

CAN WE TRUST THE OLD TESTAMENT?

By Milton Smith

Over the years, liberal critics of the Bible have often attempted to cast doubts upon the reliability of the Old Testament scriptures. From the Documentary Hypothesis to Form Criticism (and everything in between), man's flawed thinking has often tried to call into question the integrity of the Old Testament. Such criticism has always been met by good, sound Bible scholars, who have stood ready to show the weaknesses of these objections. But I have long believed that the greatest witness to the Old Testament is none other than Jesus Christ Himself. If Jesus affirmed these ancient writings as Scripture, then any effort to impeach them must be viewed as futile.

But did Jesus bear witness to the truthfulness of the Old

Testament? Indeed He did – over and over again! Jesus specifically mentioned by name such Old Testament people as Noah, Isaiah, David, Moses, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Solomon, Lot, and yes, even Lot's wife. I also find it interesting that many of the Old Testament stories that are often regarded as fables by liberal critics were clearly affirmed by Jesus as factual. Examples would include such events as Jonah being swallowed by the great fish (Matthew 12:40), the Queen of Sheba (Matthew 12:42), the flood (Matthew 24:37-39), God being the Creator of all things (Mark 13:19), and even the Genesis account of God creating the first man and woman. (Matthew 19:4.)

Students of history know that the Hebrew Old Testament was fully developed by Jesus' time.

Are we to believe that if these books were fraudulent, Jesus would have quoted from them? It should be noted that Jesus was quick to point out particular errors of Jewish leaders of his day, but he was always consistent in His support of the Old Testament – often referring to these books as "Scripture." (Matthew 21:42; 22:29; 26:54; Luke 24:27; John 5:39.) He even went so far as to specifically mention the three divisions of the Hebrew Bible of his day. (Luke 24:44.)

Do you believe that Jesus is the Son of God? If so, then you can fully trust the Old Testament books because God's Son – long ago – confirmed these same books as Scripture.

— Tulsa, OK

NEVER SURRENDER

By Cecil Burch

During the dark days of England, when it seemed that there was no hope for survival, Sir Winston Churchill stood before the House of Commons and reviewing the situation, gave them the decision of Britain's leaders: "We have talked it over; we will go on to the end; we will never surrender."

Every Christian is fighting in a spiritual war and is bombarded with temptations from all sides. (Ephesians 6:12.) To surrender cannot be an option.

The Apostle John presents a very disturbing picture of this conflict in the book of Revelation. Yet He assures

us that the faithful will be victorious. He told the church in Smyrna to "Be faithful until death and I will give you the crown of life." (Revelation 2:10.) To the church in Ephesus he said, "To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God." (Revelation 2:7.) To the church in Thyatira he said, "And he who overcomes, and keeps my works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations." (Revelation 2:26.) To each of these seven churches in Asia He promised a reward to those who are faithful and overcome.

The Apostle Paul assured the

Roman Christians that they were not only conquerors but were more than conquerors in Christ. He said, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: 'For Your sake we are killed all day long. We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.' Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us." (Romans 8:35-37.) In Christ victory is ours. (1 Corinthians 15:57.) WE DARE NOT SURRENDER!!!

— Angel Fire, NM

Old Paths

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"ask for the old paths" (Jer. 6:16)

"THE LORD IS WITNESS"

By Danny Boggs

Judge Samuel was leaving center stage. Israel wanted to have a king like other nations. Now they had their king: Saul. The Lord assured Samuel, "They have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them." (1 Samuel 8:7.)

"And Samuel said to all Israel, 'Behold, I have obeyed your voice in all that you have said to me and have made a king over you. And now, behold the king walks before you, and I am old and gray; and behold, my sons are with you. I have walked before you from my youth until this day. Here I am; testify against me before the Lord and before his anointed. Whose ox have I taken? Or whose donkey have I taken? Or whom have I defrauded? Whom have I oppressed? Or from whose hand have I taken a bribe to blind my eyes with it? Testify against me and I will restore it to you.' They said, 'You have not defrauded us or oppressed us or taken anything from any man's hand.' He said to them, 'The Lord is witness this day, that you have not found anything in my hand.' And they said, 'He is witness.'" (1 Samuel 12:1-5.)

Can you imagine a top political leader today issuing the challenge Samuel did? His life was an open book. Today public figures keep their moral missteps covered for as long as they can. Finally someone else digs up the evidence and the guilty party's public relations people work day and night at damage control.

Most of us will never bear the level of leadership responsibility that Samuel did. But each of us has a realm of influence – church, work, home, neighborhood, and other social circles.

Would you be willing to do what Samuel did? Would integrity permit you to invite everyone's realistic criticism?

Samuel was confident in face of public review because he performed for an audience of one. He knew that the Lord had been his witness, not only on the day of this challenge, but every day of his life. "And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." (Hebrews 4:13.) Samuel knew he was always in view of the "all-seeing eye."

Samuel made no claim to perfection. Neither should we. (1 John 1:8,10.) Yet a righteous lifestyle wields powerful authority. Samuel possessed the utmost credibility to call his people to obey the Lord and count on His providence. (1 Samuel 12:20-25.)

"A constant sense of Thy abiding presence," as T. O. Chisholm put it in Be with Me Lord, stimulates persistent obedience and the right to insist upon it in others.

— Neosho, MO

ONE-TALENT LAMENT

By Dalton Key

I'm just someone to pity, Lord,
A poor, one-talent soul;
My fears and doubts took hold of me,
And so I dug a hole.

The talent that you gave to me,
I hid beneath the earth;
You know I've not what others have,
I've not but dirt and dearth.

Those with more should bear the load,
And put their gifts to work!
But me, a poor one-talent soul?
I've every cause to shirk!

My little matters little, Lord,
There's not much I can do;
I think I'll sit and rest my bones,
I've dug my hole – I'm through!

What's that? You say I'm wicked, Lord?
A slothful servant too?
You're taking what I have away?
Now what am I to do?

Forgive me, Lord! And give me strength
To use what're I've got;
To focus on your will for me,
And not on what I've not.

BALANCE IN WORSHIP

By Joe Slater

Our human tendency toward extremism makes it difficult for us to find balance in life. Working to provide for your family may degenerate into your being a “workaholic.” On the other hand, legitimate recreation, taken to extremes, can turn “having fun” into a god.

Extremism takes its toll on worship as well. In some religions ritualism rules: you go through the right motions at the right time in the right way and that’s all that matters. Worship becomes like a trip to the grocery store – you have your list, you check off the items one by one, and when you’re through you pay the cashier and go home. On the opposite side of this coin is emotionalism, which judges a worship service as good only if it makes us feel good, excites us, makes us cry, makes us laugh, or moves us in some other subjective way. If our emotions aren’t sufficiently stimulated, then we complain, “I didn’t get anything out of that!”

Both extremes miss the point of worship! Merely completing a checklist is not worship; neither does worship consist of nothing more than an emotional “high.” Worship must center on God, not on you or me! Does God, in His word, set forth certain things we are to do in worship? Most definitely He does. But we are to do these things, not in an empty, ritualistic way, but with our hearts. Jesus said we must worship “in spirit and in truth.” (John 4:24.) There is the balance. Cold formalism leaves out the inner person expressing heart-felt love and devotion to our God. Irrational emotionalism sacrifices the truth for the sake of doing whatever makes us feel good.

To be balanced, we must worship from the heart while being directed by the truth of God’s word.

— Justin, TX

Editorial . . .

**ALL DRESSED UP WITH
NO PLACE TO GO**

By Dalton Key

If Frederic Maitland’s century-old observation is correct, if “the essential matter of history is not what happened but what people thought or said about it,” I can’t help but be concerned for those of us living through these days of national scandal, corruption and moral decay.

The worse things get, the less many of this age seem to care, or even notice. Majoring in life’s minutiae has replaced any real interest in coming to grips with today’s more serious and substantive issues.

Reality shows are beginning to trump reality.

The shame of it all: the most important and vital questions of the day, questions of spiritual, moral and ethical concern, are not only not being adequately addressed – they aren’t even being acknowledged by a shocking number of today’s most influential spokespersons as legitimate.

All the while, the sons and daughters of this age, numbed to the reality of what really matters, have succeeded in looking better, sounding better, and smelling better than any of their forbears; but culturally, they (or more accurately, we) are slowly but surely rotting from within.

We are all dressed up with no place to go – but down.

And like the self-congratulating cannibal who believed he had become civilized because he had learned to eat his neighbors with a knife and fork, we fool no one but ourselves.

The progress of any society depends more on its measure of character than on its economic, academic, and political weight all considered together. And that nation, any nation, which ignores or belittles such fundamental tenets as honesty, morality, and a common respect for authority and the rule of law, does so at its own peril.

What was true for Solomon’s day is no less true today: “Righteousness exalts a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people.” (Proverbs 14:34.) “Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord.” (Psalm 33:12.)

**FAITH DOES NOT EXCLUDE BAPTISM**

By Bobby Key

Many religious leaders accuse members of churches of Christ of not believing in salvation by grace or faith since we teach baptism for remission of sins. One such leader made the following statement: “The Bible plainly teaches that the sinner is saved by grace through faith before water baptism.” I don’t question the man’s honesty, but the Bible doesn’t teach any such thing!

Certainly we believe in salvation by grace through faith. (Ephesians 2:8-9.) We do not deny that faith is essential to salvation. We believe the Bible teaches salvation by faith, but not by faith alone. (James 2:17.) We would ask someone to show us, from the Bible, where someone living under the gospel of Christ

was saved by the blood of Christ before baptism. Show us where the scriptures teach that man is saved first and then baptized.

Almost every teacher who contends for salvation before baptism somehow believes that faith excludes baptism. He will find every passage in the Bible that talks about faith but doesn’t mention baptism and then assume that these passages exclude baptism. If I had the space, I could show that faith or belief always includes obedience, of which baptism is part. Faith never excludes obedience. Notice John 3:36 as correctly rendered by the American Standard Version: “He that believes on the Son hath eternal life; but he that obeys not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides in him.”

Belief and obedience are used in this passage to mean the very same thing. If one wants to know what the Bible teaches about baptism he should read the passages that talk about baptism. (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; etc.)

I once read of a fellow who was brought to court for stealing a cow. The prosecution brought forth three men who had seen him take the cow. The defendant countered by offering to bring into court twenty-five witnesses who had not seen him take the cow. He thought this would surely prove him innocent. My friend, you simply can’t prove things in this way. Neither can you prove faith only by ignoring the passages that talk about baptism. Let’s be sure to take it all! — Miami, OK

BITS AND PIECES

and work together.”

— J. M. Powell

“Our poverty comes not from the smallness of our provisions, but from the largeness of our desires.”

— Van Dyke

“Men will wrangle for religion; write for it; fight for it; die for it; anything but live for it.”

— Caleb C. Colton

After hearing Daniel Webster speak, Davie Crockett said to him, “I had heard you were a very great man, but I don’t think so. I heard your speech and understood every word you said.”

“In pulpits today, even in churches of Christ, there is a great deal of Philip Yancy, John Stott,

Three things often quoted as plural are actually singular.

Describing heaven, John says, “And the street of the city was pure gold, transparent as glass.” (Revelation 21:21.) Not “streets.” John mentions one.

“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” (Galatians 5:22-23.) They are collectively “fruit,” not individual “fruits.”

“Revelation” is “the revelation of Jesus Christ.” (Revelation 1:1.) There is one revelation of one Lord. No biblical book is called “Revelations.”

— Cecil May

“The way to build “great preachers” and “great churches” is for good men and good churches to get together, stay together,

and N. T. Wright, but sometimes not enough of Peter, James, John and Paul. There is nothing wrong in using good thoughts and ideas from denominational authors and commentaries, but not to the neglect of taking heed unto the doctrine of Christ.”

— Alan Highers

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