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HOW DO WE VIEW THE BIBLE?

By Charles Coats

At the time of this writing (June 1986), the Southern Baptist Convention is having a business conference. There is a fight going on among the delegates concerning how one should view the Bible. This disagreement has caused a great rift in the convention.

The happenings at the Southern Baptist Convention represents what has become a real problem in the religious world today. More and more people are taking a very liberal view toward Biblical interpretation. The Bible is no longer viewed as the authoritative, inspired word of God.

How should we view the Bible? Is it or is it not God's Word? Does it merely contain God's Word? Can we understand it without the miraculous aid of the Holy Spirit? Can we get to heaven without following its teachings? Let us examine some of these views.

THE BIBLE CONTAINS GOD'S WORD. This view expresses the idea that somewhere in all of those words is the Word of God. This view presents at least two problems: (1) If it only **contains** God's Word, how do we know which words are God's and which are not? (2) This view contradicts 2 Tim. 3:16 and 2 Pet. 1:20, 21 which teach that "all" scripture came from God.

WE CANNOT UNDERSTAND GOD'S WORD WITHOUT THE MIRACULOUS AID OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. This view also presents at least two problems: (1) How can one know that the Spirit

is supposed to help you unless he first learned this from reading the Bible, and **without** the aid of the Spirit? If you can know a little without the aid of the Spirit, why not all of it? Obviously, this view is false. (2) This view contradicts plain Biblical teaching that men can understand the Bible simply by studying (Acts 17:11; 2 Tim. 2:15; Jas. 1:21,22).

SOME, TODAY, HAVE TRIED A "HALF AND HALF" VIEW -- YES, THE BIBLE IS GOD'S WORD, BUT HE DOES NOT MEAN WHAT HE SAYS. This has been especially prominent in the way people view Genesis 1 and 2. They have tried to fit Evolution into God's Creation, even to the point of labeling Genesis 1 and 2 as "myth." (More will be said about this in another article in this issue.) This also does not work because we are again faced with the problem of when God meant what he said and when he did not.

THE BIBLE IS GOD'S WORD. This is the only view that can be used correctly about the Bible. The Bible either is what it claims to be or it is not. The Bible claims to be God's Word (Jer. 25:13; 2 Tim. 3:16; 1 Thess. 2:13; 2 Pet. 1:20, 21). Man has tried for years to disprove this, but to no avail. The unity of scripture, the archaeological and scientific foreknowledge of scripture, the predictive prophecy in scripture, and the absence of contradictions all attest to this fact -- **THE BIBLE IS GOD'S WORD!** Because the Bible is God's Word, it would behoove us to follow its teachings, or we will be cast into Hell (Jn. 12:48; Rev. 20:11-15; 1 Tim. 4:16; Matt. 7:21-27).

Obviously, we must view the

Bible as God's authoritative Word. It is "God-breathed" (2 Tim. 3:16). To view it in any other manner is to call God a liar! "yea, let God be found true, and every man a liar" (Rom. 3:4).

If Genesis 1 & 2 Are Mythical, What About The Rest of the Bible?

By Dick Sztanyo

This is a good question! Just exactly what does happen to the rest of the Bible if the first two chapters are considered mythical? Are there any adverse effects at all?

Before this question can be answered correctly, it is necessary to be certain that we understand what is meant by the term "myth". The term is used in several ways in modern theological discussion. First it signifies that which is a "fable," or that which is purely fictitious. This is the way Scripture used the word (see 1 Tim. 1:4; 4:7; 2 Tim. 4:4; Titus 1:14; 2 Pet. 1:16. Here the word *muthos* is translated "fable" in each case). Second, it is also used to stress a type of literary form which expresses other-worldly matters in this-worldly concepts. Though it might be easy to confuse this usage with what is understood of parables ("earthly stories with heavenly meanings"), "myth" is not used as a synonym for "parable." The word as used in this second sense, refers to the difficulty discovered when one speaks empirically about a non-empirical Being. God has nothing in common with the empirical world (so they say), but we cannot speak of Him without

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using language that is restricted to our experience in this world! The third use of the term "myth" refers to a method of interpreting ultimate truth and, therefore, a method of thinking. The idea here is that no language can ever fully contain what is literally meant. Something is always lost in language, and is hidden beneath the surface. In other words, you always mean more than you are able to express in words, whether written or spoken. Contemporary theologians are preoccupied with myth as both literary form and method of thought. They are no longer concerned with myth in the first sense (see *A Handbook of Christian Theology*, s.v., "Myth (Demythologizing)," by Erich Dinkler).

Even those theologians who believe that "myth" can be accepted, in *some sense*, do not accept the "mythical" as either historical or literal (see Bernard Ramm, *A Handbook of Contemporary Theology*; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1966, pp. 85-87). Though they do not accept the notion of "myth" as pure fabrication, they are far from holding to a literal historicity. Now, the views of Emil Brunner and Reinhold Niebuhr are generally considered to be the most conservative on the subject, whereas Rudolf Bultmann's views are considered the most liberal.

Bultmann held that one must "demythologize" the New Testa-

ment so as to preserve the "kerygma" (or, message of salvation) within it. The myths were/are those things which would not be accepted by the scientific-thinking public of the twentieth century. These include all of the miracles of the New Testament, the Virgin Birth, the Resurrection, etc. Bultmann insisted that these things could not be accepted as literally true!

William Hordern describes the view peculiar to Niebuhr as follows:

In religion, he believes, we are dealing with the mystery and depth of life which elude our efforts to catch them in neat rational descriptions. Niebuhr compares theology to a painter who, working upon a flat surface, tries to create the illusion of another dimension, depth. This is a deception, but a deception that describes a truth about reality . . . Since our earth-born logic can speak, but not adequately, about God, it must, like the painter, use symbols that point to another dimension of reality. Theology is the attempt to express the dimensions of depth in life. Niebuhr applies the term "myth" to this form of thinking. The term is perhaps unfortunate, as "myth" implies a fairy tale to most people. But by myth Niebuhr means that which, although it deceives, none the less points to a truth that cannot be adequately expressed in any other form. It is deceitful and yet true, just as is the deception of depth which is attained by the artist . . . Niebuhr, however, insists that we must take such myths seriously, but not literally . . . For example, the story of Adam and Eve does not describe the first man and woman historically, but it is a mythical statement of the situation of every man and woman (William E. Hordern, *A Layman's Guide to Protestant Theology*, rev. ed.; New York: The Macmillan Company, 1968, pp. 152-53).

IN NO CASE IS THE WORD "MYTH" USED BY EITHER PHILOSOPHERS OR THEOLOGIAN TODAY, TO REPRESENT THAT WHICH IS HISTORICALLY FACTUAL OR LITERALLY TRUE. Therefore, we are really asking, "what happens to the rest of the Bible if Genesis 1 and 2 are not his-

torically accurate?" **NO** use of the term "myth" permits one to defend historical accuracy when applied to the Bible. As a consequence, one is forced to ask what becomes of the Bible when its historical foundations are removed!

First, if Genesis 1 and 2 are mythical, then it is possible that Jesus was mistaken when He argued that, "from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female" (Mark 10:6). I say that such is **possible** because no one could really know whether Adam and Eve were created at the "beginning" of creation or not (the use of the aorist in the original rules out the possibility of evolutionary explanations - theistic or otherwise)! There would be no possible way to get at the truth regarding the creation of man.

Second, whatever was affirmed about the creation by any of the apostles must of necessity be questionable at best, and completely false at the worst! For instance, Paul's argument, "for Adam was first formed, then Eve" (I Tim. 2:13) cannot be known to be true at all, provided that we accept Genesis 1 and 2 as mythical.

Third, the doctrine of marriage, and the regulation of divorce and subsequent remarriage, depends upon the historical accuracy of Genesis 1 and 2. In other words, Jesus pitched His whole argument on the passage. In Matt. 19:3-6, the context of this discussion, reads:

The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female And said, for this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.

How could anyone defend the Lord's concept of one man for one woman for life, apart from the his-

torical accuracy of Gen. 2:24? One could as easily begin from an evolutionary perspective, and argue that, after men evolved, they came to realize that they needed to form themselves into social units. Thus, the village, the tribe, and the family came into being. Or, one could argue that what we call "marriage" was merely a sociological production for convenience or usefulness. You see, once the historicity of the account is surrendered, the argument made by our Lord is non-existent!

Fourth, the Bible makes frequent use of a phenomenon known as "typology." This consists of a **type** (which is an historical foundation) and an **antitype** (which resembles the historical foundation in some important details). A clear example of the relationship of type-antitype, is found in Heb. 9:23-24:

It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.

The whole point of this passage depends upon the typological relationship which exists between the Old Covenant sacrifices and the sacrifices of the Christ. But, the type-antitype relationship also stresses the superiority of antitype over the type. In other words, Christ's sacrifice is far superior to those offered under the Mosaic economy. Now, this information becomes important for the present study when we remember that Christ is often called the "second Adam" (see Rom. 5:12-19; 1 Cor. 15:21-22, 45-47). If it is possible that there never was, in fact, a "first" Adam, then what happens to this typological relationship? Would it not be strange to press an argument on the relationship of two persons, one of whom never existed at all?!

Fifth, if Genesis 1 and 2 are mythical, and, as a consequence, cannot be trusted to tell the truth

literally, then how can any part of the Bible be trusted? After all, no other segment of Scripture appears to be substantially different than the first two chapters. And, no real clue is given as to which parts of the Bible should be taken as mythical and which should not! For want of some clear guidelines, one would be hard pressed to accept any part of the Bible as literally true, if Genesis 1 & 2 are accepted as something less than literal and historical.

The first two chapters of Genesis can be understood as mythical, but there is a price to be paid if such is done! Since the term "myth" denotes that which cannot be historically accurate, a great cloud of ignorance hangs over those passages which are thought to be mythical. And, if one passage is considered to be mythical - when there is absolutely no indication that such should be done at all - then how do we avoid applying the same logic to the rest of the Bible? Under these conditions, the Bible would not and could not be the clear message of salvation it claims to be (2 Tim. 3:15-17; Eph. 5:17; 3:1-6; etc.). Instead, it would appear to be an ambiguous message, riddled with error, and incapable of communicating accurate knowledge to man. There does not seem to be a way to avoid these conclusions if one accepts Genesis 1 & 2 as mythical.

Recently, this problem surfaced in a science class at a Christian university. The professor had circulated a set of notes entitled, "Research in Genesis." Amazingly, these notes contained the words "myth" and "hymn" in the margins, in the professor's own handwriting! His explanation of this problem in an official university explanation of this and related problems reads, in part, as follows:

The words "myth" and "hymn" in the margin of the copy of scripture were not saying that Genesis was either a fairy tale or a song. These literary terms have been used to describe the importance and the nature of the Biblical narrative. "Myth" can

be defined as a body of information essential to understanding a culture, whether the information is true or false. That is the way the term was used in this case. The word "hymn" simply denotes the brevity, grace, and beauty of the Genesis account.

I regret using "myth", because it usually refers to something fanciful or untrue. Genesis is neither of these things. I talked with the students about these terms when I gave the handouts. I used the handouts without thinking about how they would look to someone not in the class.

There are several interesting things to be noted about this statement. First, the professor defends his use of the term "myth," as if such could be accepted so long as we do not understand it to refer to pure fiction. Even if such is granted, we are still left with the problem of that which is non-literal and non-historical! If the professor meant to say that Genesis 1 and 2 were literally true and historically accurate, he could have done it as easily as I have just now. There is no need to use a term which is highly ambiguous and misleading, if one meant to defend a high view of the veracity of Genesis 1 and 2. On the other hand, he certainly rejected the use of the term which is consistently translated as "fable" in the New Testament. But, the interesting and alarming discovery is that, he uses the term in exactly the same manner as Brunner and Niebuhr. The problem, however, is that there is a high price to be paid when one adopts Niebuhr's definition of "myth." One surrenders any possibility of consistently defending the Bible as the word of God, or of maintaining the integrity of Jesus Christ. This is simply too costly!

I have shown you how the term "myth" is used in modern theological discussions. I must again stress that MYTH IS NEVER USED IN MODERN DISCUSSIONS TO INDICATE HISTORICAL ACCURACY OR LITERAL TRUTH! Next, several consequences which followed from a rejection of Genesis 1 & 2 as

historical, were listed. Finally, I have shown one example of a current usage of the term which implies all of the consequences listed. The professor may not even explicitly believe the various consequences listed, but they are still logical implications of the position! To accept Genesis 1 & 2 as mythical is to greatly damage the cause of Christ. The only way to repair the damage is to surrender the concept of "myth!"

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POINTS TO PONDER

The house of God cannot be built with stumbling blocks.

To give honor to Godly elders is to honor God.

When we play football, we want to make a touchdown. When we play baseball, we want to hit a home run. But on the Lord's team, we don't even want to practice!

The first two letters in God are GO.
The first three in Satan are SAT.

No God, no peace, Know God, know peace.

Life is like a cafeteria: One goes through choosing as he goes, but what he chooses must be paid for at the end of the line. CHOOSE WISELY, CAREFULLY, PRAYERFULLY: NO REFUNDS, NO EXCHANGES!

We are all manufacturers - some make good, others make trouble, and still others make excuses.

The best things parents can spend on children is time.

Ideas are funny things; they never work unless you do.

Before you tell what a little bird told you, be sure the bird is not a cuckoo!

The Church of Christ

1. The Bible is its only guide (Rom. 1:16; I Thess. 2:13).
2. Wears a Biblical name (Rom. 16:16).
3. Established at the right place (Isa. 2:2, 3; Acts 2).
4. Established at the right time (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2).
5. Established on the right person (Matt. 16:18; Acts 2:36).
6. Saved are in it (Eph. 5:23; Acts 2:47).
7. Its members are enrolled in heaven (Heb. 12:23).
8. Membership in it is obtained by obedience to God's commands, including baptism (Acts 2:41-47; I Cor. 12:13).

God's Plan of Salvation

1. Hearing the word of God (Rom. 10:17; Acts 16:32).
2. Believing what is taught (Mark 16:16; Heb. 11:6).
3. Repentance (Acts 2:38; Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30).
4. Confession (Rom. 10:9, 10; Acts 8:37).
5. Baptism (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; I Pet. 3:21; Rom. 6:3,4).
6. After 1 - 5, faithful Christian living (I Pet. 2:11, 12; Rev. 2:10).

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