

Christianity: Myths and Legends

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With single-minded purpose, Stanley Thornton succeeds in analyzing and interpreting the Bible. In his book, *Christianity: Myths and Legends*, Thornton calls for a historical reassessment of biblical events from a common sense point of view. As a starting point, he raises the issue that "...simply believing in something does not make it true." Thornton then sets about questioning the Bible's claims, demonstrating that one story after the other suffers from contradictions and discrepancies. Throughout the book, the author invalidates every biblical story and reinforces his premise that "The problem with religion is that too often people confuse what they are told with what is fact."

The book's appeal is in its offering of common sense answers, most often supported by scientific reasons. For example, a volcanic eruption could have explained the cataclysmic destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and it may well have been thunder that the people heard, not God speaking, while Moses was on the mount.

Though Thornton denies any intention of dissuading readers from believing in Christianity, his assessment is convincing: there is little historical fact or science to support the myths and legends of events described in the Bible. The Bible should, therefore, be considered simply as a collection of stories written by ancient scribes and open to a reader's own interpretation.

Thornton injects humor into his debunking, making for an entertaining read. "Since there is no such thing as gopher wood, I must ... assume that Noah used every bit ... in the world, and that's why there is none now." And, about God communing with Abraham, "... this is the first time I've seen anyone wheel and deal with God like they were at some swap meet ... Is it just me, or is this the one and only example of God showing any interest in being talked into something like some politician looking for votes?"

Unfortunately, numerous gaffes in usage and grammar detract from the book's credibility: The backcover states, "He has...poured (pored) over..." Or, in reference to Jesus carrying the cross, "The point is mute (moot) ..." What's more, maps would have been helpful in locating the Garden of Eden. And while he brings up the Pangea theory in reference to the age of the landmass associated with Eden, there is very little discussion of the theory or its relevance.

It is clear that this book was not intended as a scholarly work. The author provides neither bibliography nor even a barebones list of sources. Surprisingly, there is little, if any, consideration of the probable intent of the Bible's use of myth and legend to convey moral lessons. Thornton's impulse towards historicism misses the possibility that biblical accounts, shaped by myth and based on facts (albeit inaccurate), were intended to relate past events to the present life of the people. The stories reflect universal mythic themes and are likely not meant to be taken literally.

GARY KLINGA (January 6, 2011)

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