

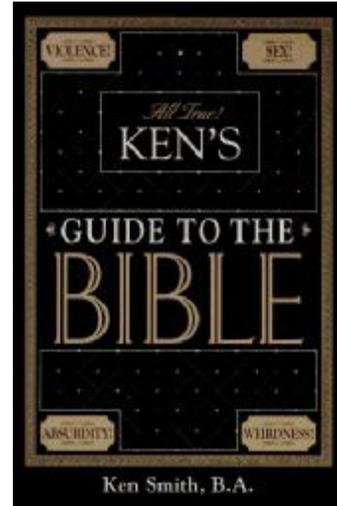
CHRISTIANITY and ATHEISM

8. Problems with the Bible

Introduction

On the list of "100 Best Books About Atheism," *Ken's Guide to the Bible* ranks number two! The annotation says: "The world's most complete compendium of the Bible's most embarrassing passages. With hammerhead precision and pig-iron wit, this compact volume lays bare all the sex, gore, and lunacy that the Bible has to offer."

Since the Bible is the foundation of Christian faith, it should be no surprise that this book would be vigorously criticized.



Development of the Argument

The Biggest Problem - The Jewish philosopher Spinoza (1632-1677) was one of the first serious critics of the Bible. Spinoza developed a logical argument for the impossibility of miracles based on his presupposition that God was identical with the universe. Turning to the the Bible he condemned all miracles, especially the resurrection of Jesus. This is the foundational principle for all the "problems" of the Bible – the problem of God, who is created the universe and is able to intervene in the universe.

Various Kinds of Problems –

Problem Type	Example
Philosophical Differences	<p>These are not really Bible "problems" as much as they are simply matters of faith and unbelief as we have discussed in previous lessons: Why does God allow suffering? Hell is an unjust punishment, etc.</p> <p>We have responded to many of these questions in other chapters of this Bible study.</p>
Presuppositional Differences	<p>These are the most serious because they are usually posed by those who claim to be believers. But the God they believe in does not accomplish</p>

	<p>miracles:</p> <p><i>The books of the Bible were written much later than the events they describe. The actual events never really occurred but are myths designed to teach us important things about God.</i></p> <p>I respond this problem in the rest of the Bible study below.</p>
<p>Misunderstandings</p>	<p>Many "sophomoric" problems are simply a failure to understand the deeper significance of the Bible and subtiles involved in explaining how the Holy God encounters and saves unholy man:</p> <p><i>How can Ex. 33:20, which says no man can see God's face and live, be squared with Gen. 32:30, which says a man saw God's face and his life was preserved?</i></p> <p>Answer: No man can see God in His unveiled glory until we are in heaven. However in Genesis 32.30 Jacob wrestled with "a Man" (32.24), who turned out to be God. Jacob encountered God in an "incarnational" way. Jacob encountered God in the same way the first disciples encountered God in Jesus.</p>
<p>Apparent Inconsistencies</p>	<p>Many problems have to do with minor differences such as this: Did Solomon have 40,000 stalls for his horses (1 Kings 4:26) or 4,000 (2 Chron. 9:25)?</p> <p>Answer: This is most likely a copying error on the part of a scribe. Some Greek translations of this text use the 4,000 number. A good study Bible will help you with these!</p>

Logical Response

Presuppositions: There are no miracles. The human authors lied or they were extremely gullible.

1. Who would care about a book that prophesied after the fact? Can you name a popular book like that? Yet these books were carefully

and painfully preserved. In the case of the Gospels there would still have been eyewitnesses (both believers and unbelievers) who could have set the record straight. This would have totally undermined the credibility of the church. It takes at least two generations for myths to develop (80-100 years).

2. C.S. Lewis: These stories are not myths when we compare them to real myths.

First then, whatever these men may be as Biblical critics, I distrust the m as critics,. They seem to lack literary judgment, to be imperceptive about the very quality of the texts they are reading... If he tells me that something in a Gospel is legend or romance, I want to know how many legends and romances he had read, how well his palate is trained in detecting them by the flavour; not how many years he has spent on that Gospel... I have been reading poems, romances, vision-literature, legends, myths all my life. I know what they are like. I know that ont one of them is like this. (C.S. Lewis, *Christian Reflections*, pp. 154-155)

Biblical Response

1. Bible claims for infallibility – While this doesn't prove infallibility, it is important remember that Christians aren't trying to "make the Bible appear infallible." The Bible makes that claim throughout and even anticipates its critics:

Psa 119:160 The entirety of Your word is truth, And every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever.

John 17:17 Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.

2 Peter 1:16 For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty.



2. The Bible's self-authenticating traits: The accuracy of geographical, political and cultural descriptions are very consistent with other known information.

Example: Paul's description of his missionary journeys – the routes taken, the ports, the weather, the names of cities and rulers are all consistent other non-Biblical descriptions.

3. Brutal Honesty – The Bible does not gloss over the sins of believers. The Bible is anything but a "fairy tale."

4. Martyrdom – Many of the New Testament witnesses died for their faith. Some people die for false causes they believe to be true. But few die for false causes that they know were false.

5. Four Gospels – "One Gospel writer does not always use the same words in reporting what Jesus said as does another. However, they always convey the same meaning. They do select, summarize, and paraphrase, but they do not distort." (Norman Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, p. 89)

6. Spiritual Transformation – This book has changed the lives of many people. Most other religions gain converts through other means whether through intimidation (negative) or lifestyle appeal (positive). For most religions their "holy books" are of secondary importance when it comes to proselytizing. In Christianity the Bible is of foremost importance. "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10.17).

