



7: "The Bible is a holy book."

"Whenever we read the obscene stories, the voluptuous debaucheries, the cruel and torturous executions, the unrelenting vindictiveness, with which more than half the Bible is filled, it would be more consistent that we called it the word of a demon, than the word of God. It is a history of wickedness, that has served to corrupt and brutalize mankind ... it is a book of lies, wickedness, and blasphemy; for what can be greater blasphemy than to ascribe the wickedness of man to the orders of the Almighty?"

—Thomas Paine, American Patriot,
The Age of Reason

Not having the hubris to compete with the great Mr. Paine's condemnations, I shall content myself with brief vignettes illustrating the nefarious character of a few supposed heroes from the founding document of the world's patriarchal religions.

Obnoxious Noah

Stories of a great flood can be found in the folk tales of almost every culture, so it could be possible that there was a time when much of Earth's current landmass was temporarily underwater. Exactly what historical time that was, however, is questionable as there is no "official" record of any such phenomena, and "the Egyptian civilization was in a particularly flourishing state at this very time and was building its pyramids."¹

There are many reasons why we also must assume that much of the story of Noah's ark is fabrication. One such reason is the clear impossibility of Noah collecting a pair of every species when many species only live above the Arctic Circle, deep in the jungles of South America, or in the Australian outback. Another reason is the preposterous size of an ark capable of holding —and storing a year's provisions for — every known species ...

there are over 250,000 species of beetles alone! But let us chalk all that up to the natural tendency for storytellers to exaggerate, and consider instead what sort of man Jehovah supposedly picked to save the human race.

For being the first leader mentioned in the Bible, there is precious little written about Noah. According to Genesis, Noah was the son of Lamech and the grandson of Methuselah. At the age of 500, he had three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. When Jehovah decided to start the world over again, he chose Noah (now 600 years old) to carry on the human race because "Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generations." [GEN 6:9]

One of the strangest stories in the Bible occurs after the flood business is over. Noah became a farmer. "He planted a vineyard; and he drank of the wine, and became drunk, and lay uncovered in his tent. And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside. Then Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it upon both their shoulders, and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father; their faces were turned

away, and they did not see their father's nakedness." [GEN 9:20-23] Now be sure to get this picture clearly in your mind. A man walks unknowingly into a tent and can't help but spy his 602-year-old father passed out on the bed in just his birthday suit. (A rather ill-fitting suit, to be sure.) He immediately tells his brothers, who cover up the old man after walking backwards into the tent. And does Noah awake and thank his sons for covering up an old man in need?

Not exactly.

"When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him, he said, `Cursed be Canaan; a slave of slaves shall he be to his brothers.'" [GEN 9:24]

This wins the award for being the most ungrateful and outrageous statement in the entire Bible. A man gets drunk of his own accord, removes his own clothes, passes out, and then complains about what his son has done to him! What harm had been done ... other than to Ham's poor eyes? And, to top it off with even greater lunacy, Noah curses not his son Ham, but Ham's son Canaan (Noah's grandson), who had absolutely nothing to do with the whole affair.

What possible reason could the author of Genesis have for writing such a preposterous story? Could the fact that "Canaan" is the name for the land long coveted by the Hebrews have anything to do with this?

Amoral Abraham

Ten generations after Noah, one of Shem's descendants was named Abram (no, this isn't a typo, later his name was lengthened to Abraham) who was destined to become the founder of the Hebrew nation.

Prior to Abram, the terms "Hebrew" and "Jew" had no meaning. The Bible tells us nothing about the 75 years of his life before he was chosen by Jehovah to father a great nation, nor does Jehovah offer any reason for his selection. Perhaps if we observe how he acts as he wanders about the land, Abram's special qualities will be revealed to us.

At Jehovah's urging, Abram takes his wife, Sarai, and his nephew, Lot, and all of their possessions, households, and servants, and begins a long trip. First to Canaan, and then, because there was a famine, down into Egypt. Abram is afraid that the Egyptians will kill him and take his wife because she is so beautiful, so he lies and gets his wife to lie and say she is his sister. [GEN 12:12-13] The Pharaoh does indeed lust after Sarai and takes her as a wife. Abram then lives very comfortably in Egypt off the largess of the royal family. Jehovah, however, doesn't much like an Egyptian copulating with Abram's wife. Does he punish Abram for his cowardice, his lies, his pimping for his wife? Of course not. Jehovah sends great plagues upon the house of Pharaoh.

When Pharaoh discovers that he has been duped, he kicks Abram out of Egypt, but lets him take his wife and all his possessions. Thus, Abram, who was well off when he entered Egypt, is a very rich man when he exits.

Sarai seems unable to conceive, so she suggests that Abram (age 86) take another wife, namely Sarai's Egyptian maid, Hagar. This Abram does, and Hagar bears him a son, Ishmael. [GEN 16] Thirteen years later, Jehovah again visits Abram, changes his name to Abraham (and Sarai to Sarah), and reiterates

his prediction that Abraham will be the father of multitudes who will get to live in the land of Canaan. In exchange, all Jehovah asks is that Abraham and all the males in his family and among his servants and slaves become circumcised. Even though no reason is given for what must have seemed an extremely odd request, Abraham immediately complies and spends the rest of the day mutilating the penises of every man within his household. [GEN 17]

Once again, Abraham goes on the road, this time ending up in the kingdom of Gerar. Once again, he sought favor from the king by passing off Sarah as his sister. And once again, the king takes Sarah to be his wife. Only this time, Jehovah is kind enough to inform the king about Abraham's deception before the marriage is consummated. The king, in apparent appreciation for not being killed as well as deceived, gives Abraham his wife back, along with sheep, oxen, male and female slaves, and a thousand pieces of silver. And thus, Abraham becomes an exceedingly wealthy man, mostly by pimping for his wife and deceiving heads of state.

Abraham went on to father Isaac, then marry again and father six other sons. (Isaac was so like his father that he, too, tried to pass his wife off as his sister.) [GEN 26:6-11] Isaac was the father of Jacob (who became known as Israel) and Jacob was the father of Joseph (of the pretty coat) and eleven other sons who all became the patriarchs of the twelve tribes of Israel; thus fulfilling the prediction that Abraham's children would become a nation. (The prediction was not written down until many centuries after the occurrence of

the event predicted — a circumstance that always improves accuracy.)

Loathsome Lot

Few who are not regulars at church or temple would be able to describe Abraham as the father of the Hebrews, yet almost every Westerner knows the story of Abraham's nephew, Lot. Probably this is because the graphically intense image of Lot's wife turning into a pillar of salt is so unforgettable.

There is actually very little said about Lot in the Bible, but little things sometimes come in lurid packages.

You might have learned in Sunday School that Lot was the only good man in the degenerate city of Sodom; but your teacher may have rushed past the salacious part.

Lot was living in Sodom when two angels — who apparently were indistinguishable from normal men — entered the city to see if its citizens were as evil as had been reported. When Lot sees the strangers arrive, he offers them food and shelter, which they accept. They eat and prepare for bed, but then a most fantastic event occurs: every single male in the city, "both young and old, to the last man," surround the house and demand that Lot "bring [the strangers] out to us, so that we may know them." [GEN19:1-8] The implication here is that the Sodomites desired to have homosexual relations with the strangers. But there were only two strangers, and there must have been thousands of men outside Lot's door. This scenario boggles the mind even more than all those millions of critters crammed into Noah's boat.

Lot's reaction is no less outrageous. He says to the mob, "Behold, I have two daughters who have not known man; let me bring them out to you, and do to them as you please; only do nothing to these men." Yes, you read it right; Lot —the most morally upright man in town — offers his virgin daughters to the crowd in place of the strangers!

The epilogue to this story is rarely mentioned. In it, Lot and his two daughters are living in a cave. Since the daughters have no man around to satisfy their reproductive desires, they conspire to get their father drunk and have sex with him. Apparently, the alcohol of the time did not have the inhibiting influence on male sexual performance that it does today, for they are successful in this escapade ... two nights in a row.

We never are told the type and extent of the sins of Sodom that prompted Jehovah to destroy that city, but if, by comparison, Lot was considered a good guy, then the rest of the townsfolk must have been true scum.

As for all the little children that got barbequed in Jehovah's cleansing fire, we can only speculate about their moral character.

Despicable David

David was the most revered king of the Jews, as is shown by the Gospel writers attempts to prove that Jesus was of David's lineage. David was a young soldier from Bethlehem when he performed his best-remembered feat, slaying Goliath with only a sling and a stone. The Bible relates little else extraordinary about him that would explain his future fame. Here are a few items you probably didn't know.

Once, when David was encamped with his exiled band of outlaws and misfits, a filthy man in torn clothing staggers into camp, falls to his knees in deference to David, and tell this story. He (the messenger is never named) had been fighting alongside the Hebrews when he came upon their king, Saul, seriously wounded and in peril of being captured by the Philistines. Saul calls out to the man in his pain and says, "slay me, for anguish has seized me, and yet my life still lingers." [2SAM 1:9] Seeing that Saul will not live much longer anyway, the man complies with his king's orders, thus saving Saul from a more painful and shameful death at the hands of his enemies. The man then escapes through enemy lines to bring the news of Israel's defeat. He also brings the king's crown, which he believes should now belong to David.

And can you guess how David shows his appreciation for this heroism and homage? David has the man killed. ... He does, however, keep the crown.

[For those Bible readers whose sense of justice is offended by this story, an entirely different version of Saul's death has been thoughtfully included in 1 Samuel, chapter 31.]

* * *

A few years later, David, now king of all Israel, peers out from the roof of his house and spies his neighbor, the beautiful Bathsheba, taking a bath. Overcome with lust, David has his troops seize Bathsheba and bring her to his bedchamber where he "lay with her" (as the RSV so quaintly puts it), and gets her pregnant. Now Bathsheba's hus-

band, whose name was Uriah, was away soldiering. David sends for him and gives him a sealed message to take back to his commanding officer. The message read, "Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting, and then draw back from him, that he may be struck down, and die." [2SAM 11:15] And that's just what happened.

Thus did King David commit adultery, and thus did King David betray the trust of his army and commit the foul and gutless murder of his loyal soldier.

Now, to be fair about this, we should note that Jehovah was not pleased with these events and meted out justice as only Jehovah could—when the baby was born, he killed it.

As for David, he added Bathsheba to his harem and fathered another child by her, a fellow named Solomon.

As bloodthirsty and treacherous as the Hebrews were, we still think of them as far more civilized than those cultures, such as the Inca, whose gods demanded human sacrifices. Consider, however, the following story. During David's reign there was a famine for three years. Jehovah tells David that the cause of the famine is the "blood guilt on Saul and on his house" [2SAM 21:1] (i.e. the kings of Israel) for the murder of certain Gibeonites. David asks the Gibeonites what would remove this debt, and they say the death of seven of the sons of the murderer. So, David gives these seven men up, and the Gibeonites hang them "on the mountain of the Lord."

If these killings only appeased the Gibeonites, the story would be but one more drop of mayhem in the ocean of atrocities that

make up the Old Testament. Note, however, that in His pleasure at the deaths of the seven sons, Jehovah immediately ends the famine. This is not exactly the same as splitting people open on an alter to appease the gods, but the victims are not likely to appreciate the distinction. And so, the skeleton of human sacrifice lurks behind the gilded robes in good King David's royal closet.

Monstrous Moses

Talk about inauspicious beginnings; the very first event related in the story of Moses' adult life is his murder of an Egyptian who he chances upon in the act of beating up on a Hebrew. Fearing punishment, Moses flees to Midian, marries a local girl, and lives in peace and plenty until the age of eighty. Then Jehovah, apparently thinking that this fugitive killer is the ideal man to help slaughter Egyptians, calls to him from a burning bush.

These days, most people think of the story of Moses and the Pharaoh in terms of epic, Technicolor movies, especially *The Ten Commandments*. In this version of the story, the Hebrews were portrayed as severely oppressed slaves, ruthlessly starved, beaten, and forced to build pyramids until Jehovah finally managed to convince the heartless Pharaoh to set them free. But, as so often happens in the entertainment world, the movie version differs widely from the original book. Of course, very few people bother to read the book. Who can blame them? Exodus is a long, poorly written, difficult-to-follow story. Therefore, I shall save you the effort of wading through the original by presenting the basic plot here. I encourage you,

however, to check my facts against the original should you have any doubts about this distillation.

To begin with, the Hebrews were not slaves in Egypt. You might recall the story of Joseph (the one with the nice coat), who was sold by his brothers into slavery. [GEN 37] Joseph ended up in Egypt and, after some initial tough times, so impressed the Pharaoh with his dream interpretations that he was appointed ruler of the country — you just can't get any further away from slavery than that. Using his new powers, Joseph invited his father, Jacob (also known as Israel) and his eleven brothers and their families to come down to Egypt where they could better survive the famine they were all suffering through. Joseph got the Pharaoh to give his family "the best of the land of Egypt." [GEN 45:18]

Here the twelve tribes of Israel—as the families of the twelve sons of Jacob became known—lived for 430 years. In that time, their number grew to something between two and three million people. (600,000 adult males plus women, children, the elderly, servants, and slaves.) [EX 12:37] They raised their own cattle, sheep, and other animals; grew their own crops on their own land (the "best in Egypt"); had their own craftsmen; and enjoyed a varied and well-seasoned diet. [NUM 11:5 & 18]

Towards the end of their stay, the Hebrews had grown "too many and too mighty" [EX 1:9] and the Egyptian leaders were afraid of them and had begun to try and oppress them. So, when Moses said "let my people go" he wasn't pleading for the release of a few downtrodden slaves, he was asking the

Pharaoh to give up a good portion of the population and wealth of the Egyptian nation.

As leader, it was undoubtedly one of the Pharaoh's primary jobs to keep the country safe, powerful, and in one piece; so, it was natural to resist Moses' request for succession. Think of President Lincoln's response to the proposed "exodus" of the Southern States of America in 1860. But, even if the Pharaoh had been inclined to let his guests of four centuries depart in peace, he simply couldn't do so because the game was rigged against him from the beginning. When Jehovah first spoke to Moses—from the burning bush on Mount Horeb [a.k.a. Mt. Sinai]—he was very clear about his intent to prevent the Pharaoh from giving-in to the Hebrews' demands: "When you go back to Egypt, see that you do before Pharaoh all the miracles which I have put in your power; but I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go." [EX 4:21 & 7:3]

And that's what happened; each time Pharaoh told Moses that the Hebrews could leave, Jehovah forced him to change his mind. In other words, Jehovah had planned to torment the Egyptians with all sorts of grotesque plagues, and the Pharaoh was just a puppet Jehovah used to provide an excuse for drawing the torment out. The purpose of all this is stated clearly by Jehovah: "that I may show these signs of mine among them, and that you may tell in the hearing of your son and of your son's son how I have made sport of the Egyptians." [EX 10:1-2]

More Heart Hardening

The Pharaoh was not the only Biblical character prevented from doing right just so

Jehovah could inflict greater punishment. When Joshua was wiping out all the people of Canaan, the good book tells us: "There was not a city that made peace with the people of Israel . . . For it was the Lord's doing to harden their hearts that they should come against Israel in battle, in order that they should be utterly destroyed, and should receive no mercy, but be exterminated, as the Lord commanded." [Josh 11:20]

Then there was the time when the sons of Eli were abusing the privileges of priesthood by having sex with their female assistants. (Yes, such practices have always been with us.) Eli finds out and warns his sons to stop this behavior, but "they would not listen to the voice of their father; for it was the will of the Lord to slay them." [1SAM 2:25]

The Hebrews went so far with this that they blamed Jehovah for their own failure to follow His teachings: "O Lord, why dost thou make us err from thy ways and harden our heart, so that we fear thee not?" [Isaiah 63:17]

Time and again, Jehovah either forces people to do the wrong thing or prevents them from doing the right thing, just so he can make a more splendid display of power.

Who was he trying so desperately to impress?

More on Egypt

Remembering that most all Egyptians (millions of them) were innocent of any oppression of their Hebrew neighbors, and that the Egyptian ruler was forcibly prevented from stopping the spectacle of plagues, consider the following details: Jehovah told Moses to lie to the Pharaoh, asking only for a few days in the country to perform sacrifices,

although he planned all along to leave Egypt permanently. Jehovah told Moses to have the Hebrews "borrow" gold and jewels from their Egyptian friends and neighbors, with no intention of returning it. Jehovah poisoned the country's only river and killed all the fish. Jehovah killed all of the Egyptian's cattle, along with their "horses, asses, camels, herds, and flocks." [EX 9:3-6] Jehovah infested the land with frogs, gnats, flies, and locusts. Jehovah inflicted painful and debilitating boils on the skin of all Egyptians. Jehovah sent a hail and lightning storm that destroyed all growing crops and killed all the slaves and servants working in the fields. And, for the grand finale, on the infamous night celebrated today as Passover, Jehovah murdered the oldest child of every family in Egypt. (Note that most families would lose several members, because many of the grandparents and parents would be the oldest children of their respective parents.)

As a sort of encore, a few days later, Jehovah made the Pharaoh take what was left of the Egyptian army out to be drowned.

Thus did the god of Abraham make sport of the Egyptians.

This is a story of deceit and thievery, of treachery and torture, of a god who murders thousands of innocent children in cold-blood just to make a name for himself. This is the most horrifying and evil story ever imagined by man.

And, quite clearly, it was imagined. Not only is it an affront to reason and common sense, it is internally inconsistent (the cattle are killed on three separate occasions, [11EX 9:6, 9:20, 12:29] the dead horses manage to pull chariots, [EX 9:3, 14:9] frogs swarm from waters

poisoned a week before, [EX 7:22, 8:6] etc.), and nowhere in the vast and detailed records that the Egyptians kept of their own history is there any mention of such momentous events.

A Tribe of Warriors

To be Jewish means that your mother is Jewish or that you have gone through a prescribed conversion process. To describe what Jews look like, act like, or think like would require describing each person of Jewish faith separately, since every "group" is really just a collection of different (often radically different) individuals. There is no typical Jew, any more than there is a typical woman. Nevertheless, popular American/European literary and entertainment media have a noticeable tendency to cast Jews as people whose strengths lie much more in the mental realms than in the more "macho" physical pursuits. As a group, Jews certainly have a long history of being persecuted. Altogether, and with many obvious exceptions (Israeli commandos come to mind), Jews are generally thought of as rather meek and mild people, perhaps even stoop-shouldered from the heavy burdens they bear.

The Hebrews of the Old Testament weren't like that at all.

Although enslaved by the Babylonians and later conquered and occupied by the Romans, for a thousand years or more the Hebrews were the toughest and meanest guys in the neighborhood. Their history is chock full of stories of invading other tribes, killing, maiming, raping, and enslaving the people and looting, burning, and generally destroying settlements all over the Middle East.

They were a warrior race whose powerful armies usually crushed their opponents. Let's face it, if the Hebrews hadn't won most of their battles, we'd be reading some other tribe's history in the Old Testament. Losers rarely get to tell their side of the story.

More Moses

After helping to destroy a good deal of the people and infrastructure of Egypt, Moses leads his tribe of millions, "equipped for battle," [EX 13:18] across the desert, intending to destroy a good deal of the people and infrastructure of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites, [EX 3:8] whose misfortune it is to be the current residents of Canaan, which is promised to the Hebrews. It seems that Jehovah used to be the god of this land, but its occupants failed to follow his orders, so he has abandoned them and chosen the Hebrews to get vengeance. If the Hebrews follow Jehovah's orders precisely, they will be empowered to vanquish the larger Canaanite armies and live forever in the land of milk and honey.

Nepotism in Extremis

Soon after the Hebrews had made good their escape, Moses set up an organization that has become the envy of every tyrant since, to wit:

- Only the Levite tribe could come near the holy tent.
- Only Aaron and his sons could enter the tent and commune with Jehovah.
- The other tribes of Israel had to support the Levites.
- Only Moses heard Jehovah announce these rules.

- Moses was a Levite. Aaron was Moses' brother.

Any questions?

40 Years of Slaughter

The story of their journey, if faithfully told on film today, would receive an X rating for violence and sex. One scene that illustrates both themes concerns an Israelite male who brings a foreign woman into his tent for a bit of lovemaking. Unfortunately, he is spied by a fellow named Phinehas, who sneaks in with a spear and pierces both man and woman "through her body." (She must have been on top.) As a reward for committing this double murder, Moses gives Phinehas a "covenant of peace" and grants "perpetual priesthood" to his descendants. [NUM 25:6-13]

As the Hebrews traveled, they acted more like an army on the prowl than a bunch of refugees seeking the promised land. They avoided the stronger nations and attacked the weaker ones. And when the Hebrews attacked, the result wasn't pretty:

"And the Lord God hearkened to the voice of Israel, and gave over the Canaanites [the kingdom of Arad]; and they utterly destroyed them and their cities; so the name of the place was called `Destruction.'" [NUM 21:3]

"And Israel slew [the king of the Amorites] with the edge of the sword and took possession of his land." [NUM 21:24]

"So they slew [the king of Bashan], and his sons, and all his people, until there was not one survivor left to him; and they possessed his land." [NUM 21:35]

The most telling conquest of all was Moses' last. Forty-some years after he left Midian, Moses returns to destroy the people that

had given him peaceful shelter. "They warred against Midian, as the Lord commanded Moses, and slew every male. ... took captive the women of Midian and their little ones; and they took as booty all their cattle, their flocks, and all their goods." [NUM 31:7+] And [pay attention now, this is the highlight] when the soldiers returned to Moses, he berated them for allowing the women and children to live, ordered that all male children and all non-virgin females should be killed, and gave the virgins to the conquering soldiers for their sexual sport (after the priests had taken their share).

Other than all the killing and raping, the grandest moment in the Israelite's trek is the stopover at Mt. Horeb to pick up some advice from Jehovah himself. Unfortunately for the peripatetic masses, all they get to see is a huge, dark cloud hovering near the mountaintop; Moses alone gets the privilege of meeting the boss in person — and he only sees a bright light. Jehovah, according to Moses, had warned the Hebrews "do not go up into the mountain or touch the border of it; whoever touches the mountain shall be put to death." [Ex 19:12] Instead, "the people stood afar off" and only listened to Jehovah's voice, which sounded to them like thunder. Fortunately, Moses was around to interpret, otherwise the world would have missed out, not only on the ten commandments, but on about 100 other ordinances including specifying the proper stone [Ex 20:25] for building altars and the protocol for selling a daughter into slavery. [Ex 21:7]

The Big Ten commandments themselves, are familiar to most of us, [See Lie #2.] Suffice it to say here that the rules against

killing, stealing, and adultery were only meant to protect Jewish victims. The bringer of what came to be known as “Mosaic Law” was a man who often practiced, encouraged, and ordered murder, thievery, and rape — and then blamed his actions on his god.

Does It Really Matter?

Expending all this energy and time to criticize fictional characters may strike some as equivalent to arguing the strengths of Superman versus Batman — unproductive and irrelevant. But the point is that those who wrote the Old Testament books, and all the

Jews, Muslims, and Christians who since have revered and promoted these books, thought that these depraved characters were heroic, and their terrible deeds worth celebrating. Many millions still think that way today.

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END NOTES

¹ Asimov, Isaac, *Asimov's Guide to the Bible*, Avenel Books, 1981, p. 38.