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## Scriptures Concerns

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## Chapter 14 Scriptures Concerns

78) *The God of the Bible acts like a mad man who endorses murder, slavery, etc.*

Answer: The Bible is the “Word” of God—it was not “written” by God and not all scriptures were written by the person whose name is assigned to the book. Scholarship uses terms like *pseudepigrapha* to refer to books that were written by person A (let’s say Bill) but is attributed to person B (let’s say Frank). The Book of Frank may contain stories told by Frank (or believed to have been told by Frank), but they were recorded by Bill.

Bill might have been Frank’s best friend and jotted down the sayings-of-Frank on weekends, or he might have lived 300 years after Frank died and written down the stories circulating about Frank (or tales-once-told-by-Frank). Frank gets all the credit for writing the book and most people will never hear of Bill (in fact Bill may never have told anyone that he wrote the Book of Frank). If the Book of Frank were categorized as scripture (despite the fact that it wasn’t written by Frank) it would be because those who accepted it as scripture believed that the text of the book was God-inspired and written with not only God’s approval but by His power to help humans on their earthly odyssey.

Much of the Old Testament—especially the earliest parts—were written thousands of years after the events took place. There is some scholarly debate about whether these books were based on earlier writings, oral traditions, or the influence of surrounding cultures, but the fact is that divinely-inspired scribes recorded the events (or copied earlier records of the events) that happened much earlier. Likewise, the Book of Abraham, as discussed in #22, may reflect traditions that were written two thousand years after Abraham lived.

The Old Testament is the book of scripture which gives us the most fits in regards to the supposedly mean behavior of a loving God. It’s also the one that was recorded the furthest in time from when the events would have happened—recorded by a people who undoubtedly had to synthesize their worldview with the stories they were hoping to share.

As noted repeatedly in this booklet (and I hate to repeat myself; I *hate* to repeat myself), *all* people think, speak, act, and write—even scripture—according to “their language.” This means that Old Testament authors would have framed their stories about the Israelites, and their interactions with God and their enemies, in terms that would have harmonized with their worldviews.

Without getting too deep into a topic I’ll address more fully in a book I’m currently writing, all people see patterns—in things we actually see visually, in things we hear, and in experiences in our environment. We unavoidably and instinctively create arrangements for those patterns to try to explain to ourselves what we are seeing or hearing, or why something happens. In Old Testament times people often attributed things to God, even if God never claimed to be the author of those events. When we combine this with story-telling embellishments,

exaggerations, assumptions, metaphors, symbolisms, and artistic freedom (all of which were normal for story-telling of the day—we have to remember that “objective” history is a *very* modern approach to story-telling), we can appreciate that the loving God of the New Testament is the same God of the Old Testament, but that the Old Testament people *understood God in the language of their day*.

*79) God can't stop Laban from sending servants to chase away Nephi but he can light stones for the Brother of Jared.*

Answer: Typically God works through mankind by letting *them* grunt, sweat, and struggle. God provides inspiration, assistance, direction, and occasionally miraculous intervention, but few if any Christians (or theists of any kind) believe that God stands by like a magician ready to solve all problems at a moment's notice and with a wave of the hand. As part of our trial and opportunity for growth, He lets us handle things on our own until we are unable to do any more (and even then he may not intervene).

*80) God kills the firstborn in Egypt except those with blood on doorposts.*

Answer: It's important to remember that the Old Testament, as we have it, was recorded many years after the events took place and undoubtedly incorporates the hindsight of those scribes who penned the texts (see #78). We know from Joseph Smith that God was saddened by His rebellious children (such as with the flood) and that it was the consequences of Pharaoh's actions—despite God's repeated requests for the release of the Hebrews—that brought the deaths upon the Egyptians. We don't know precisely how the Egyptians died, how many were firstborn Egyptians, or how much of the story is symbolic.

*81) God is a part-time racist, polygamist, and psychopath.*

Answer: God is unchanging, but since different people and different dispensations have a different understanding of the world and have their own unique needs depending on circumstance, the Lord teaches His children according to their “language” and “understanding.” God also doesn't force truth down our throats and typically reveals answers to questions—which ultimately means that, since some questions won't be asked, some revelation is withheld until God is petitioned for direction.