

Is the Bible True or Not?

Dear Fr. Gilles, we would greatly appreciate your input regarding religion class for our daughter. Her teacher is stating that the story of Adam & Eve, Noah's Ark, and a large chunk of the Old Testament is myth. She is frustrated, and asking us whether the Old Testament is real or fictitious. We have explained that The Bible is very real, and feel that this approach to the Bible in a Catholic School does nothing to up build a 14 year olds' faith. Please help with insight. Blessings, Your Friends.

My dear Friends, Parents, and Youth, this is simply a good opportunity for you to help each other make acquaintance with our secular culture - now's as good a time as any. Our beloved Youth needs to see for herself the difference between looking with eyes, mind, and eyes of faith or looking with eyes and mind only. For example: "Adam and Eve is a myth" means that it happened so long ago that there were no movie cameras, no reporters, no tape recorders, and we have absolutely no documentation left at all from the time of that first man and woman. That is true.

Some people use this fact to draw the conclusion that nothing in the Bible is real or can be trusted, often because they don't like parts of the Bible - especially the commandments - such as God really doesn't like adultery or stealing, because these things kill our spirit. Others don't like the Church and so they want to discredit the source of the Church's authority, which is God's divinely inspired Word. Others mean well, but there's something about this story and really all of the Bible which makes them feel uncomfortable; so they just dismiss it and rely on arguments from science to discredit the validity of the Bible. They think they are doing something good, by exposing something old and unreliable, they think; so that young minds can venture into life without the burden that the Bible seems to put on people's minds and consciences. We shouldn't blame them, they simply have never understood how to approach the Bible with respect as well as with intelligence.

Whether there actually was a first man called Adam and a first woman called Eve isn't really the point. Keep in mind that Adam means "man" and Eve means "from man". Let's make no mistake - there definitely was a first man and a first woman. Apes didn't mysteriously and gradually become human - so that it would be impossible to tell which were the first humans. The best that the most brilliant scientists can do is formulate theories, and since the origins of humanity are buried in time, it is very difficult, if not impossible to test these theories. This is an area of science where old stories have as much relevance as scientific theories.

Pope John Paul II is on record for saying that some scientific theories are not necessarily in disaccord with faith. It's possible that God created man and woman in ways similar to the story told in Genesis. It's also possible that the first human beings evolved from primates, but what made them human wasn't simply evolving, but God giving them a supernatural soul. Once they received a soul within their body, they became "awake" and could now know God through personal experience. They now had a conscience and could tell the difference between right and wrong. They could now choose to love and put others first, or refuse to do that. They could receive from God spiritual gifts such as faith, which allows them to see with inner, spiritual insight into things and their inner meaning beyond what only their eyes or mind could reveal.

A person of faith looks at this fact of the mythical origins of Adam and Eve and sees that

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someone took some trouble to try to remember something about the first human beings in order to help their children remember the lessons to be learned from the experience of that first human couple. This is where the Holy Spirit exercised his power - in the lives of the first couple themselves, who came to understand what happened to them and what it meant - in the lives of succeeding generations who tried to remember the story and the meaning of it for them, and in the lives of those who eventually recorded the story in the form we now have today, and finally, in the lives of those of us today who read the story and open our minds and hearts to receive the truths that God wants us to have so that we can face life and learn from the painful experience of Adam and Eve.

The central truth told in the story of Adam and Eve is that God created them and gave them a close relationship with Him. There was a difference in the relationship that the man and woman had with God - Adam remembered God telling him not to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, but Eve did not - she had to take Adam's word for it. The tempter exploited this difference and the weakness in Eve's relationship with God and tempted her with knowledge that would make her equal to God. She was tempted not to trust any longer that God would give them all good things and grab it for herself.

When Adam went along with her, what they were doing was trying to make themselves into something more than what they were - they no longer trusted that what God had made them was good enough, they no longer trusted that what God was giving them would satisfy them. What they were really doing was rejecting God's role in their lives - they were no longer satisfied with the way God was exercising his role in giving them life - they were deciding to take God's role over themselves and decide how to shape their own lives. They would decide what is good and evil. They believed the lie of the tempter that they were lacking some knowledge, and if they had it they would be equal to God. They were lacking the experience, the taste of evil. What the evil was that they tasted, the story does not tell, only that it appeared desirable to the eye and tasted sweet, but the result was very bitter.

They now became ashamed of their nakedness, they became afraid of God and hid when He called them to walk with them in the afternoon in the Garden as He usually did with them. When God questioned them, they lied: Adam blamed Eve, and Eve blamed the serpent. Neither of them took responsibility for what they had done, so God had no choice but to let the evil consequences continue to grow inside them. God described what the effects would be like for them.

Adam would be frustrated in all his efforts to cultivate the earth. Eve would have a distorted, exaggerated desire for her husband - a kind of grabbing that would give her husband the impression he was being strangled; so he would react and dominate her with his strength. They would suffer the loss of harmony with God, with each other, with the creatures and with the earth, because they had broken their trust in God, in each other, and in the earth - they broke their trust that everything God created would be sufficient to bring them happiness. Their heart's desire became corrupt.

So that is what the story is really about. It is the same with all the other stories in the Bible - they have been inspired by the Holy Spirit to remind us of truths that we have forgotten or never known. As Jesus said, only the truth can set us free - free to know and love God, each other, and all God's other creatures. God has created the world around us and He has given us a share in his responsibility to care for this world and do all we can to keep it in harmony.

May you have peace and love in Jesus, our Lord, Fr. Gilles

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