

How Did Jesus View The Old Testament?

In modern times it has become common to view the Old Testament with a certain measure of distrust. It is commonly thought that the older parts of the Bible are not really historical accounts and may not be entirely accurate. Some teach that, although there may be spiritual truths to be gained from it, some of the Old Testament is just traditions that have been handed down that may not necessarily correspond to actual historical events. Instead of reading the Old Testament as a historical textbook, people suggest reading it as a book of moral stories that should not be taken too literally.

That brings up an interesting question. The foundation of Christianity is Jesus, who is the eternally existing Son of God – fully God, and yet fully man as well. Jesus knows all things and He certainly knows how the world was created, what historical events did or did not happen, and how accurate the Old Testament really is. He spent years living among mankind and He trained His apostles in all things regarding the truth. Since Jesus knows the truth, how did He view the Old Testament? Did He see it as a collection of moral stories, or as actual and literal history?

If you read through the gospels you will never find a time when Jesus corrects an Old Testament account. He never contradicts the Scripture on any point, or says that it was in error. Jesus never condemns anyone for believing in it, nor does He correct people for thinking that its stories actually took place. This is in spite of the fact that Jesus did not hesitate to correct error wherever He saw it! He took the religious leaders of His day to task time and time again for teaching error (Matthew 22:29), and sometimes His whole ministry seemed to be focused on telling people things that they did not want to hear (John 6:60). Jesus was very bold about speaking unpopular truths (Luke 4:25-29), but He never contradicted or opposed the Old Testament. Instead we find Him supporting it – even parts that are quite surprising.

Abraham

Jesus taught that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were real people who Christians would one day meet in Heaven:

Matthew 8:11: “And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven.”

It is impossible for anyone to sit down and have a meal with an imaginary person! If we will one day meet these three men in the Kingdom of Heaven then they have to actually exist.

Sodom

Jesus taught that Sodom was a real city that actually existed, and which was destroyed by God for its sin:

Matthew 11:23: “And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.

24 But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee.”

Notice how Jesus says that if they had repented then the city of Sodom would still exist. If the city was purely fictional then that would be impossible! Jesus even taught that Sodom was destroyed by fire and brimstone, just as was taught in Genesis 19:24:

Luke 17:28: “Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded;

29 But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all.”

This would have been a perfect time to correct the historical account if this city was just a myth or the account was exaggerated, but Jesus did not do that.

David

Jesus taught that David actually existed:

Matthew 12:3: “But he said unto them, Have ye not read what David did, when he was an hungred, and they that were with him;

4 How he entered into the house of God, and did eat the shewbread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests?”

This is a reference to 1 Samuel 21:1-6. Jesus supported the Old Testament account that David, who was on the run from King Saul at the time, went to the temple and got food for himself and his men. If David never existed then Jesus had many opportunities to correct the record, but instead of doing so He allowed people to repeatedly call Him the “son of David” (Matthew 15:22, 20:30, and 21:9, just to list a few).

Jonah

Jesus taught that Jonah was actually in the great fish for three days:

Matthew 12:39: “But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas:

40 For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

Jesus compared the reality of what happened to Jonah to the reality of His death, burial, and resurrection. If the story of Jonah was just a myth then Jesus could have easily told people this, but He did not do so. Instead Jesus taught that Nineveh repented at the preaching of Jonah, just as is written in Jonah 3:5:

Matthew 12:41: “The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here.”

If the men of Nineveh are going to stand up on Judgment Day and condemn “this generation” because they repented at the preaching of Jonah, then they must be real people who actually did repent when Jonah came to preach to them.

Queen of Sheba

Jesus taught that the Queen of Sheba actually existed and made a trip to King Solomon to hear his wisdom:

Matthew 12:42: “The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here.”

If the Queen of Sheba is going to rise up on Judgment Day and condemn “this generation” on the grounds that she went to hear the wisdom of Solomon, then she must be a real person who actually did that. Jesus did not dispute the account we find in 1 Kings 10:1-10; instead He confirmed it.

Abel

Jesus taught that Abel was a real person who was killed for his righteousness (Genesis 4:8):

Matthew 23:35: “That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar.”

If Abel was not a real person then it would make no sense to punish Israel for the death of a fictional being! Jesus taught that Abel actually existed and was unjustly killed. The apostle John also testified to the historical reality of this event:

I John 3:12: “Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous.”

We never find the disciples of Jesus ever questioning anything in the Old Testament. Instead they always accepted it as actual, accurate history.

Naaman

Jesus taught that Naaman the Syrian really was miraculously cleansed of his leprosy as the Old Testament taught (see 2 Kings 5:1-14):

Luke 4:27: “And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian.”

If there were many lepers in Israel in those days but only Naaman was cleansed, then Naaman must have been a real person. Jesus does not try to correct any part of the written account (not even the part where Naaman had to wash in the Jordan seven times before being cleansed), but instead accepts it all as it was written.

The Serpent in the Wilderness

In Numbers 21:8-9 we find an account of a time when the Israelites were in the wilderness. Since Israel had spoken out against God, the Lord sent serpents against them that killed many people. When the Israelites cried out to God to remove the snakes, God instead commanded Moses to craft an image of a snake on a pole. Whoever looked at the image would be healed.

Jesus taught that this event was something that really happened:

John 3:14: “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up:

15 That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.”

The Lord could have easily said that Moses never lifted up a serpent and the whole story was fictional, but instead He taught it as actual history. In fact, He actually compared it to His upcoming crucifixion. Jesus explained that Moses was pointing to the redemptive work that He would accomplish on the cross – whoever looked to Him for salvation (instead of their own works) would be saved. Salvation does not come by our efforts, but by looking at something outside of us.

Manna

Jesus taught that, just as Exodus 16:15 said, the Israelites really did eat manna when they were in the wilderness:

John 6:58: “This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever.”

Jesus did not teach that manna was some mythical food. He instead said that it was a real thing that was actually eaten by their ancestors.

The Burning Bush

Jesus taught that God really did speak to Moses through a burning bush (as we find recorded in Exodus 3:2-3):

Mark 12:26: “And as touching the dead, that they rise: have ye not read in the book of Moses, how in the bush God spake unto him, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?”

The Lord could have easily said that God never spoke to Moses through a bush at all, and that it was just a misunderstanding or a corruption of the text, but instead He taught it as actual history.

Balaam

One of the most amazing stories in the Old Testament is the account of Balaam's donkey. In Numbers 22:28-30 we are told that Balaam once had an argument with his donkey, who actually talked to him. The apostle Peter, who was with Jesus for years, did not dismiss this story of a talking donkey as a fairy tale. Instead he taught that it really happened:

2 Peter 2:15: “Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; 16 But was rebuked for his iniquity: the dumb ass speaking with man's voice forbad the madness of the prophet.”

The Old Testament treated Balaam as a real person who was later killed by the Israelites (Joshua 13:22), and this disciple of Jesus treated him the same way. This would have been a perfect time for the apostles to explain that this never really happened, but instead they confirmed the Old Testament account.

The Flood

Jesus taught that the great flood of Genesis 6-8 was a real event that killed everyone who was not on the Ark. He did *not* teach that it was a local flood that could have easily been avoided if Noah had just moved to a different location:

Matthew 24:37: “But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

38 For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark,

39 And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.”

Luke 17:26: “And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man.

27 They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all.”

The Lord could have easily explained that the great flood was a minor local event that didn't flood the whole world, and that there were many survivors who were not on the Ark because the flood wasn't global. Instead of doing that, though, He confirmed the Genesis account and said that the great flood destroyed *everyone*. The apostle Peter, who spent years with Jesus, likewise taught that only eight people were saved and everyone else in the world died:

1 Peter 3:20: “Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water.”

2 Peter 3:5: “For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water:

6 Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished:

7 But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.”

Neither Jesus nor Peter taught that the flood was a local event. Instead they spoke of it being a worldwide judgment in which the *entire world* was overflowed with water. Only the eight people on board the ark were saved.

Adam

In the book of Luke, the genealogy of Jesus includes Methusaleh, Enoch, and Adam:

Luke 3:37: “Which was the son of Mathusala, which was the son of Enoch, which

was the son of Jared, which was the son of Maleleel, which was the son of Cainan,
38 Which was the son of Enos, which was the son of Seth, which was the son of
Adam, which was the son of God.”

Jesus could have easily corrected the people of His day and told them that there was no literal Adam who was the father of the entire human race, but He did not. Notice that all of the people in His genealogy are listed as actual, historical people who really lived! No difference is put between Joseph (His adopted father) and Adam.

Moreover, Jesus treated the Genesis account of creation as something that really happened:

Mark 10:6: “But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female.

7 For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife;

8 And they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh.”

In evolutionary terms, the creation of mankind was at the very *end* of history. Evolutionists teach that the universe is around 14 billion years old and mankind only appeared at the end of a long, slow, and gradual process. No evolutionist would teach that mankind appeared at the “beginning of the creation”; instead mankind appeared at the *end*. If history was a book, evolutionists teach that mankind appeared in the last line of the last page.

Here we have Jesus, the creator of the universe, weighing in on the topic. Jesus never hesitated to correct error wherever He saw it. He could have told people that they had completely misunderstood Genesis and in reality creation took a very long time, mankind only appeared at the end of history (not at the beginning), and that more complex life forms came from simpler life forms. But He did not do any of that. Instead He acted as if Genesis 1 was literally true.

His apostles did the same thing. Paul taught that the reason we can be saved by the death of Christ is because sin entered the world through one man – Adam – and that all death was caused by the original sin of Adam:

Romans 5:12: “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:

13 (For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law.

14 Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come.”

The reason that salvation works is because Adam literally existed and Genesis 3 actually happened. If Adam was not the father of the human race, or if sin did not come into the world through him, or if there was death before Adam existed, then no one can be saved. The gospel depends on a literal interpretation of Genesis:

Romans 5:15: “But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many. . .

17 For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive

abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.)

18 Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.

19 For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous."

Salvation depends on a literal Adam sinning, on that sin being the thing that brought death into the world, and on Adam passing that sin down to all of his descendents. Because that is what happened, the sacrifice of one man (Jesus) can bring righteousness and everlasting life. If we are not descendents of Adam then we cannot be saved. If death existed before Adam then Christ cannot save us from death. (How can death be the punishment for sin if there has always been death? In that case the whole gospel falls apart.)

The Torah

Jesus consistently taught that Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible. He never credits any of it to anyone else:

Mark 12:26: "And as touching the dead, that they rise: have ye not read in the book of Moses, how in the bush God spake unto him, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?"

Matthew 19:7: "They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?

8 He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so."

Mark 7:10: "For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death:"

Luke 5:14: "And he charged him to tell no man: but go, and shew thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing, according as Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them."

Luke 24:27: "And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself."

John 1:17: "For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ."

John 5:45: "Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust.

46 For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me; for he wrote of me.
47 But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?"

Jesus never questioned the Mosaic authorship of the first five books of the Bible, or said that those books weren't entirely accurate and should not be considered historical. Instead Jesus *condemned* people for not believing the things that Moses wrote, and said that if people would not believe Moses then they would not believe Him either. If Moses had never existed, or had not written what people claimed he had, Jesus could have easily corrected them – but He did not. Instead He repeatedly affirmed that Moses wrote the Torah and people ought to believe it.

Isaiah

Today there are some scholars who claim that the first half of Isaiah was written by one person, and the second half (which contains a lot of prophecies) was written much later by someone else. Yet Jesus taught that *both* portions of the book were written by Isaiah himself. For example, here Jesus says that Isaiah 29:13 was written by Isaiah:

Mark 7:6: "He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me."

Jesus also said that Isaiah 53:1 (in the second, disputed half of the book) was also written by Isaiah:

John 12:37: "But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him:
38 That the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? And to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?"

In that same chapter of John the Lord quotes from Isaiah 6:10, again attributing it to Isaiah:

John 12:39: "Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again,
40 He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them.
12:41 These things said Esaias, when he saw his glory, and spake of him."

Jesus could have easily taught that Isaiah was written by multiple people over a long span of time, but instead of doing so He taught that the entire book (including the prophecies) were written by Isaiah.

Daniel

Jesus taught that the book of Daniel (and its prophecies) was written by Daniel:

Matthew 24:15: “When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:)”

Instead of saying that Daniel 12:11 was written much later by someone else, Jesus affirms that it was written by Daniel himself.

More Powerful Than Miracles

Today people often think that if only they had the power to do miracles, people would see the miracles and believe. The idea is that miracles are more powerful and more convincing than the Bible itself – but that is not what Jesus taught.

In Luke 16 Jesus told of a rich man who went to Hell, and who had a conversation with Abraham. Jesus ends the account by saying that the Scripture was actually more powerful than miracles – even the miracle of *raising the dead*:

Luke 16:29: “Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.

16:30 And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.

16:31 And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.”

Jesus taught that if you will not believe the words in the Old Testament, then even hearing the witness of someone who was raised from the dead will not convince you. The Scriptures are a more powerful testimony than any miracle. If you will not believe them then *nothing more can be done for you*. (Who taught that? Jesus did.)

Instead of finding cases where Jesus questioned the truth of the Old Testament or told people not to take it so seriously, Jesus affirmed it at every turn and constantly pointed people back to it.

Written By God

Jesus taught that, although the Old Testament was written by men, its true author was God Himself:

Matthew 22:31: “But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying,

32 I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.”

Matthew 22:43: “He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying,

44 The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool?”

Instead of teaching that the Scriptures were a work of men and were full of errors, Jesus taught that God was the one who did the writing and His Spirit authored its words and spoke through men. He did not say that Psalm 110:1 was the work of David; instead He said that it was the work of the Holy Spirit, who wrote it through David. Men may have done the actual physical writing, but God was the author and the one who spoke through them.

Every Word

Jesus once defended the existence of the resurrection based on the tense of a single word in the Old Testament:

Mark 12:26: “And as touching the dead, that they rise: have ye not read in the book of Moses, how in the bush God spake unto him, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?

27 He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living: ye therefore do greatly err.

The Lord is saying that since the Old Testament said “*I am*” Abraham's God instead of “*I was*” Abraham's God, that must mean that Abraham is still alive and so there must be a resurrection! Not only did Jesus trust every word in the Old Testament, but He also taught that the *tense* of every word could be trusted.

Jesus never taught that the Scriptures had been corrupted over the years and were not completely accurate. He did not say that we should avoid reading too much into them. He never cautioned us against trusting the text on the grounds that we don't have the original manuscripts, so we don't really know what God said. He never taught that we should try to decide for ourselves what was real and what was a corruption. No, Jesus believed every single word. He even went so far as to say that He would preserve His Word against corruption so that it could always be fully trusted:

Matthew 5:17: “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.

18 For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.”

Luke 16:15: “And he said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.

16 The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it.

17 And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail."

Jesus clearly believed that it was impossible for His Word to pass away. Instead of teaching people to question it (which He constantly did in regard to the teachings of the Pharisees), He expected people to know it and believe it. He taught that it was impossible for the Scripture to fail, or to not come to pass, or to be in error:

John 10:34: "Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods?
35 If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken;
36 Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God?"

Jesus had complete faith in every part of the Old Testament. He never questioned any of it. Instead He condemned people for not knowing what it said:

Matthew 22:29: "Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God."

He condemned people for adding their own traditions to the Scriptures:

Matthew 15:3: "But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?"

He condemned people for replacing what the Word of God said with the traditions and opinions of men:

Mark 7:7: "Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.
7:8 For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do.
7:9 And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition."

Jesus had stern words for those who would ignore what He had to say and believe something else instead:

John 12:48: "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day."

There were plenty of opportunities for Jesus and His disciples to correct people's view of Scripture – but instead of doing that they constantly and consistently reaffirmed it, teaching that it all happened, it was all real, and it could all be trusted – even down to the tense of every word.

Hall of Fame of Faith

I will close with this. In Hebrews 11 we are given a list of the heroes of faith – people who had tremendous faith in God and who were an example to all of us today. This list is presented to us as an actual list of real historical events – things that real people did and events that truly happened. This list testifies to the reality of Cain and Abel, the rapture of Enoch, Sarah giving birth when she was too old, Abraham offering Isaac as a sacrifice, the Israelites crossing the Red Sea on dry ground, the walls of Jericho falling down, and even the existence of Samson:

Hebrews 11:4: “By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.

5 By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God. . .

11 Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised. . .

17 By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son,

18 Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called:

19 Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure. . .

29 By faith they passed through the Red sea as by dry land: which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned.

30 By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days. . .

32 And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets:”

Jesus and the apostles consistently taught that everything in the Old Testament could be trusted. They testified to the truth of these verses:

Psalm 119:160: “Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever.”

Proverbs 30:5: “Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him.”

Now, it is true that if you search the Scriptures diligently you will find someone who cast doubt on the word and commandments of God. You can find him here:

Genesis 3:1: “Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which

the Lord God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?"

Who taught people to doubt? That would be the devil.