

Why Some Scholars Are Critical of the Old Testament?

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For millions, the Old Testament (OT) is a unique and very important religious book. The OT is the first of the two main parts of the Christian Bible – it is based on the books of the Hebrew *Tanakh*, a collection of ancient religious Hebrew and occasionally Aramaic writings. The Tanakh is an acronym, made from the first Hebrew letters of each of the Masoretic Text's three traditional divisions: Tawrah or Torah (literally 'Instruction' or 'Law'), Navi'im (Prophets), and Khatuvim (Writings)—hence Ta-Na-Kh.

Meanwhile, the Tawrah (Torah) is the name given to the Five Books (*Pentateuch*) of Moses that come at the very beginning of the Tanakh. The final redaction and canonization of the Torah most likely took place during the Babylonian Exile (6th–5th century BC), but it began to take form during the reign of Hezekiah of Judah in the 8th century BC. However, many believe that the entire OT was complete by around AD 100.

Regarding the various books of the OT in the Bible, the **Protestant Bible** for example has only 39 books, however, the **Catholic Bible** has 46. The additional seven books that are included in Catholic Bible are: Tobit, Judith, 1 and 2 Maccabees, Wisdom, Sirach, and Baruch.¹ The Roman Catholic Bible has a total of 73 books, meanwhile, the Greek Orthodox Bible is somewhat larger, with somewhere between 75 and 79 books.² The difference is in the OT only. Meanwhile, the OT Canon of the **Greek Orthodox Bible** has 51. Also, for example, the Catholic Canon is included in the Eastern Orthodox canon, but they have some additional parts: 3 & 4 Maccabees. Psalm 151. The question here is, who decided which books to be included in the Bible and which books to be excluded. When did man become heaven's judge with power to decide which books God wanted the people on earth to follow and which books to ignore and discard?

Most theologians suggest that the **Ethiopian Bible** is the oldest and most complete, written in Ethiopia's Ge'ez ancient language, which makes it 800 years older than the King James Version. This Ethiopian version contains 81-88 books compared to New King James version of 66 books. Others state that the **Codex Sinaiticus**³, which was discovered at the St. Catherine monastery at the base of Mt. Sinai in Egypt in the mid 1800s, is the oldest handwritten over 1600 years ago. The manuscript contains the Christian Bible in Greek, which dates from around AD 325-360. **The Alexandrian Bible** was written in the early fifth century. It contains the whole Bible, except a few pages that have been lost. It is also kept in the British Museum. Yet others assert that the **Aramaic Bible** is the oldest.

So, the books of the OT vary in quantity: some have 49 books, 46 books while others have 39 books; however, there are 39 books that are common to essentially all Christian branches.⁴ Those additional from the common 39 are called the Apocrypha. All these versions correspond to the 24 books of the

1 During the Reformation, for largely doctrinal reasons Protestants removed seven books from the Old Testament (**1 and 2 Maccabees, Sirach, Wisdom, Baruch, Tobit, and Judith**) and parts of two others (Daniel and Esther), even though these books had been regarded as canonical since the beginning of Church history.

2 The following extra books are found in the Greek Orthodox Bible: 3 Maccabees, 4 Maccabees, 1 Esdras, Prayer of Manasseh.

3 There are many who believe that the Dead Sea Scrolls are fraud. Kindly study the matter carefully.
https://www.academia.edu/71036314/Afraid_of_Fraud_and_the_Codex_Sinaiticus

4 <https://www.infoplease.com/religion/old-testament-bible-books-order>

Tanakh, with some differences of order, names or some differences in text. The additional number of books reflect the splitting of several texts into separate books in the Christian Bible.⁵ The books that are part of the Christian OT, but not part of the Hebrew canon, are described as deuterocanonical.

The Revised Version (RV) or English Revised Version (ERV) of the Bible is a late nineteenth century British revision of the only officially authorized and recognized revision - King James Version. Its New Testament was published in 1881, its OT in 1885, and its Apocrypha in 1894.

After this basic information, we must consider the fact that the OT was written by different individuals who composed the various books from their own perspective and experience. Accordingly, those individuals at times were biased in the way they presented certain events. Having made that clear, we need to examine a few examples about the edits, wrong translations, mistakes, contradictions and discrepancies within the OT that some scholars have addressed throughout the years and understand why those scholars did not consider the OT authoritative or a historical document.

First

Some events and personalities that occurred during the period that the OT books were written are not reported authoritatively.

Considering that Sumer was the center of the world in ancient times, the OT says almost nothing about it, except perhaps to suggest that Abraham was born in Ur. However, the OT says a lot about Egypt, almost all of which, according to many scholars and historians, is fictional. If the OT was written between around 1400 and 400 BC, it should have at least mentioned the great disaster that befell upon Israel in about 1208 BC, when Pharaoh Merneptah (or Merenptah) put down a revolt in the Canaanite cities and then decimated the Israelite people.

Merneptah was the son of Rameses II. He ruled Egypt for almost ten years, from 1213 BC until his death in 1203 BC, according to contemporary historical records.⁶ This will be about 240 years after the Israelites conquered the land of Canaan.⁷ He is arguably best known for his victory stele, featuring an account of his campaign in Canaan in the form of a poem from the Merneptah Stele⁸, widely known as the *Israel Stele*, which mentions the suppression of revolts in Canaan where it makes reference to the supposed utter destruction of Israel in Canaan in a campaign prior to his fifth year. The Stele states: ***“Canaan is captive with all woe. Ashkelon is conquered, Gezer seized, Yanoam made nonexistent; Israel is laid waste, bare of seed.”***⁹

This is the first recognized ancient Egyptian record of the existence of Israel – "not as a country or city, but as a tribe" or people.¹⁰ A newly discovered massive layer of fiery destruction confirms Merneptah's boast about his Canaanite campaign.¹¹ Few argue that the timing of Merneptah's destruction of Israel comes interestingly at the time when Israel turned away from the Lord and served other gods and the

5 [Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, Ezra–Nehemiah](#), and the [Twelve Minor Prophets](#)

6 One record indicates his rule between 1224–1214

7 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xj4B5xPMgbQ>

8 Discovered in Thebes (modern Luxor) in 1896 and currently in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo.

9 <https://answersingenesis.org/archaeology/mernepthah-stele/>

10 Jacobus Van Dijk, "The Amarna Period and the Later New Kingdom" in *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt*, ed. [Ian Shaw](#), [Oxford University Press](#) (2000), p.302

11 Bohstrom, Philippe (2017). ["First Discovery of Bodies in Biblical Gezer, From Fiery Destruction 3,200 Years Ago"](#)

anger of the Lord burned hot against Israel (*Judges 10:6-7*).¹²

Therefore, the Pharaoh's inscriptions could not be ignored, especially an event as significant as a major Egyptian campaign in Canaan and the decimation of all Israelites, as the historic Merneptah Stele states.¹³ Historians understand such a significant event, but the OT fails to be factual with this important event or recording pharaoh Merneptah. Some try to claim that the Merneptah in the Egyptian Stele is Shishak of the OT. The question is, why are several Assyrian Kings, such as Shalmaneser, Tiglath-Pileser, Sennecherib, Esarhaddon, Sargon and others mentioned by their real names? Why is Rameses mentioned by his real name, but his son Merneptah is not?



Merneptah Stele or Israel Stele in Cairo Museum

Also, the Book of Daniel (5:31) describes a Median king named Darius, who sat on the throne of the Medo-Persian Empire at the time when Babylon fell to the Medes and Persians in 539 BC. Yet, history books do not show that a king under the name "Darius the Mede" ever existed. The eight Media kings were: Arbaces (Varbak), Maudaces, Sosarmus, Articas, Deioces, Phraortes, Ciaxares, and Astyages (Azhdahak). Most scholars view "Darius the Mede" as a literary fiction, but some have tried to harmonise the Book of Daniel with history by identifying him with various known figures.

¹² The strange thing is that while the Merneptah's reign is conventionally and archaeologically dated at 1213 to 1203 BC; however, with a Revised Egyptian Chronology (REC) the dates are revised to sometime between 940 and 890 BC.

¹³ The Egyptian authorities organized the Pharaohs' Golden Parade that was held in Cairo, Egypt on April 3, 2021, during which twenty-two mummies belonging to Kings and Queens of the New Kingdom of Ancient Egypt were moved from the Egyptian Museum in Tahrir Square in the center of Cairo to the National Museum of Egyptian Civilization in Fustat, Egypt. Fustat is located on the east bank of the Nile River, south of modern Cairo. It was the capital of the province of Egypt during the Muslim caliphates of the Umayyad and Abbasid and succeeding dynasties, until captured by the Fatimid general Jawhar in AD 969.

Second

The OT contains numerous contradictions.

Example 1, Genesis chapter 1 says the first man and woman were made at the same time, after the animals were created. KJV **Genesis 1:27** “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.”

But Genesis chapter 2 gives a different order of creation: man, then the animals, and then woman.

Example 2, **Genesis 1:2-5** claims that God created light and divided it from darkness on the first day; but **Genesis 1:14-19** tells us the sun, moon, and stars weren't made until the fourth day.

The Old Testament contains an interesting contradiction in the story of the census taken by King David and the resulting punishment of the Israelites. God was so angered by the census that he sent a plague that killed 70,000 men. According to **II Samuel 24:1**, the Lord had caused David to take the census – which makes the punishment appear even more nonsensical. But an attempt was later made, at **I Chronicles 21:1**, to improve God's image by claiming that Satan incited the census.¹⁴

God gives Moses a set of commandments inscribed by the finger of God.

Exodus 31:18 “And he gave unto Moses, when he had made an end of communing with him upon mount Sinai, two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God.”

However, Moses was enraged by the sight of the Children of Israel worshiping a golden calf so he smashed and destroyed that first set. Then God tells Moses that he is going to give him another exact copy of the first set the next day only to give him a completely different set of commandments (**Exodus 34:1**).

Third

The Torah represents the first original Books of Moses: Be-reshit, Shemot, Vayikra, Bemidbar and Devarim, which in the English OT correspond to Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Almost from the beginning, readers of the OT observe that there were issues in these five Books of Moses that Moses himself could not possibly have witnessed: His own death and burial, for example, that occurs in **Deuteronomy 34:5-6**. A volume of the Talmud, the collection of Jewish laws recorded between the third and fifth centuries AD, dealt with this inconsistency by explaining that Joshua (Moses' successor as leader of the Israelites) likely wrote the verses about Moses' death.¹⁵

Those first five books were filled with contradictory, repetitive material, and often seems to tell different versions of the Israelites' story.

Dr. Khazal al-Majidi, who is an expert on religions and civilizations, says: Moses is supposed to have existed in 1750 BC. So how could he have written the Torah if the oldest version of it was put together much later.

Also, the Sumerians were very detailed in their documentation. They reported about the 50 brands of beer and 70 brands of cheese, and all the demonstrations by people to the details; however, there is no mention of prophets. The same with the Egyptian chronologies, which were very detailed but they did not mention anything about a revolt by Moses or leaving Egypt or how he was chased by the Egyptian army.¹⁶

14 <https://americanhumanist.org/what-is-humanism/reasons-humanists-reject-bible/>

15 <https://www.history.com/news/who-wrote-the-bible>

16 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=69J7s0YoCeg>

Forth

Even after nearly 2,000 years of its existence, and centuries of investigation by biblical scholars, we still don't know with certainty who wrote its various texts, when exactly they were written, or under what circumstances.¹⁷ Most critically, why are the original texts translated erroneously?

The renowned Assyrian scholar, Dr. George M. Lamsa, translated the Bible directly from the original Aramaic (Syriac) text – called the Peshitta¹⁸ – into English. Lamsa admitted that mistakes were made in the King James Version and those mistakes were corrected in his English translation from the original Aramaic text. For example:

a. King James, **Matthew 6:13**, “*And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil ...*”.

Lamsa's Holy Book, “*And do not let us enter into temptation, but deliver us from evil ...*”

b. King James, **Matthew 19:24**, “*And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God*”.

The Lamsa's Holy Book, “*Again I say to you, It is easier for a rope to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God*”.

The Late Mar Eshai Shimun, the Patriarch of the Church of the East¹⁹, wrote in a preface of Lamsa's English translated Bible, “*... the Church of the East received the scriptures from the hands of the blessed Apostles themselves in the Aramaic original, the language spoken by our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and that the Peshitta is the text of the Church of the East which has come down from the Biblical times without any change or revision*”.²⁰

Fifth

What is the biblical view on how non-Israelites should be treated within the context of interracial marriage?

Is the answer:

a) *you should curse, smote, and pluck off their hair ... (see Nehemiah 13:25)*

b) *you should cast the women out (see Ezra 10:17)*

c) *you should see them as under God's shelter (see Ruth 3:10).*

Such competing and opposed perspectives within the canon confuses people and calls people to deliberate between these conflicting views.²¹ Would God advice people with contradicting messages? True Christian believers adamantly say no, since God is clear and precise with his message and not confusing and conflicted.

17 <https://www.history.com/news/who-wrote-the-bible>

18 The Peshitta, or simple, is the Scripture text of the Church of the East, later known as the Assyrian Church of the East, which has come down from the Biblical times without any change or revision.

19 Mar Eshai Shimun was assassinated on Nov 6, 1975

20 Holy Bible From the Ancient Eastern Text: George Lamsa's Translations From the Aramaic of the Peshitta. Originally published in 1933. Latest publication by HarperCollins Publisher, 1984

21 <https://www.therebelgod.com/2014/01/contradictions-in-old-testament-and-why.html>

Sixth

There are many numerical contradictions in the various chapters of the OT. Some could have been copying errors or other errors in translations. Consider the following examples:

a) God sent Gad to threaten David with:

1. *SEVEN years of famine (2 Samuel 24:13)*
2. *THREE years of famine (1 Chronicles 21:12)*

b) When David defeated the King of Zobah, he captured:

1. *SEVEN THOUSAND horsemen (1 Chronicles 18:4)*
2. *ONE THOUSAND SEVEN HUNDRED horsemen (2 Samuel 8:4)*

c) Solomon had:

1. *FORTY THOUSAND stalls for horses (1 Kings 4:26)*
2. *FOUR THOUSAND stalls for horses (2 Chronicles 9:25)*

d) The Temple contained:

1. *TWO THOUSAND baths (1 Kings 7:26)*
2. *THREE THOUSAND baths (2 Chronicles 4:5)*

Seventh

It is interesting that throughout the Torah, the various Egyptian Pharaohs are always referred to as simply 'Pharaoh' or 'the king of Egypt' (or both), but no official names are given in several verses. Is that because there never was a captivity in Egypt as many have begun to assert? Was the claimed captivity in Egypt perhaps the Babylonian exile? Biblical scholars argue that this practice, meaning, pharaohs names not mentioned, was common in Egypt until 1000 BC. They also claim that the Torah is a guide for everyday life based on human nature and the spiritual loftiness of the Jewish soul and these elements are timeless. I wonder why in Genesis the names of the Kings of the plains who went to war with the kings from the east are mentioned.

Eighth

Many of the reported numbers of people or animals are implausible and perhaps exaggerated.

Numbers 31: 31-35 tells us, "So Moses and Eleazar the priest did as the LORD commanded Moses. The plunder remaining from the spoils that the soldiers took was 675,000 sheep, 72,000 cattle, 61,000 donkeys and 32,000 women who had never slept with a man." This must be very impressive that they counted all the exact 675,000 sheep and the 72,000 cattle and the 61,000 donkeys or the exact 32,000 virgin women.

In addition, the question that rises here is, could any true Christian believe that God advised Moses to capture only the virgin women?

Nineth

Many scholars argue that certain narratives in the OT were copied and adapted from ancient Mesopotamian mythology. *Exodus 2:1-10* states that Moses' mother places him in a caulked wicker basket along the sides of the Nile River where he is found by pharaoh's daughters who raised him

among the Egyptian royalty. This almost exact story was known in Mesopotamia (where Abraham was born and raised) about a thousand years earlier as the life story of the Akkadian King Sargon I. **Genesis 6-8** talks about the story of Noah and the Flood, which is a similar version of the flood story in the 11th Tablet of the Epic of Gilgamesh, which tells how **the gods determined to send a... flood to destroy the earth**, but one of them, Ea, revealed the plan to Utu-napishtim whom he instructed to make a boat in which to save himself and his family. He orders him to take into it birds and beasts of all kinds.²² Also, we read that Moses went on to Mount Sinai and received the ten commandments. Well, we know from ancient Mesopotamian records that Hammurabi went up to a Mountain and received the law from the sun god Shamash.²³



Also, **Genesis 2-3** describes God in anthropomorphic terms. He creates Adam by blowing on dust ... This description is inspired by Babylonian creation stories, and it pictures God as a human being who has a body with lungs so he can breathe into dust.²⁴ We also have **Genesis 25:23** which explains that Isaac had twins Jacob and Esau who were to be the founders of two nations and that one would serve the other. However, many believe that this biblical story has roots in early pre-Judaic religious beliefs. In a wider context, the stories of Jacob and Esau point to an earlier myth of twins deities, the moon god and the sun god.

Lastly, but not least, a study of the Assyrian prophecy corpus, first published in 1875 by George Smith, shows other parallels between the Biblical prophecies and much earlier events from the ancient Assyrian prophecies. For example, in a scene reminiscent of Jesus' Last Supper, Oracle 3.3 of the Corpus describes a scene in which Ishtar, the Assyrian goddess, invites the gods, her fathers, and brothers, to a covenant meal, and says to them: "You will go to your cities and districts, eat bread and forget this covenant. But when you drink from this water, you will remember me and keep this covenant, which I have made on behalf of King Esarhaddon."

22 Spence, Lewis. *Myths & Legends: Babylonia & Assyria*. Kessinger Publishing Company, Montana, 1995.

23 https://granovitch.blogspot.com/2023/11/the-mesopotamian-origins-of-hebrew-myth.html?fbclid=IwAR2YwpsViDI0XhscDjwQYmm3pEQnMxvCXM1ZFlrGt68-n8A_qCKL13iQZ7g

24 <https://christoverall.com/article/concise/the-creators-authorized-realistic-account-of-creation-interpretation-of-genesis-1-3-is-neither-literalistic-nor-figurative/#post-9580-footnote-12>

Final Thoughts

The above examples of inconsistencies, conflicting perspectives of the same events, errors in translations, omissions or additions, exaggeration or inflating figures, and other issues prompted scholars to consider the OT to be viewed as strictly a work of interpreted history. The contradictions raise a logical observation: If two statements are contradictory; therefore, one of them is false. So, who decides which account is wrong and which account is right.

Scholars argue that many of the OT narratives were not written for the sake of historical accuracy, but rather to reflect a sermon, a sacred text for the masses or to reflect the author's personal opinion about specific issues close to their hearts or their way of thinking. Many of the OT verses has caused centuries of debate. Those who challenged the story of creation in **Genesis 1-11**, for example, were not influenced by the relatively modern concept of Evolution, because these challenges are ancient and many rose through Jewish philosopher Philo Judaeus, Second-century Gnostics and other early Christians such as Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Augustine. Origen, for example, writes on the first principles regarding the text of the creation in Genesis: *For who that has understanding will suppose that the first, and second, and third day, and the evening and the morning, existed without a sun, and moon, and stars? And that the first day was, as it were, also without a sky [heaven]? And who is so foolish as to suppose that God, after the manner of a husbandman, planted a paradise in Eden, towards the east, and placed in it a tree of life, visible and palpable, so that one tasting of the fruit by the bodily teeth obtained life? And again, that one was a partaker of good and evil by masticating what was taken from the tree? And if God is said to walk in the paradise in the evening, and Adam to hide himself under a tree, I do not suppose that anyone doubts that these things figuratively indicate certain mysteries, the history having taken place in appearance, and not literally.*²⁵

Accordingly, and based on the examples and arguments listed in this article and several others, many scholars do not accept certain biblical narratives as authoritative while others have the conviction that the OT could not be considered as a reliable historical document.