

HOW WE GOT OUR BIBLE And WHY WE BELIEVE IT IS GOD'S WORD

by

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CHAPTER FIVE

TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

IT IS apt to be overlooked that the fundamental question about the Bible is not its inspiration but its trustworthiness. It is possible to be without any theory of inspiration, if we are assured of its trustworthiness. This is our present question: Can we trust the Old Testament? A later chapter will similarly discuss the New Testament.

It is sometimes thought that a question of this kind is so technical as to be suitable only for scholars, and not for ordinary Christians. This, however, is not the view of many leading scholars themselves.

Professor W. Robertson Smith, in his preface to a work by Wellhausen, says:

"The present volume gives the English reader an opportunity to form his own judgment on questions which are within the scope of anyone who reads the English Bible carefully, and is able to think clearly and without prejudice about its contents."

There are other criteria besides those of the expert. It is exactly the same with the Bible as it is with most other departments of life; scholarship is not everything, technicalities of learning cannot solve all problems. "There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of" in human philosophy, and it is at once possible and a duty for the ordinary Christian to test the question of trustworthiness for himself.

There are at least five ways of doing this.

Each of them alone is important, but when they are taken together they are seen to provide the ordinary Christian with opportunities and methods of coming to a definite decision which is perfectly satisfying to the believing soul.

The Bible is so vital and so important to the ordinary Christian man that unless he can be assured of its substantial trustworthiness as a record of divine revelation, his life and testimony must inevitably suffer. It is with the object of enabling him to arrive at this assurance for himself that these methods are indicated, and certain fundamental principles are enunciated.

1. The Historical Fact of the Jewish Nation - The Jewish nation is a fact in history, and its record is given to us in the Old Testament. There is no contemporary literature to check the account there given, and archeology only affords us assistance on points of detail, not for any long or continuous period. This record of Jewish history can be proved to have remained the same for many centuries, and what we find in the Old Testament agrees with all that is known from other sources.

Here before us we see the great outstanding objective fact of the Jewish nation.

The Old Testament, as we have it, is at once the means and the record of their national life. It rose with them, grew with them, formed them, and at the same time witnessed against them, and it is to the Jews alone we look for the earliest testimony to the Old Testament canon.

In face of these historic facts, it is not too much to say that the trustworthiness of the Old Testament is wholly in accord with the historic growth and position of the Jewish people. And so we can test the Old Testament by the history of the Jews and find it in entire agreement with all that we know of Hebrew national life.

2. The Evidence of Archeology - During the last eighty years a vast number of discoveries have been made in Egypt, Palestine, Assyria, and Babylonia, many of which have been valuable for their illustrations of the Bible.

The special advantage of these archeological results is that they are, as it were, tangible and intelligible by ordinary men and do not require expert scholarship to appreciate their meaning. The bearing of this on the Old Testament is obvious. It is impossible to adduce these discoveries in detail. And it is most striking and significant that not a single discovery has been made which goes to set aside or even weaken the trustworthiness of the Old Testament, while discovery after discovery has supported its statements.

3. The Witness of our Lord and His Apostles - For many reasons I should prefer to leave the authority of our Lord out of this discussion, because I am convinced that scholarship is amply sufficient to settle the question. But while this is impossible, it is important to have a clear understanding of what it means to call attention to the evidence of the New Testament embodying the attitude of our Lord and his followers. We do not invoke the authority of CHRIST to close questions summarily, but we adduce the witness of the New Testament in support of the contentions of conservative historical scholarship. If we see that the witness of CHRIST and his apostles corresponds with the Church's view of the Bible, the testimony is assuredly weighty, and this is all that we claim.

What, then, was our Lord's general view of the Old Testament?

That His Old Testament was practically, if not literally, the same as ours, and that he had a thorough knowledge of its contents, are admitted by all. Nor does anyone seriously deny that JESUS CHRIST accepted the Old Testament as authoritative, inspired, and the final court of appeal for all questions connected with it.

No one can go through the Gospels without being impressed with the profound reverence of our Lord for the Old Testament and with his constant use of it in all religious matters. Whether he referred to Bible names, or incidents, or to its deep teaching about GOD, it was always with the utmost reverence and with the evident conviction that it embodied a divine revelation.

This general view is confirmed by his detailed references. His various testimonies to Old Testament persons imply their historical character. His references to the facts of the Old Covenant equally assume historicity. His whole earthly career was very largely a fulfilment of the Old Testament Scriptures.

4. The Necessity of Spiritual Work - The use of the Bible in connection with Christian service is universally recognized, and the Old Testament part of it cannot be overlooked in work for GOD.

Now no one doubts that the blessing of the Spirit of Truth rests upon those who are serving GOD while holding and teaching its trustworthiness.

There are men today of outstanding influence doing evangelistic and pastoral work who cling tenaciously to the "**old paths.**" Their belief has been no bar to the grace of GOD.

- Blessing has manifestly come through use of the books of the Old Testament as they now exist.

- Divine lessons have been brought home to us by means of the present form of the older part of Scripture.

While we welcome all that scholarship can do in making the past clearer, and in enabling us to enter more fully into the divine methods of work, yet the Bible is the revelation of GOD for spiritual life, and not merely for historical literature, however valuable.

Whenever scholarship tends to forget this, the question of the spiritual value of the Bible becomes imperative.

For this reason we hold that any doctrine of the Bible for spiritual men must bear the seal of the Holy Spirit. The view of its trustworthiness has the mark of this seal, and has been, and is being, abundantly blessed.

5. The Testimony of Spiritual Experience - There is one special way of testing this matter, for truth requires verification by the spiritual man.

When the divine Word is brought to bear upon the human mind, conscience, heart and will, it carries its own conviction and elicits its own verification. The experience of the soul soon bears witness in the words of the Psalmist, "**Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path**" (Psalm 119:105). "**Thy Word is very pure: therefore Thy servant loveth it**" (Psalm 119:140).

We ask for an earnest and thorough consideration of these five tests. It would have been possible to add others more technical and more directly applicable to questions of scholarship, but these will suffice to show how the ordinary Christian man can test the trustworthiness of the Old Testament Scriptures. When these tests are applied separately they will be seen to carry real weight, but when they are taken together they constitute a cumulative effect and demand attention from all who seek to know the truth.

QUESTIONS

1. What is the fundamental question about the Bible?
2. Is the question of the trustworthiness of the Old Testament one that can be answered by any but scholars?
3. In how many ways may this question of trustworthiness be tested?
4. What is the relation of the Jewish nation to the Old Testament? What is the source, very largely, of that nation's history?
5. In what way have the archeological discoveries of the last eighty years been valuable to Bible students?
6. What has been the bearing of these discoveries on the question of the trustworthiness of the Old Testament?
7. In what way is the witness of CHRIST to the Old Testament invoked?
8. That was our Lord's attitude to the Old Testament?
9. How is the trustworthiness of the Old Testament shown practically in work for GOD?
10. How may this trustworthiness be brought home convincingly to the average Christian?

~ end of chapter 5 ~

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