

166 Bible bashing – Old Testament

Can I ask you some questions about the Old Testament, please?

Sure, what do you want to know?

When was it written?

The latest book, Malachi, was written around 2400 BP (before present), then there was Moses writing at about 3500 BP, but back then the oral tradition was way stronger, so the Bible contains wisdom and knowledge from even longer ago than that – what a wonderful legacy it gives us!

It was written by different authors, right? All educated people? Did they know any science?

Moses had an education in Egypt, but many were quite humble – one was just a shepherd. But even in Egyptian times, their ‘science’ wasn’t like today. For example, they thought the sun went around the earth – we didn’t know different until less than 400 years ago.

So the Old Testament contains errors of science.

Well, yes, and it probably contains some errors of history and geography because the authors had very limited knowledge of such things. Mind you, as Jews, they had an intimate knowledge of their own history, but obviously not necessarily about others.

Doesn’t that worry you, that the Old Testament probably contains factual errors?

No, not at all. It’s not a textbook. Its purpose is to tell us about the relationship between Yahweh and the Jewish people – the people he chose to fulfil his plan of bringing blessing to all the people of the whole world.

Ah, right, so it tells us about what God is like and how he relates to us today. Great!

Not so fast! It’s not as simple as that. Remember that this was written long before Jesus’ time, so they wouldn’t have seen what God is *really* like. Back in Abraham’s time, about 4000 BP, everyone thought of God as angry and sending thunderbolts if you didn’t do what he said – it takes a very long time to change people’s views.

But I’ve heard you say that the whole Bible, including the Old Testament, is inspired by God, so surely God would have told them that he wasn’t nasty like that.

Well, I guess that God could have done a sort of mind-meld to give them a better picture of his loving nature, but what he did instead was to instruct them, in things like the ten commandments, to care for one another, and especially strangers and poor people – to get them to be more loving.

God really stressed the relationship side of things, even though everyone still thought of God as punishing people when they did things wrong.

Oh, and the other thing God did was to inspire the authors to say things – enigmatic things – about the future, “The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel – God with us”. Eh?! What’s all *that* about?!

Then in Jesus’ day, when these prophecies were fulfilled, can you just imagine the “penny-drop” moments by the dozen, as people read their Old Testaments?!

Great, but can I just ask...?

Sorry, we’re already over our 500 words – ask me tomorrow! :-)

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