



BIBLICAL CRITICISM

Our local newspaper is a real downer. Oh, it's not a bad newspaper as such, but it radiates the worldviews of folks living in a secularized “Big Ten” university town. After one believer tried to defend his opposition to “gay marriage” by referring to the Bible, one bright chap lambasted him for still basing his “arrogant and hateful” views on this “worthless” old book. The critic's closing comment was,

“Oh, and I suppose the earth must be flat, stationary and the sun revolves around it if the Bible says so. It must be true if it's in a 2,000-year-old book, right?”

This got me thinking (it seem like everything does any more) about Bible criticism over the last four centuries. There are a lot of misconceptions floating around Western culture these days and a good share of them are rooted in ignorance of and hostility towards the Bible (and the God who inspired it). Where did this come from?

As readers of this column are aware, it is my belief that a major culprit is our old enemy as he has worked through the European Enlightenment. The *Scholastics* (ca. 800-1300) had re-discovered the Greek philosophers and started blending them into European thinking, and then followed the *Renaissance* (ca. 1300-1600), which glorified Greco-Roman culture in general. Add to this the nasty things done to each other, the verbal hostilities, and the outright warfare that occurred between Catholics and Protestants during the *Reformation* (1400-1648 A.D.) and you have some idea of what was going on in the minds of the founders of the *French Enlightenment* (1650-1789).

Even though their assault on the Bible and the role of Christianity in French culture helped to bring on the horrors of the *French Revolution* (1789-1799) and brought Napoleon to power, the French Enlightenment advocated moving European culture away from Christian/Biblical Theism towards a worldview rooted in pre-Christian Greek materialism and naturalism. The foundational assumptions of “nature only, progress, and human reason only” were developed in a number of different intellectual areas during the following *Modern Era* (ca. 1800-1963) – uniformitarian geology, Darwinian biology, Hegelian & Marxist history, Freudian psychology, and “Higher Critical” Bible criticism. In effect, all areas of thinking in Western culture were re-defined according to the Enlightenment's assumptions. Interestingly, one of the first areas where this new (old) approach was applied was in theology – the Devil knows how to pick his targets and that is why the Enlightenment first went after the Bible.

Bible Criticism

“Critical” thinking is not necessarily bad, but a critical attitude can be real trouble. There are a number of types of “criticism” that have been applied to the Bible. “Lower” or *textual criticism* arose as scholars sought to arrive at the original text of the Bible and this has validity for the simple reasons that we do not have any of the “original” texts of Bible books, there are lots of copies and versions, and they are not identical. *Canon criticism* considers issues of how and why books were included/excluded from the list of inspired writings and this was required because lots of “other writings” did surface in later Judaism and early Christianity and a sorting (or filtering) process was needed.

“*Higher Criticism.*” However, beginning with a pagan apologist during the later Roman era, named Porphyry (b. 232 A.D.), another sort of criticism has been going on. Porphyry was loyal to his non-Christian Greek philosophical training and he sought to discredit the Bible (and the Christianity that was threatening the pagan world he knew). Porphyry applied “historical criticism” (I will define that later) to the Bible and wound up rejecting the validity of all of the Old Testament books. He especially hated the book of Daniel for its detailed prophecies. Porphyry’s means of discrediting Daniel was simple – he assumed that detailed prediction was impossible. Thus, he argued that Daniel doesn’t contain “predictions,” but *ex eventu* (after the fact) history portrayed as though it was prophetic prediction and “ignorant” people (Jews & Christians) were simply fooled by it. It is on this same reasoning that Post-Enlightenment skeptics would date the book of Daniel around 170-160 B.C. – *after* the events of the Persian-Greek era (350-170 B.C.) that are the focus of Daniel’s predictions in chapters 8 & 11. There are reasons from Jewish tradition and other writings to hold to the traditional date for Daniel in the 6th century B.C., but Porphyry (and modern critics) tend to ignore these.

In view of the background and tactics employed by both Porphyry and the later European Enlightenment skeptics, my definition of the so-called “Higher Criticism” is that Greek materialism (matter is ultimate) and naturalism (natural processes only) are the assumed truth by which Biblical “supernaturalism” is rejected as “unhistorical.” It is only upon an *a priori* assumption that one decides that accurate prediction *before the events* is “impossible.” Why are Biblical miracles, Divine interventions, and accurate prediction of future events so unacceptable to the “modern” (a.k.a. materialistic/naturalistic) mindset? Simply because such things could not happen without a supernatural God being involved and those who embrace materialism and naturalism are or become atheists – they do not believe God exists, so “God-caused” things cannot and did not happen! In their thinking, the only other explanation for such things is that the Biblical accounts are totally false fabrications or the attempts of ignorant people to explain “natural” occurrences they did not understand by resorting to superstition.

From such thinking, it was not long before Enlightenment rationalists had attacked the authorship, date of writing, canonicity, and validity of the contents of every book of the Old Testament (the same kind of attacks soon followed for New Testament books). Thus, many “modern” folks think they are just being “intellectually honest” to view the Bible as an old and “out-of-touch” collection of myths and legends – they have been intentionally taught to think this way.

[to be continued]