

Chapter 1 : Apologetic Issues in the Old Testament, Part 1

Bible Answer Man. The Call of the Cosmos, Theistic Evolution and Q&A; Politics for Christians, Liberal Democracy, and Q&A; Best of BAM: Marijuana Legalization, Investing in Marijuana Stock, and Q&A.

With some browsers, to view the Greek and Hebrew characters in this document properly you must have multi-lingual support or Unicode enabled. There are places in the Old Testament where some English translations use the word "demon" or "devils" for example, "demons": In other places, it is easy for people in the modern world who are accustomed to reading the New Testament to think "demons" when they read things like "an evil spirit," even though the text clearly says that the evil spirit is from God for example, Jud 9: In spite of the translations, there is no word in Hebrew equivalent to the English word "demon," nor any word that communicates the same meaning that the term communicates in English as a malevolent being in the service of the devil out to destroy humans. That idea today has been shaped by the imagination of medieval writers and popularized in the modern church in terms of evil beings against which Christians need to wage "spiritual warfare. This disparity between our own modern notions and what lies behind the Hebrew terms and concepts often leads to misunderstanding the point of the biblical text and what it communicates. It is always a good idea to read what the biblical text actually says about a topic, and understand the passage against the social and cultural background of ancient Israel and the early church before we impose too many of our modern assumptions and preconceptions about meaning onto Scripture. Idols and Demons A good place to begin is Deuteronomy Translation is more often the translation of ideas and concepts rather than merely words, and there is rarely a one-to-one correspondence of single words between languages. This is especially true of languages that are separated by 3, years of history and culture. Also, there are other features of language besides just the words that affect translation. Words do not have fixed or inherent meaning in any language. The historical and cultural context in which they are used, the literary features that accompany them, the topics they are used to address, even who is speaking or writing the words can all affect "meaning," what a term communicates and how it is to be understood. There are many words in English that can take on different meanings in different circumstances, or that can be used as technical terms in one context and yet take on a more common meaning in another context. Take for example the simple English verb "run. It is usually a context or contexts, as well as other terms in that context, that give us clues to which meaning is meant. Rather than complicating the meaning, in many places in Hebrew Scriptures some of these features actually help us better understand the meaning of a term no matter what English word we use to translate it. There is one unique and prominent feature of Hebrew writing that is especially helpful in providing a context for the meaning of words. It is known as parallelism, in which ideas are related and emphasized by the grouping of synonyms or antonyms see Parallelism in Hebrew Writing. Along with the term translated "demons," in the Hebrew of Deuteronomy In these two verses, there are four other parallel terms and phrases that are used with the word translated as "demons": It is most often used of things that present a threat to the community, such as foreign people who are enemies Hos 7: In this sense it is also used to refer to the gods of foreign peoples that present a threat to the proper worship of God Psa The same is true of the second term, "abhorrent things. The final two terms also refer to the gods of Canaan with which the Israelites had come into contact only after their entry into the land for the time frame of Deuteronomy see The Book of Deuteronomy ; the "golden calf" or bull in Exodus 32 may have reflected Egyptian religious beliefs. In this sense they were "new" gods that the people "did not know" before. Just a few verses later in this passage, there is a clear statement that these "demons" or "strange gods" or "abhorrent things" that the people are so tempted to elevate to deity and use to replace Yahweh are really no gods at all Deut This leads to the conclusion that the word translated as "demons" does not refer to anything close to what we moderns think of as demons, but is a pejorative term to refer to the idols of Baal worship that are declared to be nothing at all compare Isa What is emphasized is that they are "no god. In NRSV, it is translated: This word in Assyrian refers to the mythological creatures that were supposed to guard the sphinx-colossus of Asshur, the primary deity of the Assyrians in Western mythology they are called griffons. The word in Hebrew, then, originally referred to mythological creatures

associated with Assyrian deities. The very purpose of using the term, and paralleling them with other terms for pagan idols and deities, seems to be to emphasize that the pagan deities are not something to fear because they are not really gods at all. In Hebrew thought, that is equivalent to saying that they do not exist, or have no power or importance of which to fear. In other words, even though the Greek translation uses a term that sounds much closer to our word "demons," the meaning is not what that word means to us in English, but rather what the Hebrew term communicates. It is no accident that the context in the Psalm is precisely the same as the Deuteronomy passage; that is, the condemnation of the Israelites for worshipping the idols of foreign deities. Once again, parallelism gives us some indication of the meaning of the word. Originally, it referred to the mythological creatures of Canaanite and Assyrian religion that were representations of various gods. In biblical usage, it becomes synonymous with "idol," a pejorative way to refer to Canaanite deities.

Goats and Satyrs In other places, other Hebrew terms are sometimes also translated as "demons. For example, in 2 Chronicles A feminine form of the word occurs twice to refer to "she-goat" Lev 4: The context here is the regulation of the killing and eating of meat, specifically prohibiting the killing of animals in the open fields or even within the camp without subsuming the taking of life under the covenantal worship of God. Directly forbidden in verse seven is the offering of sacrifices to the "he-goats" instead of to Yahweh. It becomes clear, then, that the "he-goat" is not just an ordinary goat, but refers to something that is a false object of worship, especially with the term "prostitute" that is commonly used in the Old Testament to describe graphically the unfaithfulness of the people in worshipping pagan gods. In 2 Chronicles Likewise, in Leviticus Although in a different context with a different emphasis, the meaning is similar in both passages. It shall be the haunt of jackals, an abode for ostriches. In both passages the emphasis is on wild animals that inhabit the desolate places of the desert. The imagery is that of cities being so thoroughly destroyed and overgrown with thorns that only wild animals live there. While it could be argued that the term refers to the ordinary goat, this was a domesticated animal in biblical times. Even though it wandered the hillsides, it was not really a "wild" animal. In other words, "goat" does not fit the imagery here to symbolize devastated and uninhabitable land. The satyr is a legendary creature that shows up in the mythologies of various cultures of the ancient world as the guardian of holy places or deities, or as the personification of debauchery and revelry. It was portrayed as half-human and half-animal, usually with the feet, tail and ears of a longhaired goat or horse and the torso, head and arms of a man. In Greek mythology, the satyrs were the escorts, guardians, and companions of the god Dionysus, the god of mirth, wine, and revelry. They were thought to inhabit the countryside, especially waste areas and ruins. The Greek god Pan was often portrayed in paintings as a satyr. Much of what we know about satyrs in ancient mythology comes from Greek and Roman sources. Some have even suggested a linguistic connection between the terms. However, the real point is that Isaiah is using the creatures as metaphorical symbols of desolation, of destruction, of total devastation that results in a place fit only for wild creatures, real or mythological, who inhabit the humanly uninhabitable places of the earth. This picks up the overtones of "emptiness" that is associated with the idols elsewhere see below. To read more into this by trying to connect the term with the modern idea of demons is drastically to misunderstand the function of poetic language sometimes called "mythopoetic" language in prophetic oracles. An interesting passage in 2 Kings The context of this passage is the religious reforms of Josiah in which he tore down the pagan altars and idols in response to the discovery of the law book in the temple. However, "gates" does not fit with the meaning of this verse here. This understanding makes 2 Chronicles The context there is the sin of Jeroboam I in banishing the Levitical priesthood from the Northern Kingdom and setting up idols of bulls and goats for the people to worship. In fact, this idolatry of Jeroboam I in setting up images of animals to represent the gods of the Canaanites became a paradigm in Israelite theology of the sinful ruler who rejected Yahweh to follow the false gods of the land compare 1 Kings It is again instructive to note the Septuagint rendering of these verses. This clearly indicates that the understanding of the term was pagan idols. Note the use of the nominal form of this word in Ephesians 4: This negative connotation of the imagery of "he-goat" may well be related to the use of a goat in the Israelite sacrificial system as the bearer of the sins of the people for example, Lev It can be debated whether Israelites viewed these idols in ontological terms, whether they would ever have asked if the gods they represented "really" existed or not. They would most likely not have asked such a question,

since those categories of ultimate reality are alien to the ancient world. They tended to express things in functional terms what they can do rather than ontological terms whether they exist. They simply represented the idols of the Canaanites, which were powerless and could be treated as "emptiness" or "nothing. There does lie behind the Old Testament conception a basic animistic and mythological world view with which the Israelites are in dialog. But they are using the terms and in dialog with such conceptions, not because they accept them or are dominated by them, but precisely to deny the validity of such mythological world views. The biblical writers use the terms, not to accept what they represent, but precisely to reject it. It is clear that there was a popular belief among Israelites in such things as ghosts and the mythological creatures of Canaanite religion. But the biblical tradition as it stands moves beyond such popular mythological conceptions to a vision of a Creator, a sovereign God who is in sole control of the world, and does not share that with anything or anyone. So again, there are no "demons" in the Old Testament, with what that word implies in modern popular English, only idols that are rejected as "no-gods.

Chapter 2 : Issues in Biblical Interpretation

Old Testament on Abortion: Click here for 2 full quotes on Abortion OR other political leaders on Abortion.. Life begins at conception. (May) Biblical "personhood" defines life starting at birth.

Hess begins with a consideration of some of the chief issues addressed more popularly in recent pro-atheist books. Finally, Hess discusses perhaps the most important apologetic issue in the Old Testament, that of Deuteronomy, Joshua and divinely ordained genocide. An apologetics addendum on matters relating to the Old Testament can include a great variety of items. Guided by the author of this volume and my own thoughts as to what may be of most value, I have chosen to focus on three items that might assist us in appreciating some of the major apologetics issues for this era. I will begin with a consideration of some of the chief issues addressed more popularly in recent pro-atheist books. I will then consider the so-called minimalists and criticisms of the historical witness of the Bible. Finally, I will look at perhaps the most important apologetic issue in the Old Testament, that of Deuteronomy, Joshua and divinely ordained genocide. So I will attempt to focus on some of the main charges in three well-known books by authors also famous for taking this position: *How Religion Poisons Everything*. A favorite text is Deuteronomy The latter of course is an obvious error by Harris. It may have been used to justify the Inquisition, but that does not mean it was interpreted correctly. In fact, to apply this text to a young participant in yoga is misleading. Fourth, all this ignores the ancient context of this legislation. Deuteronomy is presented as an ideal set of laws and punishments in an ideal theocracy where the nation follows God. This is not unique. The legal collection of Hammurabi, hundreds of years earlier, functioned in a similar manner. It was an ideal set of laws designed to demonstrate the justice and righteousness of the king. Despite thousands of Old Babylonian texts, including court decisions, we have virtually no certain example in which this legal collection was appealed to in order to adjudicate a specific case. The same is virtually true of Deuteronomy. In fact, if we were to read the history of Israel in the Old Testament the picture is not that of a people fearfully observing this law lest they face death at the hands of their own family. The reality as presented is just the opposite. In every generation huge numbers of the people turn away from God with impunity. In fact, the era of Ahab and Jezebel is one of the few where their assassinations at the hands of Jehu are attributed in part to their sin. Mercy triumphs over judgment, as it does so often in the Old Testament. At one point, in Deuteronomy But later God promises that he will circumcise the hearts of the people Deuteronomy Yes, we can cherry pick harsh texts in the Bible. However, in the larger context the picture is different. God is characterized by mercy rather than judgment Hosea 6: A few points escape Mr. First, according to the text God created all these people and thus holds an implicit right over their existence. Second, the rationale for the flood was the violence that filled the earth so that, with the exception of Noah, all the people devoted themselves to violence Genesis 6: Unlike the comparable ancient Near Eastern flood account that Dawkins cites Utnapishtim of the seventh-century b. Epic of Gilgamesh , the flood did not come because the gods were fed up with the noise of so many people i. Rather, the Bible ascribes a moral cause, uncontrolled murder. This, of course, is the reason for the prohibition of murder immediately after the flood in Genesis 9: Third, in a text very conscious of chronology and sequence, it is important to note that Noah was five hundred years old Genesis 5: This would allow up to one hundred years during which Noah was building the ark and preparing for the flood. The story thus presents a century of mercy, during which everyone who cared to learn of the coming judgment, symbolized by the ark that was under construction, could learn of it from Noah. Unlike the Utnapishtim story, there was no command to keep this a secret. Finally, God could not have ended that generation and its murderous inclinations without destroying it entirely. Note that the text never states that children were killed. This is not to deny that the picture evoked would have included whole families. Rather, it stresses the terrible consequences of murder and violence in the eyes of God. Neither the murders by Cain or Lamech ended in their own deaths. But this merciful act of God only led to greater and greater violence. Dawkins has a better solution to end this growing cycle of bloodletting. The author of Genesis did not. That world ended and a new one was created, beginning with the righteousness of Noah. Dawkins then turns his attention to Lot and his daughters in Genesis First, the purpose

of these stories is not to present the ideals of how women or men should be treated in ancient Israel. It is to describe the ultimate in the lack of hospitality in both Sodom and Gibeon. Common morality throughout the ancient world and in Israel demanded that anyone visiting a town should be shown courtesy and hospitality. The evil men of both of these towns were not lusty homosexuals but rather those who rejected this tenet of common morality and sought to degrade and abuse visitors. In both cases their utter violation of hospitality brought terrible judgment upon them, their town and for the incident of Judges 19 their tribe. This selfishness and lack of concern for the vulnerable lies behind Ezekiel. No text in the Bible presents Lot or the Levite as moral ideals. Rather, these texts describe corruption and degeneration on both sides. It is probably for this reason that those who constructed the order of the canon for the Christian Old Testament chose to put Ruth immediately after Judges. The scroll of Ruth describes a beautiful love story of faith in which a Moabitess freely takes on devotion to the God of Israel out of love for her mother-in-law, and through this act comes to fall in love with Boaz of Bethlehem. The presentation here is less about the role of women or men, and more about living in a world where love, peace and family can still exist as values despite the presence of cruelty and violence. Hitchens begins his attack on the Old Testament with a critique of the Ten Commandments as found in Exodus. The text does not make this claim. In this context of a covenant it refers to disloyalty, and the greatest disloyalty toward God is the abandonment of this deity to worship other gods. Thus, this is not a slight or insignificant offense. In treaty literature, hating someone creates an enemy and provides justification for war against them and for their death. Second, there is a reason for the third and fourth generation, rather than for the first and second or some later set of generations. It defines the length of time that people might expect to live so they could see their grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Thus the text is suggesting that the effect of someone turning away from God will affect their family for as long as they live. This is not the transference of guilt, which the Hebrew text does not claim. It is instead the inevitable impact parents and grandparents have on their families; something Mr. Hitchens does not mention. This is clear from the manner in which Abraham was Promised Land, descendants and blessing as he remained faithful to God in test after test Genesis 12. The stipulation that this should take place one day in every seven is unknown outside the Bible. No Babylonian or Assyrian ever mandated a period of rest like this. It is unheard of and unique to ancient Israel. That such an amazing mercy for the most vulnerable elements in society should be interpreted as characteristic power madness by an ancient Near Eastern dictators demonstrates just how far Hitchens has wandered from a correct understanding of the culture the Bible was written in. Because of this ignorance the contextual significance of the Sabbath law is turned upside down and ascribed the opposite of the intended meaning, which would have been clear to any slave in the ancient world. I could go on and examine each of the charges with a point by point refutation. However, the limitations of space do not permit this. Instead, I have chosen three well-known books and examined the first one or two charges against the Old Testament in each. Careful study of the text and its context consistently reveal the opposite of the intended allegations. I will now turn to three major issues of the Old Testament: For more of this see Richard S. Houghton Mifflin,

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problems in the critical task of old testament ethics Once the ethical nature of OT material has been determined and described, there follows an evaluative task. Such a task is not to be understood as setting human wisdom above divine revelation as though human beings were in a position to improve God's word.

Development of the Hebrew Bible canon , Development of the Old Testament canon , Septuagint , and Books of the Latin Vulgate The interrelationship between various significant ancient manuscripts of the Old Testament, according to the Encyclopaedia Biblica Some manuscripts are identified by their siglum. LXX here denotes the original Septuagint. The process by which scriptures became canons and Bibles was a long one, and its complexities account for the many different Old Testaments which exist today. Lim, a professor of Hebrew Bible and Second Temple Judaism at the University of Edinburgh , identifies the Old Testament as "a collection of authoritative texts of apparently divine origin that went through a human process of writing and editing. By about the 5th century BC Jews saw the five books of the Torah the Old Testament Pentateuch as having authoritative status; by the 2nd century BC the Prophets had a similar status, although without quite the same level of respect as the Torah; beyond that, the Jewish scriptures were fluid, with different groups seeing authority in different books. Septuagint and Masoretic Text Hebrew texts commenced to be translated into Greek in Alexandria in about 300 BC and continued until about 100 BC. The Septuagint was originally used by Hellenized Jews whose knowledge of Greek was better than Hebrew. But the texts came to be used predominantly by gentile converts to Christianity and by the early Church as its scripture, Greek being the lingua franca of the early Church. The three most acclaimed early interpreters were Aquila of Sinope , Symmachus the Ebionite , and Theodotion ; in his Hexapla , Origen placed his edition of the Hebrew text beside its transcription in Greek letters and four parallel translations: The so-called "fifth" and "sixth editions" were two other Greek translations supposedly miraculously discovered by students outside the towns of Jericho and Nicopolis: Athanasius [21] recorded Alexandrian scribes around preparing Bibles for Constans. Little else is known, though there is plenty of speculation. For example, it is speculated that this may have provided motivation for canon lists, and that Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus are examples of these Bibles. Deuterocanonical books and Vulgate In Western Christianity or Christianity in the Western half of the Roman Empire , Latin had displaced Greek as the common language of the early Christians, and in AD Pope Damasus I commissioned Jerome , the leading scholar of the day, to produce an updated Latin bible to replace the Vetus Latina , which was a Latin translation of the Septuagint. At much the same time as the Septuagint was being produced, translations were being made into Aramaic, the language of Jews living in Palestine and the Near East and likely the language of Jesus: Christian views on the Old Covenant Christianity is based on the belief that the historical Jesus is also the Christ , as in the Confession of Peter. This belief is in turn based on Jewish understandings of the meaning of the Hebrew term messiah , which, like the Greek "Christ", means "anointed". In the Hebrew Scriptures it describes a king anointed with oil on his accession to the throne: By the time of Jesus, some Jews expected that a flesh and blood descendant of David the " Son of David " would come to establish a real Jewish kingdom in Jerusalem, instead of the Roman province. None predicted a Messiah who suffers and dies for the sins of all the people.

Chapter 4 : Old Testament on the Issues

10 problems with Old Testament teaching August 31, David Murray 12 comments Ten years ago I was asked by my church in Scotland to put together the Old Testament courses for our fledgling Free Church Seminary.

Does your political party, politicians, clergy, teachers, professors, news-media follow G-d? Please strive to live a G-d pleasing life including how you vote! Killing innocent, defenseless unborn babies. What party or politician favors this? Why have you let the boys live? What political party or politician is against this? No one was at war with him during those years, for the LORD gave him rest. The land is still ours, because we have sought the LORD our God; we sought him and he has given us rest on every side. All these were brave fighting men. On that day thoughts will come into your mind and you will devise an evil scheme. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your families, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes. The officers posted themselves behind all the people of Judah 17 who were building the wall. Those who carried materials did their work with one hand and held a weapon in the other, 18 and each of the builders wore his sword at his side as he worked. But the man who sounded the trumpet stayed with me. Our God will fight for us! His fame spread far and wide, for he was greatly helped until he became powerful. He was unfaithful to the Lord his God, and entered the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense. That is for the priests, the descendants of Aaron, who have been consecrated to burn incense. Leave the sanctuary, for you have been unfaithful; and you will not be honored by the Lord God. Indeed, he himself was eager to leave, because the Lord had afflicted him. What political party or politician favors this? Everything on earth will perish. It was the worst storm in all the land of Egypt since it had become a nation. Then the LORD shut him in. From there the LORD scattered them over the face of the whole earth.

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Current Issues in Old Testament Scholarship on November 2nd, in Campus News Current Issues in Old Testament Scholarship Introduction Only a few years ago the topic at hand would have seemed marginal to the interests of all but specialists in the field. This is no longer the case. Books, periodicals, television specials, and screen scripts are devoted to a seemingly never-ending thirst for topics of biblical interest. Frequently these are antagonistic toward established beliefs, but on the other hand sociologists report an increasing trend toward spirituality if not toward institutional religion. Thus media attention to the Old Testament as part of the broader spectrum of this revival of interest in religion and spirituality should not be surprising. Relevance Fascination with the Old Testament springs largely from its claim to be a revelation from God. As such it has been cherished by both Judaism and Christianity. Moreover, a virtual consensus holds that the Old Testament is a major foundation stone supporting the superstructure of Western civilization. This is despite its loss of authority in the popular imagination as well as in academe. Indeed, the assertion that the Old Testament has profoundly shaped the history, culture, law, politics, and mores of both Jewish and Christian traditions as well as the secular institutions that explicitly or implicitly stand in debt to their influence is no exaggeration. Popular interest in the Bible is both generated by the media and is also responsible for unprecedented media attention. The Iran hostage crisis, the attacks, and the Iraq war have ironically drawn attention to sites of biblical significance as has the upsurge of technologies such as DNA, currently being employed to establish the antiquity and personal identities of Egyptian mummies. Persons with only a modicum of interest in the Bible are naturally drawn to such media exposure no matter their faith commitments. History of Old Testament Scholarship Modern approaches to Old Testament issues cannot be understood fully without at least brief acquaintance with the history of Old Testament scholarship, a survey for convenience divided into the Pre-Enlightenment, Enlightenment, and Post-Enlightenment periods. The first of these refers to a time when the Old Testament was taken largely at face value as the revealed word of God, infallible and authoritative in all it said. Rationalism and the scientific method ascended, relegating the Bible to the status of a purely theological treatise at best or a hopelessly irrelevant collection of myths, legends, and folk-tales at worst. First came the documentary hypothesis concerning the Pentateuch, an approach that denied its Mosaic authorship and that viewed it as a collection of originally independent traditions woven together over a period of many centuries. In its wake, a continuing spirit of skepticism denied the possibility of miracles, predictive prophecy, and special, verbal revelation. Two rivulets thus feed into contemporary biblical scholarship, the one being modern and post-modern versions of the older criticisms and the other the practice of archaeology now refined to a near-exact science. While these two at times intermingle and coincide, they also frequently go their own ways in mutually hostile opposition. Many critics summon archaeological research to put to rest biblical claims to historical authenticity and just as often, or even more so, conservative scholars invoke it to support the biblical tradition. Worse still is the proclivity of both sides to manipulate Scripture into coherence with the conclusions of archaeological method. Contemporary Issues In an increasingly naturalistic age the relevance of the Bible to everyday life in America has correspondingly decreased. This is due not only to the florescence of democratized pluralism, but to academic and political establishmentarianisms that regard the Bible as a vestige of medieval superstition unnecessary for a well-ordered society. More at blame perhaps has been the accommodation by religionists to unbelief and by bibliocentrists to a broadminded worldview that eclipses the narrowness of evangelical theology and practice. No longer is it fashionable in the intellectual world to view the Bible as magisterially relevant literature. In fact even popular culture has consigned the Bible to benign neglect, a text that at best takes its place among the curios of a past age. However, and to repeat, the media have never been more fascinated by the Bible as an object of public interest. Twentieth-first century Hollywood, followed by television and other entertainment vehicles, has produced a number of blockbuster films devoted to biblical subjects. Increasingly, however, the subject matter of such presentations has turned from rather straightforward narrations of biblical texts to creative reconstructions of those texts in a

generally controversial or even blasphemous direction. Iconoclasm and sensationalism still sell; thus when the Bible and the church have lost their magisterial standing among their own adherents, it is but a short step toward exploitation of hitherto out-of-bounds areas of sacredness in the interest of profiteering and even desecration. Competing contemporary ideologies The Old Testament Bible and the state. Though vigorous disagreement on the matter of the Christian roots of the American experiment has come to the fore in recent years, the general consensus is that the Continental Congress that drew up the articles of American federation consisted largely of Christians who undertook their task as Founders with conscious attention to scriptural principles. The very language of our founding documents puts this beyond doubt. Thus the American experiment called for a separation of church and state with respect to mutual interference. However, waves of immigration for over years have radically changed the American political and religious landscape. Diversity and pluralism have challenged the notion of any particular brand of religious authoritarianism and with it has come a decreasing role of the institutional church in political affairs. The upshot of this manifests itself in an uneasy tension between church and state, one that naturally encompasses within it the role of the Bible in political and public life. Presidents swear their oath of office with hands on a Bible, but this symbolic act rarely translates into intentional public policy. The Old Testament and the schools. Colonial American education was largely in the hands of the home and local community with little involvement by the state. Moreover, the very notion of absolute separation of church and state was unthinkable; in fact religion, particularly the Christian faith, was not only permitted in the schools, but was mandatory. The Bible was the textbook that provided instruction in faith and morals and in reading and writing as well. The establishment of the confederation of states, coupled with an increasingly diverse immigrant population, the industrial revolution, and the settlement of the West, brought an end to the concept of truly local education and the beginning of centralized standardization of every aspect of noncollegiate education. Well before the end of the 20th century, American educational policy mandated that public schools be off limits to religious expression including use of the Bible in student education. This being the case, religion, grounded in the metaphysically transcendent as it is, was barred from the classroom. Evolution, on the other hand, runs so contrary to the Old Testament account of origins and development that the latter fell into the realm of the mythical or imaginary and thus, like theism, was quickly shown the door. A reaction from the Christian community was predictable. In place of schools where their children were taught values and concepts contrary to the Bible and the Christian faith, Evangelicals in particular have created Christian schools or home schooling, both of which have grown exponentially. The Old Testament and the church. Most ironic of all, the Bible, especially the Old Testament, has come to be scorned even within some circles of the church. Theological liberalism plays a significant role in this lack of interest in the Scriptures and the corollary disregard of its claims to authority. A holy book of uncertain origins and unreliable transmission can hardly become the bedrock of a viable faith. But the matter cannot rest there. At one time the Old Testament, though regarded as less relevant than the New Testament for Christian faith, nevertheless provided lessons for morality and bases for proper behavior. However, compared to the Gospels and the epistles, the Old Testament seemed dull and dry, the relic of a religion long past its prime and with little or no practical relevance to the modern world. Preachers avoided its texts and laity despaired of ever understanding its arcane practices. Thus three-quarters of the Bible was benignly allowed to die, buried by its own weightiness. It is acceptable as moralistic Sunday school material but not as a text to be proclaimed as the Word of God to the church. Nothing comparable to the sensationalism attendant to the Jesus Seminar, the James ossuary, the Shroud of Turin, and other New Testament topics has yet developed with regard to media handling of the Old Testament. Greater interest accrues to political events surrounding modern Israel and its claims to territory based largely on Old Testament promises. These range from the fundamental right of Israel to exist, to the occupation and settlement of the West Bank, to preparations by the Temple Institute to construct the Third Temple on the site of the Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa Mosque. Those committed to these ideals use the Old Testament to justify any course of action that brings to pass the fulfillment of its prophetic texts. Those who have a lesser view of its authority and who deem its pre-exilic history to be but myth and legend view any use of the Bible for political purposes as misguided at best. In almost inverse proportion to their coverage in the popular media are the number and

significance of archaeological finds in the last thirty years that have enormous bearing on both the understanding of the Old Testament and its shoring up as a reliable historical account. The following list is illustrative of a much larger corpus. The size is approximately the same; it consists of two chambers, the Holy Place and Most Holy Place; and it clearly accommodated cultic features like those described in the Bible. Thus the notion that Israel had a temple in the 10th century rests on very firm ground. Study showed it to be an Aramaic text from about B. This puts the historical existence of David beyond doubt and furthermore shows him to be so powerful a figure that the nation was named for him. Just west of Abydos in southern Egypt, this site yielded an alphabetic inscription carved on the underface of a ledge. However, the Wadi Hol example is at least years older, from the time of Jacob and his sons in Egypt. A former argument that Moses could not have written the Torah in alphabetic form that early ca. Excavation of a tomb overlooking the Hinnom Valley in Jerusalem brought to light a small silver scroll containing a tiny inscription bearing the words of the priestly benediction of Numbers 6: Not only does this shed light on Hebrew orthography and morphology, but also its date ca. Among a multitude of issues that could be addressed relative to the academy and particularly to Evangelicalism are the following. Erosion of biblical authority. Though the documentary hypothesis and other regnant 20th-century methods of accounting for Old Testament texts have lost favor, no corresponding return to the Bible as the basis of ultimate truth has emerged. In fact, skepticism has never been more rampant than today, particularly in areas of science and history. The social sciences too have led to new ways of reading Old Testament laws and customs because of their alleged homophobic, antifeminist, and militaristic overtones. In this view only a Bible deconstructed so as to rid itself of these embarrassments can speak with authority. Mainstream religious traditions have long embraced evolution as a replacement for biblical creationism. The BioLogos Foundation founded by Francis Collins is spearheading this approach, one being endorsed in principle by a number of evangelical theologians. The historicity of the Old Testament has been seriously questioned for years, but not to the degree current in the past 25 years. The narratives purporting to recount history are no more than political propaganda designed to justify Jewish occupation of the land in postexilic times. Remarkably, this interpretation is being employed today with the unintended or intended? Thus the antiquity of the patriarchal promises, channeled through the prophets, is without substantiality since they lack genuine historical grounding. Sadly some dabble in minimalism as though theology and history can be viewed as parallel universes. This has been the story of Christian scholarship since its beginnings; hence the need for unending introspection and reassessment lest the ancient moorings be cut loose and the vessel of truth and authority be scuttled. Since the author is a committed evangelical, there should be no surprise that this essay embodies a subtext of warning and exhortation, one directed especially toward his young evangelical colleagues. This information was created for his presentation at the national meeting of the Evangelical Press Association in Irving, Texas.

Chapter 6 : Old Testament - Wikipedia

Does your political party, politicians, clergy, teachers, professors, news-media follow G-d? Please strive to live a G-d pleasing life including how you vote!

Menaklukan Pemerintahan Iblis yang Guided by the author of this volume and my own thoughts as to what may be of most value, I have chosen to focus on three items that might assist us in appreciating some of the major apologetics issues for this era. I will begin with a consideration of some of the chief issues addressed more popularly in recent pro-atheist books. I will then consider the so-called minimalists and criticisms of the historical witness of the Bible. Finally, I will look at perhaps the most important apologetic issue in the Old Testament, that of Deuteronomy, Joshua and divinely ordained genocide. So I will attempt to focus on some of the main charges in three well-known books by authors also famous for taking this position: Sam Harris, *The End of Faith: How Religion Poisons Everything*. A favorite text is Deuteronomy The latter of course is an obvious error by Harris. It may have been used to justify the Inquisition, but that does not mean it was interpreted correctly. In fact, to apply this text to a young participant in yoga is misleading. Fourth, all this ignores the ancient context of this legislation. Deuteronomy is presented as an ideal set of laws and punishments in an ideal theocracy where the nation follows God. This is not unique. The legal collection of Hammurabi, hundreds of years earlier, functioned in a similar manner. It was an ideal set of laws designed to demonstrate the justice and righteousness of the king. Despite thousands of Old Babylonian texts, including court decisions, we have virtually no certain example in which this legal collection was appealed to in order to adjudicate a specific case. The same is virtually true of Deuteronomy. In fact, if we were to read the history of Israel in the Old Testament the picture is not that of a people fearfully observing this law lest they face death at the hands of their own family. The reality as presented is just the opposite. In every generation huge numbers of the people turn away from God with impunity. In fact, the era of Ahab and Jezebel is one of the few where their assassinations at the hands of Jehu are attributed in part to their sin. Mercy triumphs over judgment, as it does so often in the Old Testament. At one point, in Deuteronomy But later God promises that he will circumcise the hearts of the people Deuteronomy Yes, we can cherry pick harsh texts in the Bible. However, in the larger context the picture is different. God is characterized by mercy rather than judgment Hosea 6: A few points escape Mr. First, according to the text God created all these people and thus holds an implicit right over their existence. Second, the rationale for the flood was the violence that filled the earth so that, with the exception of Noah, all the people devoted themselves to violence Genesis 6: Unlike the comparable ancient Near Eastern flood account that Dawkins cites Utnapishtim of the seventh-century b. Epic of Gilgamesh , the flood did not come because the gods were fed up with the noise of so many people i. Rather, the Bible ascribes a moral cause, uncontrolled murder. This, of course, is the reason for the prohibition of murder immediately after the flood in Genesis 9: Third, in a text very conscious of chronology and sequence, it is important to note that Noah was five hundred years old Genesis 5: This would allow up to one hundred years during which Noah was building the ark and preparing for the flood. The story thus presents a century of mercy, during which everyone who cared to learn of the coming judgment, symbolized by the ark that was under construction, could learn of it from Noah. Unlike the Utnapishtim story, there was no command to keep this a secret. Finally, God could not have ended that generation and its murderous inclinations without destroying it entirely. Note that the text never states that children were killed. This is not to deny that the picture evoked would have included whole families. Rather, it stresses the terrible consequences of murder and violence in the eyes of God. Neither the murders by Cain or Lamech ended in their own deaths. But this merciful act of God only led to greater and greater violence. Dawkins has a better solution to end this growing cycle of bloodletting. The author of Genesis did not. That world ended and a new one was created, beginning with the righteousness of Noah. Dawkins then turns his attention to Lot and his daughters in Genesis First, the purpose of these stories is not to present the ideals of how women or men should be treated in ancient Israel. It is to describe the ultimate in the lack of hospitality in both Sodom and Gibeon. Common morality throughout the ancient world and in Israel demanded that anyone visiting a town should be shown courtesy and

hospitality. The evil men of both of these towns were not lusty homosexuals but rather those who rejected this tenet of common morality and sought to degrade and abuse visitors. In both cases their utter violation of hospitality brought terrible judgment upon them, their town and for the incident of Judges 19 their tribe. This selfishness and lack of concern for the vulnerable lies behind Ezekiel No text in the Bible presents Lot or the Levite as moral ideals. Rather, these texts describe corruption and degeneration on both sides. It is probably for this reason that those who constructed the order of the canon for the Christian Old Testament chose to put Ruth immediately after Judges. The scroll of Ruth describes a beautiful love story of faith in which a Moabitess freely takes on devotion to the God of Israel out of love for her mother-in-law, and through this act comes to fall in love with Boaz of Bethlehem. The presentation here is less about the role of women or men, and more about living in a world where love, peace and family can still exist as values despite the presence of cruelty and violence. Hitchens begins his attack on the Old Testament with a critique of the Ten Commandments as found in Exodus The text does not make this claim. In this context of a covenant it refers to disloyalty, and the greatest disloyalty toward God is the abandonment of this deity to worship other gods. Thus, this is not a slight or insignificant offense. In treaty literature, hating someone creates an enemy and provides justification for war against them and for their death. Second, there is a reason for the third and fourth generation, rather than for the first and second or some later set of generations. It defines the length of time that people might expect to live so they could to see their grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Thus the text is suggesting that the effect of someone turning away from God will affect their family for as long as they live. This is not the transference of guilt, which the Hebrew text does not claim. It is instead the inevitable impact parents and grandparents have on their families; something Mr. Hitchens does not mention. This is clear from the manner in which Abraham was Promised Land, descendants and blessing as he remained faithful to God in test after test Genesis 12” The stipulation that this should take place one day in every seven is unknown outside the Bible. No Babylonian or Assyrian ever mandated a period of rest like this. It is unheard of and unique to ancient Israel. That such an amazing mercy for the most vulnerable elements in society should be interpreted as characteristic power madness by an ancient Near Eastern dictators demonstrates just how far Hitchens has wandered from a correct understanding of the culture the Bible was written in. Because of this ignorance the contextual significance of the Sabbath law is turned upside down and ascribed the opposite of the intended meaning, which would have been clear to any slave in the ancient world. I could go on and examine each of the charges with a point by point refutation. However, the limitations of space do not permit this. Instead, I have chosen three well-known books and examined the first one or two charges against the Old Testament in each. Careful study of the text and its context consistently reveal the opposite of the intended allegations. I will now turn to three major issues of the Old Testament: For more of this see Richard S. Houghton Mifflin, Hitchens, God Is Not Great, pp.

Chapter 7 : Current Issues in Old Testament Scholarship - DTS Voice

Modern approaches to Old Testament issues cannot be understood fully without at least brief acquaintance with the history of Old Testament scholarship, a survey for convenience divided into the Pre-Enlightenment, Enlightenment, and Post-Enlightenment periods.

Yesterday, Hess began this series with a consideration of some of the chief issues addressed more popularly in recent pro-atheist books. Tomorrow, Hess will discuss perhaps the most important apologetic issue in the Old Testament, that of Deuteronomy, Joshua and divinely ordained genocide. Minimalists and the Old Testament The issue of minimalism, or more accurately the question of the historical value of the Bible, has changed over the years in terms of the focus of ancient Israelite history. For example, in the mid-20th century the major concern was whether the patriarchs of Genesis 12-36 had any historical claim to its tradition. This was countered by a series of studies that demonstrated that the quantity and quality of many parallels in the early second millennium b.c. Behind this lay assumptions that no significant writing existed in Israel before the Hellenistic period, that there was no ethnic connection between Palestinian Jews of the third century b.c. Thus all history writing in the Old Testament, including that of the postexilic period, was called into question and regarded as fairy tales. While each of these criticisms has its own significance and remains important up to the present, I can only consider something of the last and latest controversy. This view was popularized by the writings of the Tel Aviv University archaeologist Israel Finkelstein and the popular writer on archaeology Neil Asher Silberman. They accepted that the writings of Genesis were fiction but rejected the assumptions that the later periods of the Old Testament also lacked any historical worth. The assumption was that c. The farther back in time one went, the less historical value was present that could be ascribed to the writings. Thus the claims of Genesis and the first six or seven books of the Old Testament were almost entirely fiction, or at least legend whose kernels of truth were largely unrecoverable. There was a David and probably a Solomon who ruled in Jerusalem, but over a small kingdom rather than a great empire. Omri and Ahab provide the beginnings of historical worth in the northern kingdom of Israel, while late-eighth-century Hezekiah begins something approaching history in the southern kingdom of Judah. Although there is reason to challenge some of these findings, they have become the accepted dogma in mainstream biblical criticism. However, they tend to revolve around the question of whether the written or oral traditions may have some claim to antiquity and authenticity. Insofar as historical worth is based on two or more independent witnesses, the earliest undoubted witness outside the Bible to a specific event attested in the Old Testament is the attack of Pharaoh Sheshonq also called Shishak against Palestine in 586 b.c. However, this does not invalidate anything purported to appear earlier in the biblical text. It simply means that we do not have an independent witness. If a text concurs with history where it can be checked, it may be reasonable to assume that the burden of proof lies with those who would argue for the absence of historicity elsewhere in the same context. For example, the Bible claims that David and his son Solomon ruled over a kingdom that at various times comprised some or all of the modern state of Israel as well as regions beyond see 2 Samuel 5; 8; Is there any basis for this claim? Several lines of evidence bear on this question. First, it is important to note that the period that the Bible assigns these rulers to, the late eleventh century down to 586 b.c. This was true of Egypt and the Hittites, who had earlier impacted this region. Egypt was in decline and the Hittite empire had collapsed near two centuries earlier. Assyria and Babylonia were yet to rise to sufficient strength so as to influence the southern Levant. The Arameans are attested as early as three centuries before the eleventh century and gain in strength at this time. Like Israel did, they also took control in the power vacuum left by a diminished Egypt. In the low-land region of Edom south of the Dead Sea, tenth-century b.c. During the eleventh and tenth centuries b.c. The expansion and strength of the Philistines at this time is well documented. Hazor, Megiddo and Gezer were diverse architecturally; respectively, an Israelite settlement, a Canaanite city-state and a Philistine dependency. However, in the mid-tenth century b.c. As noted in 1 Kings 9: Their emergent uniformity of major structures suggests the formation of a single state in this area. Further, the fact that domestic architecture is not common in Solomonic Hazor or Megiddo nor that there is any nearby population center at Megiddo suggests that these were built and

controlled by a larger territorial state, such as that described in Samuel and Kings. Located in Jerusalem, it suggests the center of a supraregional state. Thompson, *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives*: Yale University Press, However, similar authors and arguments would be used in the s, when the term began to be used. See especially the numerous studies collected in Alan R. Millard and Donald J. Eisenbrauns, ; Richard S. Hess, Philip Satterthwaite and Gordon Wenham, eds. *Biblical Themes from Genesis*, 2nd ed. Baker, ; and Alan R. Hoffmeier and David W. A single-authored work that represents the finest example of applying ancient Near Eastern studies to the Bible is Kenneth A. Eerdmans, , esp. *Background and Beginnings of Israelite History and Identity*, trans. Westminster John Knox, ; Philip R. Westminster John Knox, On literacy see Richard S. Philips Long, David W. Baker, and Gordon J. Eerdmans, , pp. On the general questions of authentic historical memory, see the following footnotes. Among the monographs see among others William G. Eerdmans, ; William G. Eerdmans, ; Kitchen, *Reliability of the Old Testament*. At least four conferences have produced important sets of papers challenging this critical approach. See the essays in Long, Baker and Wenham, ed. Hoffmeier and Alan Millard, ed. *Reassessing Methodologies and Assumptions*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, ; Richard S. Klingbeil and Paul J. Eisenbrauns, ; Daniel I. Cribb and Gregory S. *Ancient Kingdom or Late Invention?* See also the important collection of John Day, ed. Eisenbrauns, , pp. Killebrew, *Biblical Peoples and Ethnicity*: Society of Biblical Literature, , pp. *Facts On File*, , pp. Sheffield Academic Press, , pp. Note that Finkelstein and Silberman, David and Solomon, would date the gates a century later. For a tenth-century b.

Chapter 8 : Books of the Bible List Order - Complete New and Old Testament

An apologetics addendum on matters relating to the Old Testament can include a great variety of items. Guided by the author of this volume and my own thoughts as to what may be of most value, I have chosen to focus on three items that might assist us in appreciating some of the major apologetics issues for this era.

The use of the Old Testament Scriptures by the church of Christ has been the subject of some debate from the early church fathers up to the present day. The debate is primarily concerned with the question of what writings are truly in the canon of the Old Testament Scriptures. Augustine seemed to consider church reception to be sufficient warrant for canonical authority; this he gave as the reason for accepting the Maccabean books as canonical. Some held that the canon was extensive enough to encompass all the books read in the church for edification, which would include the Apocrypha and sometimes the Pseudipigrapha anonymous apocalyptic writings. Others held that the canon was simply that of the Jewish Bible, representing also the Protestant Bibles of today. In when the Council of Trent made a formal statement that all not accepting the selected Apocryphal writings should be damned, the Protestants retorted with an equally resolute voice. The question of canonicity is completely valid. If there are disputes about what is Scripture, the validity of faith itself is greatly at stake. The Concept of the Old Testament Canon How ironic it is that evangelicals today base their beliefs solely on Scripture, and yet their canon was recognized by tradition. The way that canon was regarded in history past plays an integral role in the recognition of the canon. The tradition and authority of the people of God throughout history have attested that there was a group of writings, divinely inspired, which were recognizable as such. The internal evidence within the Old Testament itself affirms that it is Scripture. Beckwith says of this period that. The number of references to the Old Testament by New Testament writers is abundant, and it attests to the fact that there was an established canon at the time of their writing. Probably the fullest evidence in secular writings on the concept of there being a canon is in the work of Josephus. In Against Apion 1. This list is identical to the Jewish and Christian canon with one exception, that of omitting either the Song of Songs or Ecclesiastes. The Construct of the Old Testament Canon Not only does the literature testify to the concept of there being a canon, but also to the construction of that canon as being in three parts: This is a method of arranging the various books evidenced from many sources outside the canon itself. The earliest evidence is from the prologue to the book Ecclesiasticus which specifically mentions three times the three parts of the canon. Jesus Himself, the most authoritative witness for the Christian, states in Luke He said in Luke Judas Maccabaeus and his associates, in BC, compiled a list of the Prophets and Hagiographa at least years prior to the generally assumed date of the closing of the canon AD 90, at the Synod of Jamnia. The historical book of 2 Maccabees 2: If therefore ye have need thereof, send some to fetch them unto you. The manner in which Judas Maccabaeus did his work was presumably by compiling a list, not by combining books in large scrolls. If Judas gave such structure to the canon, he must have had a definite collection of writings to work on. The relevancy that there was an established order--even though that order was different for different people--implies that the books in that order, however arranged, were recognized as canonical and that the canon was closed at the time of its ordering. The number of the books is also a relevant issue, and the evidence shows that the number of the canonical books was always assumed to be 22 or The books themselves were the same in both renderings; they would simply be grouped differently. Theoretically, this must be true, but actually, a book of Scripture was considered to be such by virtue of the authority of the human author. So while the Pentateuch was completed with the death of Moses, and the Prophets and the Hagiographa with their authors, the recognition of their canonicity may have been centuries after their actual completion. The secular motifs in these books were the leading cause of concern to some scholars as well as was the apparent contradictions with other canonical books which were not disputed. The disputes themselves imply that the books in question were considered canonical, because contradictions in un-inspired texts would have been assumed, and therefore, non-existent. It is usually assumed that the presence of the dispute proves that the canon was still open and up for grabs and that it was not settled until the Council of Jamnia in AD The motivation behind such an assertion is the desire to canonize some Apocryphal and books of the

Pseudepigrapha as well. Beckwith makes a good argument¹⁴ that Ezekiel was not debated, it being part of the already closed Prophets, and not the Hagiographa, which was the subject of debate at Jamnia. In particular only the Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes were debated, or according to the Rabbi Akiba, only Ecclesiastes. No one in Israel has ever doubted that the Song of Solomon defiles the hands [i. For no day in the history of the world is worth the day when the Song of Solomon was given to Israel. For all the Hagiographa are holy, but the Song of Solomon is a holy of holies. If there has been any dispute, it referred only to Ecclesiastes. So they disputed and they decided. Why did they not withdraw it? Because the beginning and the end of it consist of words of the law. For two factors helped, says Pfeiffer: In ancient times, when books had to be copied laboriously by hand on papyrus or parchment, no literary work could survive for a few centuries unless it had attained considerable circulation. We may wonder, for instance, why Esther should have survived among the Jews, while Judith perished, since the appeal of both was mainly patriotic. The confusion comes in that many of the books in question are impeccable historical sources, and are true in what they say, but truth does not necessarily equate with canonicity. The books such as 1 Maccabees, Judith, Wisdom of Solomon, and Ecclesiasticus, just to name a few, contain great value in and of themselves. But value is not enough to warrant canonicity. Even within the book of such value as Ecclesiasticus are personal biases that Holy Scripture would not commend. If they suspect this let them examine carefully the codices of our enemies the Jews. There let them read those things of which we have made mention. Jerome yielded to the popular request in furnishing a translation to the church at large but never permitted his scholarly convictions to yield to the point of recognizing these books as canonical. Most of these writings were midrash on canonized books and logically therefore would not be Scripture. For if the Pseudepigrapha contained a copy of a canonical book as well as commentary on it, why would it not negate the original canonical book, because the Pseudepigrapha with its inspired commentary would be much more valuable? To quote what is true in Scripture is different than saying that what is quoted is Scripture. Even Paul quoted a pagan poet in Acts. The Pharisees, the Sadducees and the Essenes also all recognized a closed canon and generally saw that prophecy had ceased before the Pseudepigrapha and Apocrypha were even written. None of the Pseudepigrapha and Apocrypha were in the canon of the Jews and it was to this canon that Jesus Himself and the Apostles appealed. Implications and Conclusions The implications of such a study are two-fold. For those who have held that the writings other than the Jewish and Protestant Old Testament are inspired, there needs to be serious reconsideration. Jesus Himself implied that the last prophet was Zechariah in the book of Chronicles. The previous section alone is sufficient to warrant solemn attention. The value of the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha is not the question but only whether they were even candidates for canonicity. There is no shame in a change of position, only in resolute rejection of the historical and logical data. For those who have held to the Jewish and Protestant Old Testament there is the implication of comfort, assurance, as well as a deepening devotion to what God has not only seen fit to reveal to us, but that which He has seen fit to uphold and confirm to us through many different agencies. Wilbur Gingrich, and Fredrick W. Eerdmans, , 2 4 Beckwith, 5 5 Dillard, Raymond B. An Introduction to the Old Testament. Zondervan, , 6 Beckwith, 71,

Chapter 9 : Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate - Gerhard Hasel - Google Books

The Old Testament goes hand in hand with the New. If Jesus referred to blog.quintoapp.comally Creation as being an actual fact, then we need to accept it as well. I know some Believers who take some Books of the OT with a grain of salt.

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When one considers how often people invoke biblical teachings in matters of morality, it seems that biblical ethics would be an inviting terrain for scholars to explore. Yet there is a perplexing scarcity of comprehensive, systematic studies of the material. In discussing Old Testament ethics, we are not faced with the usual problem of trying to pick out a consensus from a welter of diverging viewpoints and methods. When one considers how often people invoke biblical teachings in matters of morality, it seems that biblical ethics would be an inviting terrain for scholars to explore. Several general treatments of Old Testament ethics appeared around the beginning of this century -- W. But to my knowledge the only study devoted to Old Testament ethics since is a German monograph of less than pages, written in by Hendrik van Oyen as part of a series on the general history of ethics in the West. The situation is only slightly better in the field of New Testament studies, although there also the several systematic overviews are all rather too concise. When biblical scholars have interested themselves in ethical studies, they have tended to focus on rather specific, narrow topics: Many also address problems tangential to ethics: What is missing is the effort to bring these aspects together and to examine the ways in which they interrelate in a general system of ethics. Perhaps we can find part of the reason for this lack in a statement made by ethicist James Gustafson: A person venturesome enough to engage in interdisciplinary work runs the risk of being tagged a dilettante by colleagues in each discipline. But the root problem is how to conceive and conduct the work. Biblical studies and ethics do not mate easily; each has a quite different purpose, method, set of presuppositions and subject matter. One way to demonstrate both the dilemma and the possibilities of biblical ethics is to retrace my own efforts to acquire an understanding of the field. From my first exposure to the critical study of the Old Testament in seminary, I found certain of its moral teachings and its general view of humanity and community attractive, indeed compelling. Yet like most seminary students I had little more than the standard introductory courses in ethics, and nothing at all in biblical ethics specifically. My graduate training focused almost entirely on. It was not until a few years into my teaching career that I was able to indulge my fancy by teaching a trial course at the seminary and graduate levels. That I survived that first stumbling attempt to put together an overall approach to biblical ethics -- indeed to experiment with whether there could be said to exist such a discipline -- I owe to the goodwill of those first students. What I needed was a second graduate education in ethics. I decided instead to devote a sabbatical in to as much reading in the field as I could manage. With the advice of some colleagues I tackled a mass of materials ranging from Aristotelian ethics to contemporary analytical philosophy and phenomenological thought. The readings included key contributions in both philosophical and theological ethics. I sought to familiarize myself with these intellectual traditions, to ascertain what were the recurrent issues in the study of ethics and to identify categories and methods which could be helpful in conducting a study of biblical ethics. This reading had a rather sobering effect on me, and I was tempted to abandon the whole project. To my knowledge, there is no other field in which graduate students, often at the point of their doctoral examinations, are expected to define their discipline -- both its subject matter and the viable ways to approach it. Actually, this is not an inherent weakness; more disciplines could benefit from the kind of self-criticism that ethics applies to its presuppositions, purposes and analytical means. An obvious change in the study of religious ethics during the past couple of decades is its drift from its traditional moorings in the study of theology. This change is reflected in the curricula of many seminaries and divinity schools today: To be sure, many theologians and other nonethicists cannot understand this shift and are still reluctant to grant ethics separate status. Does not ethics serve as the practical application of theological truths? Most ethicists seem unwilling to view the matter this simplistically. They must often make use of several nontheological disciplines in their work, such as sociology, anthropology, economics, jurisprudence, political science,

philosophy and phenomenology. They may frequently engage moral questions in institutional contexts where the theological warrants for a specific ethical issue may not be honored -- as when they advise on matters of medical ethics, public policy and ecological practice. In addition, an apparent shift in the self-understanding of the field of ethics has occurred. Ethicists today consider their area not just the normative task of what people ought to do and why but also the analytic and descriptive enterprise of how and why people in fact do act. Ethics entails critical reflection on the social dimensions of moral behavior, the constitution of meaning by both the individual and the group, the identification of values underlying moral action, the use of warrants in grounding these values, the operation of norms and principles in a changing and diversified world and similar issues. By no means are all ethical studies devoted to such theoretical matters, yet even the many books and articles that deal with some specific moral problem will typically address these general matters in the course of their discussions. The aim is to understand moral action in the total context of human existence, that is, in light of all the individual, social and environmental factors affecting it. For Christian ethics, the effort is to determine how certain moral behavior is consistent with, or even perhaps required by, the tenets of Christian faith. At the outset we must recognize that the Bible is neither an ethical treatise nor a handbook of morals. For that matter, it can scarcely be considered a theological work -- that is, a critical, systematic study of the deity and of the relationship between the divine sphere and all other spheres of existence. Rather, the Bible is a gathering of traditional materials that gradually emerged among the people of ancient Israel and early Christianity and eventually became their authoritative statements about their God, the nature of their believing community and their terms for living. Morality and ethics, like religion and theology, are observable in this literature, but they can be recovered only with a method capable of identifying moral values in what began as folk or community literature before it was made normative as religious canon. How this task should be approached is at present a completely open question, and one that unfortunately is scarcely being addressed. Dealing with theology, Stendahl argues that the modern student of the Bible must distinguish clearly between the descriptive task and the hermeneutic task: It should be obvious enough -- but seems not to be to some -- that one should first take pains to describe and understand the ethics of the ancient document and the people who produced it, before trying to appropriate moral norms and directives of the Bible for today. Because there has been so little comprehensive work on the ethics of the Old Testament, it would be premature to indicate any trends in understanding it. We can, however, itemize several elements that converge to make up the descriptive task, taking our examples from Old Testament materials. Most important are the moral norms and teachings in biblical literature. As central as they are, however, they are not theoretical absolutes. They are attached to explicit moral problems such as adultery, war, punishment, parent-child relations, the oppressed or defenseless in society and the use of property. The prophets often make sweeping statements about social justice, but there are always specific injustices they are trying to combat -- sometimes through rhetorical overstatement. In other words, the prophets seem to have certain general ethical principles or values in mind, yet they speak mainly in terms of concrete moral norms about specific conduct. It remains an open question whether it is the general values or the specific norms that are the universals -- if either is. By focusing on the moral dilemmas that the biblical generations faced, we can take a first step toward determining how principles and norms function in the moral life. The sociohistorical context for both these moral problems and moral norms is crucial if we are to understand what the Bible is advocating ethically. After nearly a century of form criticism, all students of the Bible are aware how much the ancient social situation affected the meaning of the literature that grew up in its midst. Ethicists must look not only at the Israelite context but also at the moral values of the surrounding culture or cultures on any given moral point, for often the biblical position is taken in direct response to some contrary moral behavior. For example, the Old Testament retains a largely disparaging ethic concerning the status and rights of women. Women were under all the obligations of the law but shared in few of the social and religious prerogatives. Yet while no excuse can be offered for the biblical ethic at this point, at least the historical and social reasons for it can be understood. Ancient Israel and its neighbors constituted a patriarchal world; at some points Egypt and Babylonia granted slightly more rights to women than did Israel. But by understanding the moral norms in Israel and early Christianity as natural products of their times, we are able to look beyond them for indications of a higher, liberating view of women.

Such a critical analysis has been done by several scholars, notably Phyllis Trible in *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* and *Fortress*. Because we cannot directly observe the behavior of biblical people or interview them about their moral values and principles, it is all the more important to study the biblical forms of moral discourse -- the many ways in which these values and judgments are expressed. More subtle is the use of narratives. The ancient people, like many today, would not be prone to distinguish sharply between morality and religion. What is morally right to do is so because God wills it or because it is consistent with the divinely ordained structure of the world. Consequently, it is especially important in biblical ethics to determine the theological warrants for morality. For example, even though the laws in the Pentateuch probably emerged gradually over the course of centuries as people sought ways to live in community, what does it mean that these laws became viewed as stemming directly from God at one point in the life of Moses? Or again, note that God is normally pictured as the supreme practitioner of the morality which humans must follow -- but that, in an interesting twist, Abraham in Gen. Such matters as revelation, divine activity, theodicy and eschatology will all be pertinent in understanding how the Old Testament theologizes its ethic. An essential part of ethics is the particular view taken of moral agency. What is the nature of humanity according to the biblical tradition? Is it possible for us to know and do the good, and therefore should each person be held fully responsible for all actions and choices? Furthermore, to what extent is it even appropriate for us to single the individual out? There will likely be quite different answers to these questions in different sections of the Bible. Within the Old Testament, for example, it appears that humans are in a position to know and do the good because of what they have experienced in their past history, but that they too often choose the wrong course nonetheless. According to the opening chapters of Genesis, humanity and all the world are created good -- but humans repeatedly choose, as they are free to do, a course which yields disruption, alienation and chaos. Inevitably, ethics involves the problem of authority. How is it that ancient Israel and early Christianity tried to secure conformity to certain moral practices and avoidance of others? Of course, the above-mentioned issue of theological warrants will loom large at this point, as will the forms of moral discourse employed in engendering and interpreting moral behavior. But one must also consider the roles played by institutions the cult, the school, the court of law, the state, family and kinship groups and key leaders including the prophets and the sages. Furthermore, it is very important to consider tradition in this regard; that is, the way in which the heritage from the past functions for each new generation -- sometimes being appropriated rather fully, sometimes being rejected or ignored and other times being creatively reinterpreted in the new situation. Values, attitudes and lifestyles can often be instilled in the succeeding generation by subtle means of inculcation and regimentation. The subtle as well as the more obvious techniques of persuasion, coercion and legal controls are part of the functioning of morality. Finally, at the very heart of biblical ethics lie the fundamental values that infuse moral conduct and principles. These are not the first but rather among the last things that the ethicist will be able to determine. Such moral values involve an essential preference given to a particular way of existing in the world. Values are not the same thing as religious beliefs or practices, although they will be related to them. Values are also not mere ideas. They are oriented toward the concrete conditions of life and lie behind our choosing, acting and finding meaning in our situation. Among such fundamental values observable in Old Testament morality are the following: Such values, while not all present at every point of Old Testament morality, do in fact underlie the bulk of the moral norms and principles we find there.