

THE REASON FOR OUR HOPE

by

Vernon C. Grounds

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CHAPTER NINE

SCIENCE AND SCRIPTURE (I)

THE DISTINGUISHED AMERICAN PREACHER, Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick, speaks in this critical and belittling fashion concerning the teachings of the Bible with respect to nature and science:

“When one moves back to the Scripture with a mind accustomed to work in modern ways, he finds himself in a strange world . . . Knowing modern astronomy he turns to the Bible to find the sun and moon standing still or the shadow retreating on Ahaz’ dial. Knowing modern biology he hears that when Elisha had been so long dead that only his bones were left, another dead body, thrown into the cave where he was buried, touched his skeleton and sprang to life again, or that after our Lord’s resurrection many of the saints long deceased arose and appeared in Jerusalem. Knowing modern physics he turns to the Bible to read that light was created three days before the sun and that an axe-head floated when Elisha threw a stick into the water. Knowing modern medicine he finds in the Scripture many familiar ailments, epilepsy, deafness, dumbness, blindness, insanity, ascribed to the visitation of demons. Knowing that the sky is blue because of the infinite number of dust particles that catch and break up the light, he finds himself in the Bible living under a solid “firmament” “strong as a molten mirror,” or a “paved work of sapphire stone” from which a fiery chariot can come down to snatch a living man by literal levitation from the flat earth to his heavenly reward.

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“We live in a new world. We have not kept the forms of thought and categories of explanation in astronomy, geology, biology, which the Bible contains. We have definitely and irrevocably gotten new ones diverse from and irreconcilable with the outlooks on the universe which earlier ages in general and the Bible in particular had.”

Does the Bible abound with mistakes and inaccuracies of this kind? Does it contradict the established facts of astronomy, biology, chemistry, and physics? Is it scientifically untrustworthy? Not in the opinion of James Dwight Dana of Yale University, probably the most eminent geologist America has yet produced. He once addressed a graduating class in these words:

“Young men! As you go out into the world to face scientific problems, remember that I, an old man who has known only science all his life long, say to you, that there is nothing truer in all the Universe than the scientific statements contained in the Word of God.”

Is the Bible scientifically untrustworthy? Not in the opinion of Dr. Howard A. Kelly, of Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore. An authority on radium and herpetology and, in addition, a world-famous surgeon and gynecologist, he was a convinced and outspoken Christian, and included among his writings is that classic of common sense and spirituality, *A Scientific Man and the Bible*.

“A definite Christian faith is the one really important thing in life. I mean that literally. It is vastly more important than any profession; than any scientific research; than any other or all activities of a man’s life . . . My intimate experience has shown me that the Bible is a Living Word, just as definitely God’s Word to me—and to every man who reads it—as a letter received in the morning’s mail from my mother is her word to me. As such the Bible is its own defense and needs no apologist.”

— *American Magazine*

Is the Bible scientifically untrustworthy? Not in the opinion of Sir Ambrose Fleming who has been President of the Victoria Institute and Philosophical Society of Great Britain; President of the Television Society; Professor of Electrical Engineering in the University of London, Honorary Fellow of St. John’s College and Cambridge Fellow of University College, London.

“Although there are a considerable number of educated persons in the leading nations of mankind who regard the remarkable Hebrew and Jewish literature called the Bible merely as the production of the unassisted human intellect embodying myths, legends, and the imaginations of men in unscientific ages rather than as in any way a supernatural revelation of truth, yet the fact remains that this literary masterpiece still retains, in spite of all attacks on it, a dominating position amongst human literature, and is an encyclopedic work which in extent of production, sale, world-wide circulation, and perusal is unapproached by any other book or books ever written by mankind. It has a power of appeal to, and influence on, the learned and unlearned, powerful or simple, rich and poor, strong and feeble, civilized and uncivilized, possessed by no other set of books produced in the history of the world.

“It has had to fight battles for existence against the most violent attempts to exterminate it, the like of which has been endured by no other book. Yet today it has been translated into every language spoken on earth, and printed and sold in numbers reckoned only in millions of copies. Whilst it is revered, loved, and treated by millions of those who have studied it as a supernatural book and in some way difficult to define, as a communication from the Creator of the Universe to Mankind, yet here again the greatest learning, cleverness, and ingenuity has been brought to bear upon it to undermine any belief of the above kind and represent it as the outcome of the human mind alone, having in it mistakes, inconsistencies, and fabrications, characteristic of imperfect human knowledge of events and facts.

“Side by side with these attempts to minimize its value and distort its meaning or deny the truth of its history, there has been of late years an enormous increase in the discovery of facts which confirm its historical accuracy by the work of much archaeological research and exploration.”

— *The Origin of Mankind*

Is the Bible scientifically untrustworthy? Not in the opinion of W. Bell Dawson, Gold Medalist in Geology and Natural Science at McGill University, and Laureate of the Academy of Science at Paris.

“To the present writer, the Bible is a revelation from God of these higher truths, and of salvation through Christ. From a life-long study of the Scriptures, he is also convinced that in every subject which they touch upon, their every word is reliable, and deserves consideration; and this can only mean that they were written under Divine supervision and guidance.

“If we will let the Bible speak for itself, we will be in a position to compare it with modern knowledge with some hope of enlightenment. We may thus find in the end, that the portrayal of nature and of man as set before us in the Scriptures, is not only corroborated by all that is most reliable in science; but that by accepting what the Bible states, we will invariably be pointed to the right road, and kept from the paths of error which would lead us astray in our advance in knowledge.

“It is not, therefore, remarkable that the Bible, instead of looking to science for its confirmation, in reality anticipates the highest and deepest that science can reach; and not only so, but brings these within the limits of our comprehension. Surely, these are marks of Divine guidance and oversight; and they are reassuring to our belief that the Scriptures are a revelation from God.”

Now why do you suppose these men of international repute look upon the Bible with profound respect and veneration?

The reason for their attitude is this: not a single scientific inaccuracy in its pages has as yet been demonstrated. To be sure, many errors have been alleged, but it is one thing to allege a mistake and altogether another thing to prove that allegation. And the fact is that to date no error has been demonstrated.

Do you know, for instance, that for years the Science Research Bureau, headed by the late Dr. Harry Rimmer, publicly offered a reward of one thousand dollars to any person who could prove the existence of a scientific blunder in the Bible? Although that offer has been made in twenty-seven different countries, the thousand dollars is still uncollected. But before you attempt to collect the reward, we ought to tell you that in November of 1939, William Floyd of New York City, thinking he had pointed out several bona fide inaccuracies, brought suit against Dr. Rimmer. The case was tried in the Fourth District Municipal Court with the Honorable Benjamin Shalleck on the bench. Mr. Floyd called in his own self-chosen witnesses to prove that the Bible from a scientific standpoint is fallacious. He lost the suit, and Justice Shalleck threw the case out of Court.

This absence of error in an ancient Book is truly remarkable, for all other ancient books, and even many recent ones, contain scientific blunders and mistakes. In the sacred writings of the Hindus, you find such fantastic nonsense as this:

“The moon is 50,000 leagues higher than the sun and shines by its own light; night is caused by the sun’s setting behind a huge mountain several thousand feet high, located in the center of the earth; this world, flat and triangular is composed of seven stages—one of honey, another of sugar, a third of butter, and still another of wine, and the whole mass is borne on the heads of countless elephants which in shaking produce earthquakes.”

Why is it that ridiculous teachings like these are nowhere to be discovered in the Bible, which is much more ancient than the sacred Vedas of India? Read the Koran and you find that the stars are torches set in the lower heavens, and that men are made out of baked clay! Or read the *Natural History of Pliny*, the Roman scientist who lived during the first century, and you are amused to note that he writes with equal satisfaction about “the lion, the unicorn, and the phoenix,” unable to distinguish between the real and the imaginary, the true and the impossible. He preserves for us the superstition of the time and recounts in all good faith the practice of various forms of magic.

Why is it that the Bible, much older than the Vedas, or the Koran, or Pliny’s *Natural History*, is not filled with the mistakes which are discoverable in their pages? Very plainly there is but one adequate explanation: a higher Intelligence than that of man has presided over the composition of the Bible and preserved its writers from error.

“Tested by cosmogony, astronomy, geology and zoology, physiology and comparative anatomy, natural philosophy and sanitary science, etc., this Book evinces superhuman knowledge and wisdom. It is a scientific marvel.”

— Dr. A. T. Pierson

But what does all this mean to us personally? Let a famous surgeon, Dr. D. M. Blair, Professor of Anatomy in the University of Glasgow, tell us what it ought to mean:

“The doctor who looks at the Bible finds himself in the end face to face with One who is greater than the Bible, greater than anyone he ever met; a Physician, the Great Physician, who can not only say to the stricken one, ‘**Take up thy bed and walk,**’ but also ‘**Son, be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee.**’ Here is a matchless One, who can heal broken bodies, but also the souls of men.

““Those that are broken in their hearts and grieved in their minds, He healeth, and their painful wounds He tenderly upbinds.’

“The doctor looks back again along the way he has come. He has seen many things which he has recognized as true things, but now he sees a greater truth behind them all, One who is the Truth, of whom even Moses and the Prophets spake, when they ‘**saw his glory and spake of him.**’

— *A Doctor Looks at the Bible* (1936)

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