

Letters From a Skeptic
Lesson 10: Myths, Vengeance, and Holy Books

“*VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY*’ says the Lord.”

Romans 12:19



“I don’t always know why God did what He did in the Old Testament, but since I know on other grounds that God is all-loving and all-wise, I must simply trust that He had wise and loving reasons for doing what He did..”

Correspondence 20: “Isn’t the Bible full of myths and God’s Vengeance?”

Father <pp. 159-160>

1. A bit more cognitive dissonance: “*You gave the best reasons imaginable for believing the most unimaginable things!*”
2. Has three problems:
 - a. “Cognitive dissonance” dilemma: “*...the Bible is just too bizarre to believe.*” Asks if the son takes the Bible literally. “*Do you take all of this nonsense seriously?*”
 - b. Wonders at an “all loving God” who would bring a flood, wipe out the Canaanites, etc.
 - c. Brings up some “hearsay” arguments about OT authorship
 - i. Has heard that the Bible wasn’t written by who we think
 - ii. “*So if Jesus thought the OT was the Word of God, maybe He was wrong after all?*”
(1) Also acknowledges solid evidence that says Jesus was who He claimed to be!
3. Dad just doesn’t know what to believe!
 - a. Makes me think of the Bereans who searched God’s Word to determine what was right and true (Acts 17:11), and were called noble for doing so.

Son <pp. 161-167 >

1. Says right off that he takes the whole Bible seriously.
 - a. “*How can I do otherwise if Jesus Christ is my Lord?*” he asks.
2. Points out that God operated differently in OT times.
3. Also says that the “unusual” stories in the Bible are there exactly because they’re unusual!
 - a. Reminds his Dad that the Bible is quite condensed (and so it seems to be “full” of unusual stories), but that God’s miracles were actually quite rare.
4. Discusses literal vs. symbolic language, saying that nothing prevents God from using symbolic elements in His Word if He wants to.
 - a. Points out that, regardless of a discussion of symbology, there’s always a larger point being made, and tells his Dad to focus on that.
 - b. “*It’s all God’s Word and must, therefore, be taken seriously.*”
5. God’s vengeance against the Canaanites
 - a. Says the Canaanites were very, very violent
 - b. Suggests that maybe violence was the only way to deal with them
 - i. See Deut. 20:10-15 for God’s instructions to Israel on destroying their enemies
 - ii. See Deut. 20:16-18 for “special” instructions concerning the Canaanites
 - iii. Deut 9:5 puts this in perspective
 - c. Leads into a discussion of eternity (there’s more than just our life on earth).

6. Finishes with a discussion of Biblical authors, literal interpretations, and inspiration
 - a. States plainly that he believes the authors *are* correct and that the text is genuine
 - b. Makes three statements (discuss these, time permitting):
 - i. “...*taking the Bible seriously does not necessarily mean taking it all literally*”
 - ii. “*The idea that the Bible must be 100% literal if it is 100% inspired is a very recent, and quite misguided notion.*”
 - iii. “...*the authorship of the OT... has little or no bearing on the inspiration of the Bible*”
 - c. Says what is important is the **message**, not who wrote down the words
7. Finally, invites Dad (yet again) to “open himself up” to the Bible’s transforming power

Although we won’t be looking at correspondence 21, read 2nd paragraph of father’s reply!

Correspondence 22: “Why are there so many interpretations of the Bible?”

Father <p. 144 >

1. Back to the “defensive” questions:
 - a. Why so many translations of the Bible?
 - b. Over 1200 Christian denominations in America alone!
 - c. Can’t God be more clear?
 - d. How can you possibly know what is right?

Son <pp. 145-148 >

1. Addresses the disunity in Christendom
 - a. Points out that this hurts the cause of Christ
 - b. Claims disunity comes largely from pride, arrogance, and greed
 - c. Brings out that this has always been the case with humanity—we are all sinners that need God’s grace (see 1st paragraph on p. 146)
2. Two other reasons for differences between churches
 - a. Not all churches regard the Bible as “God’s Word” while others (e.g. Catholics) have additional sources of authority
 - b. Differences of opinion on interpretation
3. As always, points the father back to Jesus as Lord and Savior

Homework: Read Correspondence 24 and Correspondence 25.