

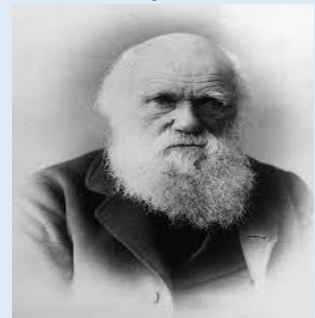
## **Study Guide #15: Scriptures or Higher Criticism?**

### **Introduction**

Higher Criticism constitutes a bias against the supernatural and the historicity of the Bible, viewing the Scriptures as a purely human creation. This means that Higher Critics use what is called the historical-critical method of interpreting the Bible. Its philosophical foundation is that reason is the most important source of knowledge. Thus, the Bible is not above suspicion. In this Study Guide, we examine Higher Criticism and its roots and then contrast it to the Biblical worldview.

### **Question #1: When and how did Higher Criticism originate?**

**Answer:** For the most part, Higher Criticism arose in response to the intellectual movement of the late 17<sup>th</sup> and the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries called the Enlightenment, shortly after the rise of science and several of its discoveries. Enlightenment thinkers viewed everything in the universe as being governed by natural law, which can be discovered through observation, experimentation, and reason. If everything is governed by natural law, then there is no room for supernatural, divine intervention or explanations. Higher Criticism was the development within large portions of Protestant Christianity which applied Enlightenment thinking to Christianity and its Bible. Higher Criticism really blossomed shortly after the publication of British naturalist Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species by Natural Selection* in 1859. Today it is particularly influential within mainstream, old-line Protestant churches.



Charles Darwin

### **Question #2: What evidence does Higher Criticism offer for its anti-supernatural position?**

**Answer:** Its rejection of the supernatural is simply a philosophical presupposition, given its position that everything operates only on natural law. In other words, Higher Critics have already predetermined that something cannot happen, so they naturally conclude that it did not happen in the past either. See Explorer I, Study Guide #10 for a discussion on the possibility of miracles occurring. This position is especially puzzling when these scholars claim belief in some version of Christianity. If they believe in God at all, why is it so difficult to believe that He can and has performed miracles?

### **Question #3: How did Higher Criticism's rejection of the supernatural impact its belief about the Bible?**

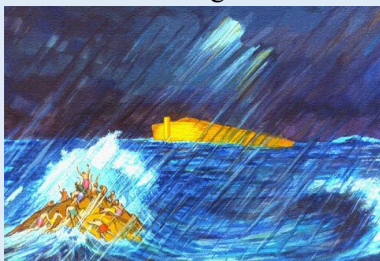
**Answer:** Once Higher Critics had dismissed the possibility of the supernatural, they discarded any notion that the Bible was a divinely inspired book. Instead, it was a book, or a collection of books, of different literary works consisting of a purely human invention. Then Darwinian evolution led many disciplines to view human developments from a naturalistic perspective. Specifically, Higher Critics assumed that the Bible was created by a variety of writers with greatly different notions of what God is like, with a gradual change of viewpoints about God over the course of time. In the course of such thinking, much of the traditional authors and dates for the various books of Scripture were thrown out, making the Bible a product of evolutionary development.

### **Question #4: What's wrong with the Higher Criticism approach to the Bible?**

**Answer:** The most basic problem is that it's based on a worldview that excludes God. See Explorer I, Study Guides #1, #2, and #3 for a rational belief that God does, in fact, exist *and* that He cares about His creation. Besides, long-standing historical traditions and evidence as to whom wrote the various Bible books and approximately when they were written shouldn't be so lightly discarded into the trash heap of history, especially when the Jewish people are well known for being among the most accurate recorders of history. Furthermore, trained secular historians widely adopt Aristotle's dictum that any book's historicity should be given the benefit of the doubt unless compelling evidence exists to the contrary. Moreover, what may appear to be historical error for centuries may later be vindicated by Biblical archaeology. In fact, archaeology has again and again proven consistent with historical persons and events recorded in the Scriptures in spite of the fact that historical mysteries still exist.

### **Question #5: Where in the Bible do Higher Critics take special aim to discredit it as literal historical fact?**

**Answer:** The Higher Critics' most vehement attacks on the Bible have been levied against the first 11 chapters of Genesis because of its account of (1) a literal Creation week consisting of 24-hour days, (2) the Fall of mankind into sin, (3) the global Flood, and (4) the very old ages of the pre-Flood patriarchs. The book of Daniel has also been a favorite target, for Higher Critics deny the possibility of predictive prophecy and therefore insist that Daniel was written, or at least completed, by an unknown Jewish writer in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. after the persecution of the Jews by the Seleucid ruler Antiochus IV.



Noah's Flood

## **Question #6: How do Higher Critics interpret Bible history if they don't regard it as historical and factual?**

**Answer:** Higher Critics often express the belief that the appearance of angels, the interaction with God, and the claim of miracles all prove that the Bible is full of myths. Therefore, its stories are considered mythical inventions that teach good moral lessons. The process of demythologizing the Bible began in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, beginning with certain German Protestant scholars. The experts are generally agreed that the following list constitutes the major characteristics of a myth:

- Myths are often set in pre-historic times, where gods, goddesses, and supernatural monsters or other mystical beings exist.
- Myths tend to have an abundance of stories where natural laws are bent or broken.
- Myths focus on the mysterious or the unknown.
- The hero in a myth is often a sophisticated storyteller.
- Myths tend to be concerned with the cosmology of a culture, not with ordinary life.

## **Question #7: How does the Biblical record match up with the characteristics of myths? (See Question #6)**

**Answer:** Certainly, the Bible speaks of one God and declares that Jesus is God who became a man. However, this is hardly consistent with the likes of supernatural monsters or other mystical creatures, unless you count angels as mystical beings. There are also miracles alleged in Scripture, but they are not great unknown or mysterious events like you find in mythical literature in general. Bible writers often tell a story, but the narratives are not particularly told in a sophisticated or fantastical manner. While the Bible sometimes concerns itself with heavenly realities, it's far more concerned about mankind and his everyday life. Simply because ancient religions contain much that is mythical in nature doesn't mean that every piece of religious literature is mythology. An honest reading of the Judeo-Christian Scriptures reveals that it's not mythological literature. Instead, it reads as if it wants to be taken seriously as straight-forward history.



The Mythical Hercules

## **Question #8: Why is it important to take Bible history as factual? Could its stories simply be vehicles to teach good moral lessons?**

**Answer:** Even a cursory reading of the Bible reveals that it purports to show the frequent intervention of God's acts in human history. If one throws out Bible history as unreliable or fictitious in nature, one is actually challenging the whole character of the Bible. It cannot conscientiously be valued as a source of good moral teaching if the actual content in which its moral teachings are conveyed is rejected. In other

words, if the Bible is *lying* about its stories and historical accounts of God's intervention in history (which read as straight-forward accounts), then how can we trust what it teaches about anything else?

### **Question #9: Besides its straight-forward testimony about historical events, why do you believe in the factual history of the Bible?**

**Answer:** The heart of Christianity is the belief that Jesus is both man and God. See Explorer I, Study Guides #8-9, 11 for evidence of this truth. Therefore, the Christian ought to believe what Jesus believed. The truth is that Jesus gave testimony in the gospels that He believed in numerous Bible characters and events as real. We here summarize 7 significant persons and events:

Creation History—that Genesis 1 is literal, and that God had a personal hand in the creation of mankind:

**But from the beginning of the creation, God ‘made them male and female.’ For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. (Mark 10:6-8, NKJV)**

#### Global Flood and Noah

**For as in the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. (Matthew 24:37-39, NKJV)**

#### Destruction of Sodom and the Existence of Lot



Destruction of Sodom

**Likewise as it was also in the days of Lot: They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed....Remember Lot's wife. (Luke 17:28-30, 32, NKJV)**

#### Jonah and the Great Fish

**...no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will rise up in judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here. (Matthew 12:39-41, NKJV)**

## Moses, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob

**But concerning the dead, that they rise, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the burning bush passage, how God spoke to him, saying, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living. (Mark 12:26-27, NKJV)**

## David

**But He [Jesus] said to them, ‘Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him.... (Matthew 12:3, NKJV)**

## Daniel and the Accuracy of his Book

**Therefore when you see the ‘abomination of desolation,’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet.... (Matthew 24:15, NKJV)**

## **Question #10: What conclusion should the Christian draw regarding the Bible?**

**Answer:** Rather than summarize the contents of this Study Guide, we invite the reader to review it for himself. Higher Criticism has done more to undermine confidence in the Judeo-Christian Bible than any other human effort in world history. But its underlying principle is a rejection of the possibility that supernatural events can and have occurred. The simple truth is that if we can accept the existence of God, then there is absolutely no reason to doubt the inherent historicity of the Bible’s accounts of God’s acts in history. Since Jesus certainly believed its history, there’s no good reason why we shouldn’t also. Higher Criticism pervades most religious documentaries and many religious films of the last several decades. Avoid its insidious logic and stand firm on the authority of the Scriptures.

