

Authors offer up a racy view of the Bible

Ashly McGlone Religion News Service Religion News Service | Jul. 23, 2008

The Uncensored Bible: The Bawdy and Naughty Bits of the Good Book

By John Kaltner, Steven McKenzie, Joel Kilpatrick

HarperCollins, 224 pages, \$19.95

Most believers would say the Bible is the Word of God, or at least a divinely inspired book written by divinely inspired men.

But what if the Bible had been mistranslated, or censored to remove the tawdry bits about pimps, cross-dressers or, ahem, Brazilian wax as punishment?

That's what biblical scholars John Kaltner and Stephen L. McKenzie of Rhodes College in Memphis, Tenn., were wondering, and they set out to investigate a handful of unorthodox interpretations of Old Testament tales.

The result was their new book, *The Uncensored Bible: The Bawdy and Naughty Bits of the Good Book*, co-authored with Christian satirist Joel Kilpatrick.

They've got questions like: Was Eve actually created not from Adam's rib, but "from something a little lower down"? Was the "knowledge of good and evil" in the Garden of Eden a euphemism for sex? And, as Chapter 6 asks, "Did Abraham Pimp Sarah?"

The answer to many of their questions was no, but it nonetheless makes for some interesting (not to mention steamy) reading. Kaltner and McKenzie were inspired to write the book after hearing the intriguing account of Eve's origin at a conference. From there, they researched other unusual interpretations tucked away in scholarly journals. Kilpatrick, the evangelical creator of religious satire Lark News, was also brought on board to further the book's witty and lighthearted tone.

In the account of Eve's creation, the Hebrew word used for "rib" is *tsela*, but that's not how it's translated in other parts of the Bible. Rather, it's usually translated as a "side" or "appendage" jutting out from a central structure.

All male mammals possess a penis bone - except humans and spider monkeys. So was the "bone" used to create Eve not actually Adam's rib after all?

The authors conclude the theory has "compelling advantages" over traditional interpretations, and is not "bizarre, outrageous or unreasonable." They insist they are not challenging the integrity of the Bible, but "just dealing with parts of the Bible that aren't preached from the pulpit that often," Kilpatrick said.

In an attempt to simplify biblical scholarship, complex ideas are brought into layman's terms. Rather than sacrilegiously picking on accepted biblical translations, the authors say their book simply picks those translations apart, revealing potential long-standing misunderstandings.

"No Bible Bashing, Please," reads the introduction. "We are not trying to make fun of the Bible. We love the Bible."

However, with eye-grabbing, provocative titles like "Was Joseph a Cross-Dresser?", "Did Jacob Use Ancient Viagra?" and "Does the Bible Command Bikini Waxing?", the authors' approach to biblical appreciation is sure to ruffle some feathers.

Joseph's alleged cross-dressing theory roots itself in the vague Hebrew word used to describe his famous "coat of many colors." The same word is used only one other time in the Hebrew Bible, describing the clothing of Tamar, daughter of King David. The authors delve into the theory authored by a professor at Chicago Theological Seminary that Joseph's garb could not possibly be unisex, and wonders if maybe Joseph was instead transgendered. The authors mostly disagree, and say the idea can be filed under "highly unlikely."

Euphemisms, puns and sarcasm abound in the breezy read that journeys through risqué ideas, including a translation from Deuteronomy of a woman's hand being cut off to mean a primitive Brazilian wax as punishment.

Given its frequently sexual and snarky approach, the book is already drawing fire in the blogosphere. But the book's authors - and its publisher - don't seem to mind.

"This stuff is in the Bible. It deals with murder, rape and incest so to object on that basis is to object to the Bible itself," said Mickey Maudlin, editorial director and vice president of publisher HarperOne. "Sometimes people miss the grittiness of scripture because they feel it goes against holiness of scripture, and it doesn't."

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