 7:14). The New Testament teaches that Jesus was God in the flesh (John 1:1, 2, 14, 1 Tim. 3:16, et al). The first line of proof that Jesus is who He claimed to be is the Biblical account itself. The gospels form a reliable historical account of the life and activities of Jesus. Under the scrutiny of the most critical eye, the gospels will stand the test. They are historically reliable. Inasmuch as they can be shown to be reliable, what they record about Jesus is true. He is who He claimed to be.

A second line of proof of the fact that Jesus is Deity is the resurrection itself. There is overwhelming historical evidence that Jesus rose from the dead. A number of books have set forth irrefutable evidence of the resurrection.

Professor Thomas Arnold, for fourteen years the headmaster of Rugby, author of a famous three-volume History of Rome, and appointed to the chair of modern history at Oxford, was well acquainted with the value of evidence in determining historical facts. He said: "I have been used for many years to study the histories of other times, and to examine and weigh the evidence of those who have written about them, and I know of no one fact in the history of mankind which is proved by better and fuller evidence of every sort, to the understanding of a fair inquirer, than the great sign which God has given us that Christ died and rose again from the dead."¹⁵

McDowell quotes English scholar Brooke Foss Westcott as saying,

"Taking all the evidence together, it is not too much to say that there is no historic incident better or more variously supported than the resurrection of Christ. Nothing but the antecedent assumption that it must be false could have suggested the idea of deficiency in the proof of it."¹⁶

Dr. Simon Greenleaf is noted as having one of the greatest minds in law in the world. While he was professor at Harvard School of Law, he wrote a book examining the legal value of the testimony of the apostles to the resurrection of Christ. He believed that it was impossible that the apostles "could have persisted in affirming the truths they had narrated, had not Jesus actually risen from the dead, and had they not known this fact as certainly as they knew any other fact." Greenleaf concluded that the resurrection of Christ was one of the best supported events in history, according to the laws of legal evidence administered in courts of justice."¹⁷

Frank Morrison was another lawyer who determined to refute the evidence of the resurrection. However, after examining the facts with his legal training, he concluded that Jesus had indeed been raised from the dead and wrote a best-seller, *Who Moved the Stone?* (Zondervan

Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI. 1958). This book is a great addition to any library.

George Eldon Ladd concludes: "The only rational explanation for these historical facts is that God raised Jesus in bodily form."¹⁸

When all the evidence is in and is carefully considered, one must conclude that Jesus is who He said He was — the divine Son of the Living God. He is God and, as such, lived a sinless life on earth and went to the cross in order to atone for our sins. He was raised from the dead and now rules at the right hand of God. Jesus is not a myth. He is what and who He claimed to be.

Since Jesus Is Deity, Then Genesis is Not a Myth

By what right can we say this? Because Jesus taught that Genesis is history.

- He taught the creation. "For those days will be a {time of} tribulation such as has not occurred since the beginning of the creation which God created, until now, and never shall" (Mar 13:19).
- He taught about Adam and Eve and the beginning of the marriage relationship (Matt. 19:4-6).
- He taught about Noah and the flood (Matt. 24:38-39).
- He taught about righteous Abel and the fact of his blood being maliciously shed (Matt. 23:35, Luke 11:51).
- He talked about Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph.
- He spoke of Lot: "Remember Lot's wife" (Luke 17:32).

We can see from these few references that Jesus considered Genesis to be the history of God's dealing with man. He did not look upon it as mythical at all. To Him it was what God said and what God did. Since Jesus is Deity, then He could not make a mistake in this matter. We must conclude that the Bible is a book that contains historical reality and that it does not contain myths and fables that are pawned off as history.

When we examine all the evidence that is before us, we must conclude that the Bible is from God and not from man. The various creation and flood accounts in different cultures only bear record to the fact that God did create the world and there was a flood. The Bible gives us the accurate information about this creation, about

this flood and about God who came to earth in a human body. Let us reverently bow before the Lord Jesus Christ and give our hearts totally to Him while we can.

Endnotes

1. Arthur Drews as quoted by Lloyd Graham, *Deceptions and Myths of the Bible*, Carol Communications, N.Y., p. 282.
2. Lloyd Graham, *Ibid.*, p. 5.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 426.
5. *The Interpreter's Bible*. Abingdon Press. New York. Vol. I. 1952, p. 460.
6. Gunkel, Hermann. *The Legends of Genesis: The Biblical Saga and History*. Schocken Books. New York. 1964. pp 7-8. Quoted in a manuscript by Brad Bromling, *Is Genesis Myth?* Apologetics Press, Inc. Montgomery, AL.
7. Geisler, Norman L. and William E. Nix. *A General Introduction to the Bible*. Moody Press. Chicago. 1968, p. 85.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 86.
9. Gary R. Habermas, *The Verdict of History*, Thomas Nelson Publishers. Nashville, p. 31.
10. Bert Thompson and Wayne Jackson, *A Study Course in Christian Evidences*. Apologetics Press, Inc. Montgomery, AL. 1991, p. 140.
11. Josh McDowell, *A Ready Defense*. Here's Life Publishers. San Bernardino, CA., p. 197.
12. Gary R. Habermas, *op. cit.*, 36.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 36.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 36.
15. Josh McDowell, *More Than A Carpenter*, Tyndal House Publishers, Inc. Wheaton, IL., p. 96.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 96-97.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 97.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 98.

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