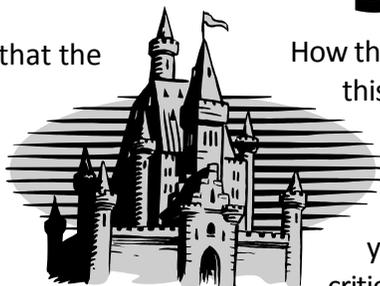


Myths and Legends

Many people think that the Bible, especially the Old Testament, contains more legend than fact. "What can you expect", they say, "when a story has been passed down for centuries by word of mouth?"

They have a picture in their minds of a great camp fire, with old men telling stories they heard in their youth about heroes of ancient times. Each time the story was told it would grow. Details would be exaggerated to impress young ears, and embellishments would be added according to the skill of the story teller.

This is, perhaps, a fairly accurate picture of how we got the Norwegian or Icelandic sagas, but it is in no way true of the Bible. King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, or Saint George and the Dragon cannot be compared with the great Bible heroes.



How then do people get this false idea about the Bible? To find the reason we have to go back about 100 years to the Bible critics of Victorian times.

Brimming with self-confidence, many intellectual men felt there was nothing their great minds couldn't tackle. It was the age of discovery, the dawn of science. Human knowledge had never reached such heights before, as the principles of electricity, chemistry and physics were explored. There was a general feeling of superiority over former generations.

The Bible scholars did not want to be left out, and so the assault on the Scriptures began. At that time, not much was known from archaeology, but this did not deter them from making sweeping, destructive statements about the accuracy of the Bible.

The Hittites

The Bible refers to a people

known as the Hittites but this was laughed at by the critics. Such a nation never existed, they said, so the Bible must be unreliable.

How wrong they were soon to be proved! Modern archaeology has uncovered vast quantities of Hittite remains. We now know that they were not only an important people in the ancient world, but ruled a great empire.

One of the best examples of the accuracy of Scripture is in the Genesis

account of Abraham. He was regarded as the No.1 myth of Scripture. Just 100 years ago, a German scholar wrote that it is "impossible to obtain any historical information" from the Biblical record of Abraham. These stories, he said, were made up much later, and reflect a much later culture.

It was generally believed that, in the age when Abraham was

supposed to have lived, man was still on his way up from the ape, and lived a very simple and rough existence.

The Bible's record of Abraham's lifestyle was laughed at. The city he came from, Ur, had 'never existed'; anyway, the whole area was uninhabitable desert. However, while the search for King Arthur's home at Camelot remains unfruitful, the discovery of Abraham's birthplace, in the 1930s, was dramatic.

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In its heyday, Ur was one of the most important cities in the

world. Staggering quantities of gold, silver and jewels were found in the tombs. Excavations revealed factories and workshops, beautiful buildings with richly-inlaid furniture, and musical instruments.

The city had a sophisticated business life, with shops and offices, invoices and receipts, and the files kept by the civil

service tell us much. The architecture surpassed that of the Greeks with its arches, vaults and domes. The Bible's critics could not have been more wrong!

Haran and Abraham's Family

After leaving Ur, the Bible tells us that Abraham went to Haran. This city has been identified, and there is very good evidence that Abraham was there. Clay tablets refer to the "Hebrews", and name Nahor (Abraham's brother), and Laban who is even referred to as an Aramaean in the same way as he is in Genesis.

The story of Sodom and Gomorrah has long been ridiculed and considered pure fabrication, but the location of the cities has now been identified. They lie to the east of the southern part of the Dead Sea. Archaeology shows that the plain which they overlooked was exceedingly fertile and well populated in Abraham's day (around 2065 B.C.), but that not long afterwards it was abandoned.

Scientists even admit that there was a "catastrophic destruction" with evidence of an earthquake that released flaming gas and oil. The area is full of oil and sulphur (brimstone) deposits, and there is even a five-mile-long mountain of salt, now known as Mt. Sodom.

Although the accuracy of the Old Testament has been confirmed time and time again, it is sad how few people are aware of it and, tragically, millions still regard the Bible as a book of myths.

Even many who call themselves Christians are influenced by this attitude and say that it is not the truth of the story that matters but what it has to teach us. However, the Bible claims to be true from cover to cover, and its authority is based on that.

Accuracy No Longer Doubted

The days are gone when the critic could make sweeping accusations against God's Word. Every year more discoveries are made. The Encyclopaedia Britannica says that the incredible

accuracy of the Old Testament can no longer be doubted.

The Bible is clearly the word of God, and as it warns on the front of this cover, we must be very careful not to reject what it says to us.

True Christians do not just believe the Bible because a lot of ancient discoveries prove it to be true. They believe it because they know how the message of the Bible has powerfully changed their hearts and given them a relationship with God.

God did not just give us His word to tell us how ancient civilisations lived. It is not a complete history of the world, but a complete revelation of who God is and how we can come to know Him. Those who scoffed at what the Bible has to say about the past later regretted it, but how much more will *you* regret it if you ignore what it says about the future?

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