



How God Became God: What Scholars Are Really Saying About God and the Bible

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This epic, thrilling journey through Bible scholarship and ancient religion shows how much of Scripture is historically false--yet the ancient writings also resound with theologies that crisscrossed the primeval world and that direct us today toward a deep, inner, authentic experience of the truly sacred.

From a historical perspective, the Bible is shockingly, provably wrong--a point supported by today's best archaeological and historical scholarship but not well understood by (or communicated to) the public. Yet this emphatically does not mean that the Bible isn't, in some very real measure, true, argues scholar of mysticism Richard Smoley.

Smoley reviews the most authoritative historical evidence to demonstrate that figures such as Moses, Abraham, and Jesus are not only unlikely to have existed, but bear strong composite resemblances to other Near Eastern religious icons. Likewise, the geopolitical and military events of Scripture fail to mesh with the largely settled historical time line and social structures. Smoley meticulously shows how our concepts of the Hebrew and Christian God, including Christ himself, are an assemblage of ideas that were altered, argued over, and edited--until their canonization. This process, to a large degree, gave Western civilization its consensus view of God.

But these conclusions are not cause for nihilism or disbelief. Rather, beneath the metaphorical figures and mythical historicism of Scripture appears an extraordinary, truly transcendent theology born from the most sacred and fully realized spiritual and human insights of the antique Eastern world. Far from being "untrue," the Bible is remarkably, extraordinarily true as it connects us to the sublime insights of our ancient ancestors and points to a unifying ethic behind many of the world's faiths.

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Eugene Pollock says

I was going to rate this book as "3" because of its theological technicality, which is too tedious for my taste; however, in the very last chapter on pp. 247-49, the author explained "Levels of Meaning" in a way that was totally new to me and that made more sense than any religious writing I have read in a very long time. Hence, "4" for this Sunday School text!

Melissa says

It started out interesting and informative when speaking of the Hebrew Bible but once he introduced Jesus his Christian bias started showing as far as objectivity was concerned. I honestly would not recommended it and was left disappointed.

Connie says

FTC Disclosure: I received this book free from Goodreads hoping I would review it.

Maggie Holmes says

I read -- and purchased for the library -- this book thinking it would mostly be about how the early Hebrew god became what we now think of us as the One True God. Some of the chapters dealt with this and gave me some new information to mull over.

Once it started talking more about Jesus and Paul I lost interest because I've read enough about those subjects and in more depth.

The writer presented many different points of view on each topic and then gave his opinion about which is most likely if it could be decided. Many times it can't be decided. There just isn't enough information.

It was a relatively easy read, but probably won't convince many people one way or the other.

Joe Stack says

This is not a book for anyone who believes that the Bible is sacred, is divine revelation, or is to be taken literally. If you consider the Bible to be trustworthy history, then this is not the book to read. In very clear and straight forward writing, the author lays out what we think is true in the Bible and what isn't (a very wide gap), where there is exaggeration and fabrication, the differences between Christian theology now and when the New Testament books were written, and the importance of symbolism, myth & legend. The author reviews current Biblical scholarship and even offers some of his own reasoning which I found enhances some of the ideas scholars have. He reminds the reader that much of the prophecies in the Bible never came

true, much less aimed for future readers. This is good book to grasp an understanding of how the books of the Bible should be understood in the context of their time; yet how we can also appreciate the power of its message. As Mr. Smoley mentions, the history of the Bible are stories that start out simple, are elaborated over time, and given details that have more to do with the mindset of the Biblical authors rather than what actually happened. If the reader is not interested in everything the author covers, I'd recommend just reading the chapter on how God became God.

Steven says

Although the reviewers may call this book "epic", I certainly cannot express the same feeling.

I found this book to be full of holes and containing few sources.

I think "Hidden Wisdom" is much more comprehensive in the discussion of the mysteries of faiths.

William says

>> An in depth compilation of scholarly research on the bible that can easily be digested by layman. A great guide for those who are thirsty for the facts about the holy book and a great reminder for our religious friends on the true purpose of religions.

Summary:

Have you ever wondered how Christianity has changed since the crucifixion of Jesus? Or why there are many controversial and contradicting biblical texts?

Smoley's immense knowledge in the history of Christianity brings me into a journey to understand the true purpose of spirituality and religion. He cited all works that are done by other scholars from different schools of thought without showing much bias for or against Christianity. His comparison of different texts from different gospels shines light on many human errors that occurred when the early Christians compiled them. Other problems, such as translation error, theological intervention and influence from different culture, are also comprehensively exposed by this book. The meaning behind the Book of Revelation, the worship of the Virgin Mary and the nature of Christ are some of the issues that are explored.

Nevertheless, Smoley is not an ignorant liberal who is anti-religion. In fact, he encourages the research into the spiritual realm and encourage all his religious readers to try understand their religion beyond its literal teaching. The bible may be an imperfect guide but Jesus and Paul actually have great advice on how to be spiritually enlightened. After all, he confesses that he bought a bible for his daughter as a gift in the early chapters.

The best takeaway from this book is Smoley's reminder that while "humanity is not the center of the universe... humanity is the center of our universe." When we look beyond the literal meaning of religions, the spiritual teachers or prophets guide us to love our neighbours and be someone who is bigger than ourselves.

ps. This book is challenging for those who are not familiar with the common biblical narratives, like the exodus or nativity.

Kathy says

Smiley takes an interesting and unconventional approach to the Bible. This is not the book for those who take the Bible literally, but for those who are willing to consider differing points of view this is a well-written book.
