

## 14/2/2016. *Against liberal theology*

The basis of today's so-called 'liberal theology' is that the Bible is inaccurate and cannot be trusted. This view is based on the 'higher criticism' which grew in 18th century Germany as a technique in the analysis of ancient texts. But it goes far beyond the valuable task of teasing out the motivations of the men who wrote the Bible. The liberal claim is that the Bible does not present what actually happened, and that the account has changed in a large-scale process of 'Chinese whispers.' (In this game, a short story is whispered from one person to the next; the end result generally differs startlingly from the original.) That is how the Greek myths arose around a core of historical events such as the Trojan War, for instance.

David Jenkins, a Bishop of Durham in the 1980s, was a typical church liberal. In his autobiography he grumbled about evangelicals who insisted he must believe either that the Bible is accurate or that it is a pack of pious lies. Nobody is cold-bloodedly lying in a sequence of Chinese whispers, but Jenkins' intent to exonerate the people he believes were involved in creating the scriptures is irrelevant, because it is the end result that matters. In particular, a central liberal notion is that the Law of Moses was finalised around the time that the Jews were exiled to Babylon – centuries after Moses. (This view can be traced back to apostate Jewish scholars: see the chapter titled *The birth of Biblical criticism* in Rabbi Marvin Antelman's book *To Eliminate the Opiate*.) Some liberals even say that the prophecies were written after the events they foretold; the Book of Daniel is a common target. Liberals claim that this is a literary convention rather than deceit – but would any faithful Israelite put words in God's mouth retrospectively? Evangelicals who explore the biblical account find it trustworthy, whereas liberals bring a different set of assumptions to the Bible, particularly scepticism of the supernatural. As the Bible is packed with supernatural events they cannot be faithful to it, although they do not admit this. One liberal aim is to reconstruct, from the biblical accounts, what *they* believe actually happened. This project of dissecting the texts to work out how they supposedly emerged has appeal as an intellectual challenge, and liberals have long dominated university theology faculties. They forget that God wrote the Bible to be understood by everybody, not just scholars. Liberal theology has had disastrous effects on Christian faith; it is liberal churches that are in decline today, as God prunes the unfruitful branches.

Liberal theology is hypocritical, for liberals speak differently amongst themselves and in public. In public they affirm the gospel. But when they say they believe it, they don't mean what evangelicals mean when we affirm the gospels. Among each other, liberals use language that questions countless events in the scriptures, including the miracles and even the virgin birth and Resurrection of Christ – anything supernatural. The liberal view is a form of secret knowledge for insiders, or *gnosticism*. Liberal bishops take a salary from churches for providing oversight while actually sowing doubt. Satan presumably regards them as 'useful idiots.' They should heed the warning of James (3:1) that teachers will be judged to higher standard, and also how sharply Jesus spoke against hypocrisy.

What makes the Bible different from mythology? The Greek myths came out of a culture of rhetoric in which storytellers put words into the mouths of legendary heroes, saying whatever the storyteller thought was appropriate. The gospels, in contrast, came out of a Hebraic culture having deep respect for accuracy about God's words and deeds. No-one who didn't believe in God would portray such a relationship between God and man, and no-one who did would dare to put words in God's mouth. The gospels were written down very soon after the events they speak of, whereas many generations came between the Trojan War and Homer (for example), allowing ample time for an oral tradition to evolve before being frozen onto paper. The early church needed the truth, and it collected the early writings into the New Testament. We have more copies of New Testament passages, dated nearer the events they describe, than of other ancient (and undisputed) writings. No liberal scholar has identified any later editor ('redactor') who reworked them into their present form. As for the Old Testament, a copy of Isaiah dating from Jesus' time, one of the Dead Sea scrolls found in the mid-20th century, has proved virtually identical to modern copies.

Liberals decide which bits of the Bible to accept according to their own understanding, instead of letting the Bible form their understanding. All you need to bring to it is your understanding of words and grammar. The liberals have clearly picked up their anti-supernatural belief from Western secular culture, which is the only culture among dozens in history and geography to deny the supernatural. I suspect that Satan is playing a long game and has reduced the volume of the occult in our culture, so that secular people will be awed if he

turns it up later. Liberals never admit that they are guided by anti-supernatural prejudice rather than literary analysis.

Liberals are liable to suggest that ancient Old Testament figures were not real people and were invented to make points, even though much irrelevant detail is given about their lives (unlike in Jesus' parables). Liberals are also unable to say where in the genealogies the mythological figures become historical figures. In questioning the Book of Genesis the leading liberal name is Julius Wellhausen, who died in 1918. He claimed to recognise four strands in Genesis and Mosaic Law; these strands have supposedly been combined in the biblical text. This 'documentary hypothesis' was demolished by PJ Wiseman (*d.* 1948), who recognised that Genesis is a compiled sequence of ancient texts that had originally been written on stone tablets. Many stone tablets from Mesopotamia, dated as old as Abraham and Noah, have been found, and they have their own writing conventions, which Wiseman recognised within Genesis. The retaining of those conventions by the compiler – presumably Moses, who also wrote the last part of Genesis, set in Egypt – shows that he copied faithfully. Moses added the names of places which had changed name by his time, but that is all. We even know who each tablet was written by (or for), because the earlier, Mesopotamian parts of Genesis each end (not begin!) with the phrase "These are the *toledoth* of..." and *toledoth* means "historical origins". (For example, "these are the *toledoth* of Jacob" in Genesis 37:2; our mediaeval chapter divisions do not match this understanding.) Each section runs up close to the death of the man named yet never reaches it, and each section gives information which only that man could have known or found out reliably. Wiseman's work deserves to be better known.

The liberal position ultimately regards Jesus merely as a great moral teacher, made out to be a divine miracle-doer by his followers. But (as CS Lewis pointed out) Jesus accepted worship and asserted authority to forgive sins – something reserved for God – so if Jesus was not divine then he was an impostor, mad or bad.

*Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe – St Paul, 1 Corinthians 1:20-21.*