



BIBLICAL CRITICISM (continued)

As the rationalist attacks proceeded to (apparently) invalidate the books of the Old Testament, an “evolutionary” development story was substituted for Israel’s history. Gleason Archer described it this way,

An evolutionary understanding of history and an anthropocentric view of religion dominated the 19th century. The prevailing thinkers viewed religion as devoid of any divine intervention, explaining it as a natural development produced by man's subjective needs. Their verdict was that the Hebrew religion, as its neighbor religions, certainly must have begun with animism and then evolved through the stages of polydemonism, polytheism, menolatry, and finally monotheism.¹

This notion was formalized in the German theological schools of the 19th century and, with modifications, is still pretty prevalent in secular academic circles. Because the Judeo-Christian worldview is rooted in Biblical history, the rationalists reacted by discrediting the reality and validity of historical issues in one way or another. Probably beginning with Spinoza (1632-77), a strong tradition developed by which “miracles” were explained away as contrary to God’s decreed “natural order” and as a simple literary vehicle that appeals to the imaginations of the uneducated. This kind of thinking has probably carried all the way through to the present and generally lies behind the *rational* rejection of the historicity of Creation, the flood, and the exodus/Law at Sinai/conquest of Canaan (Genesis through Joshua) as “historical” events. Liberals tend to retain the exodus and conquest, but move them down to the 13th century, while skeptics really alter the story. A good example of this radical approach appeared in *Archaeology Magazine* a few years ago. Neil Asher Silberman asserted that there really was no “conquest” of Canaan by Israelites at all - some rural Canaanites revolted and established their own community! Silberman’s view of the story in Joshua goes like this,

What seems almost certain, however, is that the story of the bloody conquest of the land of Canaan as a unified military campaign led by a single, divinely directed leader was woven together centuries later-an anachronistic saga of triumph on the battlefield, crafted and compiled by loyal court poets anxious to flatter the later Israelite and Judean kings.²

Silberman thinks the book of Joshua is Jewish fiction to make later Judean kings feel good about themselves.

Aside from the other responses we could make, what about the logic of such a view of Old Testament history? If there is one thing Old Testament history is NOT, it is hardly a flattering

¹ Gleason Archer, Jr., [A Survey of Old Testament Introduction](#) (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), pp. 132-133.

² Neil Asher Silberman, "Who Were the Israelites?" *Archaeology*, March/April 1992, pp. 22-30.

“feel good” story about the Jewish people. Anachronistic³ history would not look like what we have. Fantasy stories begin with “once upon a time,” describe a wonderful hero/heroine who defeats an external villain, and then closes with the central character “living happily ever after.”

The Old Testament offers the hope that “Someone is Coming” (Genesis 3:15) and then proceeds to document the rebellion and general failure of people in general, and the Jewish people in particular, to live up to their covenant obligations. If Joshua is a bogus white-washing of Jewish history, it fails miserably, for even this book sounds all too real – a whole generation of Israelites failed to circumcise their children (5:2-6), there was failure at Ai because of Achan’s greed (7:1) and Israel may have been a little arrogant after their first victory (7:3), the Israelites were suckered by the Gibeonites (9), there were areas that Israel failed to conquer,⁴ conflict arose over the memorial altar (22:10ff), and Joshua exits with a call for Israelites to get rid of the idols they still are holding onto from earlier times (24:14).

And while we are at it, let’s demolish the notion that the Old Testament, in general, is a Jewish “feel good” epic designed to appeal to the imaginations of uneducated people. If that were the case, the alleged “loyal court poets” should have done something about the recorded sins of the patriarchs in Genesis (especially Judah - Genesis 38), the covenant-breaking at Sinai (Exodus 32), the rebellion that brought on the 40 years of wandering and death in the desert (Numbers 13-14), Moses’ comments about Israel’s lack of spirituality (Deuteronomy 9; 31:16-18), and much of what is recorded in Judges through 2Kings and the Prophets? And how about the continual report that Israel refused to listen to the prophets God sent to them⁵ and that the only reason God continued to work with Israel was His Messianic promise to the Patriarchs (Deuteronomy 9:4-8; 2Kings 13:23)? Even the “hero” figures are treated like real people – Noah gets drunk, Abraham tells half-truths to save himself and Isaac did the same thing, Jacob tries numerous lies and games, Judah commits incest, Moses offers excuses and then gripes about the workload, David covers adultery with murder, Elijah runs away and hides claiming he is the only believer left. Joshua and Old Testament history are doctored up stories to glorify the Jewish people and their past? Give me a break!

It is interesting that some of the most committed opponents of the Old Testament/Biblical system of thought are disaffected Jews, whose very cultural identity as “Jews” arose from that story – opponents of the prophets and apostles, Baruch Spinoza, Moses Mendelssohn, Carl Sagan, Stephen Jay Gould, Richard Lewontin, etc.

Another reason why many liberals and skeptics reject the 1400 B.C. conquest is that there isn’t much archaeological evidence of destruction of cities in Canaan at that time and *reason* assumes that a conquest requires lots of ruin and destruction. Of course, if any of these “critics” put any stock in what the Bible says, the “problem” would disappear. The Biblical account indicates that you should NOT find much destruction in Canaan in connection with Joshua’s conquest for the simple reason that God promised Israel cities, houses, vineyards, etc. that they would not have to build (Deuteronomy 6:10,11) and, accordingly, Joshua’s conquest only destroyed and burnt three cities - Jericho, Ai, and Hazor (Joshua 6:24; 8:28; 11:11).

³ false history written long after the events, mentioning events that did not happen and/or mentioning cultural elements or using terminology that could not have been present at that time

⁴ Joshua 13:13; 15:63; 16:10; 17:12,13

⁵ Exodus 5:21; Numbers 14:2; 2Chronicles 30:1-11; 36:15,16