

Is the Bible Reliable?

Introduction

This essay is meant to capture and respond to the essential elements of liberal biblical interpretation. It is specifically a response to Kenneth G. Davis' book *Don't Know Much about the Bible*. Davis is not a theologian, but a researcher and popular author. His work, therefore, proposes nothing original, but rather encapsulates the essence of contemporary liberal theology. It is my hope that through this essay readers will become more familiar with the pervasiveness of liberal thought, and that in so doing they will show more discernment. I will examine the underlying world-view of liberal interpretation and discuss the way this world-view affects their methodology. I will then critique this methodology and demonstrate that it is neither academically responsible, nor by any means the final word of biblical interpretation.

By liberal I mean scholars and writers who come to the text with a humanistic or naturalistic world view. By humanist I mean those writers who believe that the value of the Bible rests predominantly in what man can know about himself and his society, rather than what he can know about God. By naturalistic I mean those writers who deny the existence of any supernatural events, or immanence of God in the world.

These two world-views have permeated the church, and have duped non-discerning Christians. The problem is not small, nor is it relegated to a few ivory towers. On the contrary, these two world-views are the consensus among pastors and seminary teachers in all the mainline denominations: United Methodist, American Baptist, Evangelical Lutheran, Episcopal, and Presbyterian USA.

Through this essay I hope that readers will be able to identify the presuppositions and methodology of liberal interpretation, and that they will understand that the gospel and the faith proposed by liberal theologians is not compatible with Christian teaching.

Liberal Theology/Vogue Theology

It is likely that Davis uses the term BCE rather than BC so that he may not offend non-Christians. Yet one must also assume that he prefers the terminology. Perhaps he prefers the term because it's in vogue. Or perhaps he prefers it because it makes more sense in his humanist world-view.

Davis claims that the Babylonian exile was "not as bad" as the biblical authors claimed, nor as bad as other trials the Israelites faced. One can only imagine, however, the criticism that would be showered upon someone who said life was not as bad in India under British rule as it could have been, or that the exile of slaves to the United States from Africa was not as bad as slaves have claimed. In our modern era one can only get away with such critical statements when they are applied to the Bible. It is politically incorrect to diminish the suffering of any group of people in history, except the people of the Bible—they are fair game.

Davis says of the book of Job, that "Like much of the Bible Job brings out more questions than answers." Surely the bulk of humanity who have read the book would disagree with Davis, for ever since it's writing the book has delivered great comfort to afflicted people. The book has remained greatly popular through millennia because of the answers it offers to people in time of distress. But more important than refuting Davis' conclusion is the observation that this conclusion typifies his consistent methodology. By his own admission, Davis believes that "much of the Bible" has more questions than answers.

Another example of this methodology is his introduction to Jesus. Davis asks, "Was Jesus married? Did he have children? The Bible doesn't tell us." The implication is that billions of people have put their faith in a man that they don't even know as well as they people down the street. He says the Bible doesn't tell us the answers, but there is no way anyone can honestly read the New Testament and wonder whether it leaves any doubt that Jesus was not married and didn't have children. Prior to the age of liberal theology no one would have asked this question.

Similarly Davis says, "Christians then [in ancient times] as now agreed on few things. Here again he views the world as full of disagreement rather than agreement—full of questions rather than answers. But when one reads the New Testament and the writings of the Early Christian Fathers, he does not get the sense that Christians agreed on few things. Paul captures the gospel in a nutshell: "that which we preached to you,

that Jesus was crucified, died and buried, and that he rose on the third day and appeared to hundreds of eyewitnesses.” These things which Christians agreed on may seem few in number when summarized in this way, but they are not insignificant.

It is vital for readers of liberal theology to realize from the outset that seeking more questions than answers is an underlying method of liberal theologians. Unlike the historic Christian approach of coming to Scripture for answers, liberals believe that the Bible is instead fodder for more questions. In fact, questions fascinate them. What’s more, liberal theologians are not bothered by a lack of answers. Indeed, answers would only frustrate them in their effort to expose more possible questions. One can see that, when faced with the same facts, this approach to Scripture will produce vastly different results than the traditional approach of study.

Davis says that, “The Gospels may be divinely inspired, but they aren’t history. They were written by zealous followers as a call to faith.” Liberals do not generally elaborate on their definition of “faith” because they know that their usage is a veiled attempt to speak common language with Christians even though their beliefs are radically different. Faith, according to the Bible and to the historic Christian faith is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things unseen. Faith is the belief in a truth without empirical evidence. So liberals speak of the Christ of history and the Christ of faith, and they maintain that both are valid beliefs which one can simultaneously hold. The Christ of history was a non-spiritual Jewish peasant who hoped to foster liberation for the poor and oppressed. The Christ of faith is the risen lord who gives forgiveness for our sins. But this is really a just an attempt of being less offensive while they speak of the real Jesus and the made-up Jesus. Imbedded in their assertion is the implication that Christ did not historically rise from the dead and he did not historically forgive our sins or even historically intend to do so. If one subjects the Gospels to the rigors of history then he is left with three options: either Jesus was God in the flesh, or he was a liar who claimed to be God but really was not, or he was a lunatic who thought he was God. But liberals are unable to believe he was God, unwilling to call Jesus a liar, and not so naïve as to call him a lunatic. But there are no other options if the Gospels resemble history. So unable to accept any of these options, they instead turn the tables by rejecting the Gospels as history. Then they are given a fresh set of alternatives. If the gospels are not history they either they are simple myths which evolved over time or they are allegories placed into theology to illustrate some great truths. Both of these options fit within their world-view and are less offensive to the non-discerning Christian audience.

Davis says that the Bible is a work of faith, and the stories of Jesus’ birth show this. Because, according to liberals, the Bible can’t get straight the time or location of his birth, and the gospel writers invented the stories of the virgin birth, we are not to assume that the narratives are intended as history, but only as a work of faith. But one must ask, in what are we to have faith? The plain sense answer to this question is that the gospel writers intended us to have faith that Jesus was the fulfillment of prophecy, that he was born of a virgin in order to give us a new nature. But if these events did not happen, then we must find faith in something else. Yet the scripture does not indicate anything other than the events in themselves in which we are to put our faith. So when liberals say the Bible is not a work of history they are compelled to answer, then what it is. And to dispel impending criticism they cannot say it is a work of fiction, so they instead choose a more favorable term: it is a work of faith. But their definition of faith is radically different from the Christians understanding. Instead it is closer to Mark Twain’s definition: “Faith is believing something with all of your might that you know ain’t true.”

In line with his ever-questioning outlook, Davis ends his essay with the questions, “Whose Bible? Whose God? Which God?” In other words, he concludes that life’s basic questions are still unanswered at the end of his study of Scripture. Of what value, then is the Bible? Well, he says, it is valuable because it is a book of faith. Yes, an barely understood book of faith in an unknown God. So Davis claims that his book is “aimed at people who still view the Bible as sacred and inspired, but don’t know much about it.” What they don’t know about it, however, is that few of the propositions of the Bible are historically accurate, and none of the theology is verifiable.

Finally Davis states that his audience ought not to be afraid of asking questions, and he is right. But there are two implications of his encouragement: first he implies that he has the answers, and more importantly

he implies that if one does not agree with his answers they are afraid to ask questions. Though one puts full faith in the truth of the Bible, he may not be afraid to ask questions. The person who seems to be most afraid of asking questions is the liberal who never ventures to wonder, or even examine the faintest possibility that Scripture might be accurate, and that we may possibly live in a supernatural world.

Statements regarding archaeology/anthropology

Davis claims that there is no evidence that any of the events in Esther occurred, and in fact no collaborative details in the book other than the name of the king. In other words, the only thing we can be sure of in the whole book of Esther, is that there was a king named Xerxes. All the other characters in the story, and all the other events are doubtful. But in fact there is a great deal of anthropological evidence for the historicity of these events. Esther closes with the institution of the feast of Purim, a Jewish celebration of the deliverance from genocide at the hands of Xerxes. The feast of Purim dates back to the time of Persian Rule (300 BC) and continues even today. One must assume that this celebration has some origin. And that origin is explained in Esther by the events which occurred in that book. So while one may dispute the actual legitimacy of this origin of Purim, one cannot honestly say that Esther has no evidence. And in the absence of any evidence to refute this origin of Purim, it stands as an excellent attestation to the events of Esther.

Davis states that the only thing we can know about the authorship of Joshua is that Joshua was not the author. The book was not written until a thousand years after the concerned events. And the events which are found in the book did not actually take place. One must ask, therefore, what is one left with? Of what value is the book? What theological truths are contained in a book written by an anonymous distant author who records myths? The central theological theme of Joshua is that God promised the land of Israel to the Jews, and he helped them win the battles for the land. But if Davis is right, then God did not make such a promise, nor did the people win the battles. What, then, is the value of the book?

Statements regarding theology

Liberals claim that Revelation is the first place in the Bible to link Satan with the image of the serpent in Genesis. Likewise they claim that Satan was not portrayed as the king of demons, or even as particularly antithetical to God until later Christian writings. Similarly, they say that the Satan of Job was not a demon, but a more neutral being who was sometimes welcome and sometimes not welcome in God's court. In other words, they claim that the Bible does not portray a unified concept of Satan, and that instead the ideas of Satan have evolved independently. These conclusions are based on the naturalist's rejection of Satan and demons. For some reason, however, liberals are hesitant to criticize the biblical authors for the inception of this outlandish idea, and instead they prefer to credit later Christians with the superstition of Satan. Evidently if they admit Scripture portrays a unified theology of Satan, and then they disagree with Scripture, they fear that Christians will reject them for being too controversial. So they would rather pretend that the Bible is accurate, but that it doesn't portray our modern understanding of Satan. Instead, the view that Satan is a real being who opposes God was a later development based on superstition and miss-readings of Scripture.

Statements regarding philosophy/interpretation

Davis states that the story of Lot's wife was a myth used to explain the salt formations around the Dead Sea. This is a theory which states that many myths are aitiological, or that they were created to explain origin. The problem with this interpretation is that there is only one salt formation in the biblical story: Lot's wife. So the story only explains the origin of one salt formation. The other problem with Davis' interpretation is that the biblical account never states anything aitiological: pertaining to origin. Davis' statement is not founded on the biblical narrative, but upon his underlying belief in these myths and their function. Furthermore, his need to maintain this belief is rooted in his inability to accept this story, and others similar, as history. He begins with the assumption that the story is not history, therefore, he then asks, "What is it, if not history?" The logical explanation is that the story had some point, and the natural point of the story is origin. But one only comes to this conclusion if one begins with the assumption that the narrative is not a historical

account.

The underlying philosophy of Don't Know Much about the Bible, and liberal interpretations in the same vein is that of literary evolution. Evolution, though commonly applied to the origin of species, predates Darwin as a philosophy. The philosopher Hegel introduced the concept of evolution years before Darwin. He proposed that in many areas of the universe: science, language, history, sociology, there exists first a thesis, which is counteracted by an antithesis, and then results a synthesis. Darwin applied this theory to biology, but it has been used by scholars of all disciplines. The Bible is no exception. Davis assumes that the end-product of Scripture must be the synthesis of a long evolutionary process whereby the original thesis (the first stories of Scripture) were revised throughout time (this is the antithesis). Liberal scholars use this theory as their starting point, just as evolutionary biologists use the same theory as their starting point. The biologist begins with this assumption because, as the saying goes, the alternative is unthinkable. But the point is, neither the biologist nor the historian subscribes to the evolutionary theory because the evidence leads them there, but because their preconceptions require them to start there.

For instance, Davis says that "most scholars agree the Passover is a combination of the barely harvest and the livestock harvest." In other words, the Passover was not an event where God spared the firstborn of Israel; instead, the story of the Passover was created to explain the existence of a celebration rooted in some lost history which Kenneth Davis recently discovered. But Davis, and his plethora of sympathetic scholars did not come to this conclusion from any evidence. It is pure speculation based on their evolutionary model, rooted in their humanist and naturalist world-view.

Davis believes that he has some solid evidence for the evolutionary model. He points to the "missing Mount Sinai." He asks, "How could such an important mountain be so obscure that no one can identify its location today, if it truly existed?" And he points to the Ark of the Covenant which he says "disappears" after the Babylonian exile. He asks, "How could such an important possession drop from the minds of the Israelites if it truly ever existed?"

Davis claims that the existence of prose and poetry in the Deborah story in Judges proves the existence of two separate groups of authors. This assumption is also rooted in his evolutionary model. Isn't it equally reasonable that one author wrote in both prose and poetry? Is he saying that the quality of the prose and of the poetry is so masterful that no person could possibly excel to this degree at two skills? Obviously one person is capable of this work. Further Davis suggests that because of the importance of Deborah in the book of Judges, perhaps the writer of this narrative was a woman. But is it inconceivable that a man could write something favorable to a woman in ancient times? What's more, isn't reasonable to assume that if such a powerful and successful heroine actually lived, her story would be written down by a man? In other words, if the story is fiction, then perhaps Davis has a point: it may be more likely that a woman would make up a story about a heroine than a man to do so. But if the events actually occurred, then it is just as likely that a man or woman wrote them. Except, of course, for the fact that literacy was a rarity for women in ancient times. Davis' suggestion, therefore, is rooted in the prior assumption that the events did not take place, and there is no reason to believe that they did not.

Davis states that when Josiah read the book of the law, he probably read Deuteronomy. There is not textual or historical basis for this statement. There is no textual or historical reason to believe he did not read the whole Pentateuch (all the books of Moses). On what basis does he make this claim then? Simply put, his evolutionary model requires him to believe that ancient people could not have had access to all the books because they arose somewhat independently among different groups of authors. If Josiah had the whole Pentateuch, then Davis would be forced to admit that these books were more unified in their composition, and consequently more reliable. And if they are more reliable, then God is more powerful and active in the events of the world than Davis is willing to believe.

Davis says that the "two books of Chronicles are the best examples of revisionist history." He says they "leave out the nasty parts and create a safer version" of history. Because Chronicles varies so greatly from its similar accounts in Kings and Samuel, he says that these differences prove "very human authorship." He bases this all-encompassing claim on two pieces of evidence. First, David is called a "man after God's heart" throughout Chronicles, and second, Solomon is said to have "followed in the ways of his father." So

Davis says “the two kings are depicted not as they had been, but as they should have been.” He makes a over-arching claim that the books are “the best examples of revisionist history” based on the generally positive view that the extensive books take toward two of the hundreds of characters. So even if Davis is right that Chronicles tones down the negative aspects of David and Solomon, what about the hundreds of other passages which stand uncontested? If this is the best example of revisionist history, then perhaps the theory can be discarded with certainty.

Furthermore, Davis fails to mention that Chronicles is a far more condensed version of history than Kings and Samuel. The books of Chronicles cover the same time period in fewer than half of the chapters of Kings and Samuel.

Finally, since Davis claims that Chronicles depicts David and Samuel as they should have been, not as they actually were, does that mean he upholds the historical reliability of these two men? That statement implies that it is possible to know, and in fact that Davis does indeed know what Solomon and David actually were like. Since he criticizes Chronicles for failing to mention David’s massive bloodshed and Solomon’s numerous extravagancies and women, surely he must believe that the accounts of these two men in Kings and Samuel are reliable. Yet we know that this is not the case. Davis elsewhere claims that Solomon and David were not as rich and powerful as Kings depict them. So Davis uses Kings as evidence to prove that Chronicles was revised and left out important information. But when he critiques Kings he says that the stories of David and Solomon are largely legend. Logic does not permit one to have it both ways. So in reality, not Chronicles, but Davis is the perfect example of revisionist history.

The naturalist world-view precludes one from accepting prophecy. Therefore Davis says, “Isaiah was crafted into Jesus’ life as Messiah.” In other words, Isaiah did not predict anything particularly relevant to Jesus, but after Jesus died creative people found things in Isaiah that could be made relevant. The problem with this naturalist interpretation is that since the writing of Isaiah, more than 700 years before Christ, Hebrew scholars formed a picture of what they expected the Messiah to be, and they recorded their expectations in the Talmud; a Hebrew commentary on the Old Testament. Their picture of the awaited Messiah was greatly influenced by the prophecies of Isaiah. So the Gospel writers did not apply passages from Isaiah that had no relevance to messianic prophecies; they realized that Jesus fulfilled the prophecies which the Rabbis expected the Messiah to fulfill for hundreds of years.

Statements regarding authorship

Davis’ philosophy is best summarized in his statement, “The fact remains, no one knows who wrote the Bible.” He leaves no possibility that the books of Moses were written by Moses but instead subscribes to the documentary hypothesis with which he exaggerates, “Most scholars agree.” This theory states that the Old Testament evolved over a period of time through an evolutionary process. His first support is that he confidently states that there are two conflicting creation stories. He does not even attempt to explain how these two accounts can be reconciled, yet they have remained side by side in Genesis for over 4,500 years. Does Davis believe that he has discovered some error in the Bible which lay unnoticed for millennia? Obviously biblical authors, scribes, rabbis, and Christians have known about the transition from Genesis 1 to 2 since the text was written, and have sought an explanation. Yet Davis does not even give the faintest lip service to the historic understanding that Genesis 2 is a particularization of Genesis 1. In other words, the second narrative more specifically states what occurred in the previous, short narrative. Academic honesty compels writers to give some acknowledgement to conflicting views, especially when the body of literature concerning the issue is so massive and ancient. Yet Davis never does this. So the implication is that either he is not academic or he is not honest.

He says that “Jeremiah is not the likely author of Lamentations.” He provides no support for this claim. But in the absence of contradictory evidence, it seems reasonable to support the historic view that Jeremiah is the author. Lamentations was clearly written during the same time period as Jeremiah, it concerns the same events. Furthermore, Lamentations serves as a natural sequel to Jeremiah. The obvious connection between the two books may perhaps be the reason ancient scholars assumed Jeremiah was the author. So

while there is no textual claim that he is the author, it is more reasonable to support the traditional view than to discard it without any rationale.

Most criticism of biblical authorship derives from one or two verses in the book which contain a prophetic word. Those prophecies are inconceivable to naturalists, so they assume the book was written after the event happened. This is a somewhat veiled attempt to foster doubt without coming off so offensively as saying that the biblical authors lied. But the implication is just the same. If the books were written after the fact, but they purport to have been written before the events they prophesy, then the pseudonymous author is both lying about his identity and the historical sequence of events. Most liberals would deny that they think the authors were lying. They wouldn't use such a harsh word. They claim that this literary device was well accepted in ancient times. Even if this were true, and there is evidence that it is not true, there is still ample reason to reject the liberal interpretation.

First, we may reject the liberal interpretation because it is rooted in a naturalistic world-view. One who believes in God's immanent work in this world need not start with the assumption that prophecy is impossible. Without that assumption, there will be no reason to suggest the prophetic books were written hundreds of years after they claim. Second, even if one rejects prophecy, there is still a literary/philosophical reason to reject pseudonymous, after the fact authorship. The theme of Isaiah, for instance, is that God is sending a message to the people of Israel to repent. If they repent, he will spare them. But if they do not repent, they will know what a powerful God they have as they are punished by his hand through the invasion of Syria. If we accept the naturalist world-view, and the late authorship of the book, we must ask what affect this acceptance has on the literary value of the book. If the book were written after the facts, then the warnings of future punishment are irrelevant. If it were written after the fact, then the possibility of God's gracious forgiveness is irrelevant. In addition, the greatness of God's ability to control the future and to relay prophecy to man is also irrelevant. Clearly the central themes, in fact, the whole message of Isaiah, is bound to the idea of future prophecy. Without prophecy, there is no meaning to the book. The very truths which the book intends to convey require prophecy to have been true. If a pseudonymous author wrote Isaiah, there is no way he could have incorporated the themes which are found in the book.

Liberals rightly point out that the Proverbs were written over a period of years, and that some are anonymous. Yet they claim that many were borrowed from neighboring nations, especially Egyptian sages. There are two problems with this conclusion. First, similarity does not imply causality. In other words, there may be strong similarities between Hebrew and Egyptian proverbs, but they could have been written independently. After all, proverbs do not address historical events, but universal generalizations. Second, it is equally plausible to assert that a Hebrew proverb was borrowed from an Egyptian one as it is to assert that an Egyptian proverb was borrowed from a Hebrew one. In the absence of evidence, neither statement can be deemed more likely. Yet the liberals always confidently take a position, and it is always the position that the Hebrews borrowed. One must ask why they so consistently take this position. And the answer seems to be that scholarship thrives on controversy and on provocation.

Liberals give a late date to every book in order to cast doubt on them. Esther was allegedly written in 200 BC, rather than 400 BC, because it contains Persian words. Isaiah was written in 400 BC, rather than 722 BC because it contains the word Cyrus. The existence of that one word causes liberals confidently to maintain that it was written 300 years after the author claims. Liberals say that at least half of the books of Paul are pseudonymous, and therefore written long after Paul, because they neither resemble the authentic letters in style or content. But the entire authentic writings of Paul can be read in less than an hour, and they evidently maintain that they have sufficient data conclusively to state what is Paul's style and what are his preferences of content.

Liberals claim that the gospels were among the last written, not first written material. This assertion, unanimously held by liberals, is based solely on Jesus prophecy that the temple would be destroyed. The temple in Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 AD, as all four gospels prophesy. But since prophecy is impossible, the gospels must have been written after 70 AD. The problem with this assumption is that 2 Peter, which according to liberals is an early book, quotes the gospel of Mark. So Mark must already have been in wide circulation by the time of Mark. The other problem with the late date, of course, is that it revolves around one

verse and the liberals' inability to accept prophecy.

Davis states that most scholars agree that the Gospels derive from a common source known as "Q." One wonders whether he, during his extensive research for this book surveyed a stratified sample of scholars to see whether most scholars do in fact agree. Certainly most scholars he consulted subscribe to this theory, but there have been no studies to determine what most scholars believe. He is not making a researched conclusion, but using an intimidation device to convince his less-informed audience that he is in the know and in the majority. Aside from his tactic, the theory of Q is a recent invention of liberals to explain why the gospels agree. First they attack the gospels because they disagree, then they attack the gospels because they do not cover all the same events, and finally they attack the gospels because they agree too often. Rather than inventing some additional source known as Q, wouldn't it be more plausible to suggest that the Gospels agree because they represent the truth?

Nearly every attack on the date and authorship of any Scriptural book involves the assumption that prophecy is not possible. If the book contains prophecy which has been so-called fulfilled, then obviously the book was written after the events. The possibility of predicting the future is inconceivable to these liberal scholars. So they are left with no other choice but to dispute the authorship, and thereby move the date to a time after the concerned events. This is the driving motive behind any case for pseudonymous authorship.

Davis, for instance, confidently states that some portions of Joshua were added after the Babylonian exile.

Statements regarding Oral Tradition

The notion of oral tradition is a theory with no specific biblical evidence and no compelling historical evidence. The theory that the Bible was passed down through the generations is a necessary out-growth of the liberal world-view. Because many books of the Bible contain fulfilled prophecy, and liberals cannot accept that such fulfillment is possible, they assume the books were written in late dates. If they were written in late dates, then the authors are pseudonymous. And if the books were written in late dates, then perhaps a kernel of the story is ancient, but the narrative was passed down and revised through time. Davis says this is the case with the crossing of the Red Sea. He states that this part of the epic only emerged after hundreds of years of retelling.

Yet if one begins with a different world-view, the conclusions are dramatically different. If one begins with the view that prophecy is possible, then the books of the Bible may have been written by the stated authors. And if the stated authors wrote these books, then corruption may not necessarily have occurred over time. In this case, the burden of proof would lie with those who dispute that the narratives exist today in their original form. The accounts stand as reliable until proved otherwise.

So the issue is not as simple nor as settled as Davis implies. And in fact, text criticism is perhaps the best way to solve the issue. If the ancient fragments of Scripture differ greatly in their text, then we would be able to assume that oral tradition and redaction existed. But if the "fossil record" of Scripture shows no "missing links," then the responsible assumption is that there was no oral tradition, or at least no significant revision.

Davis points out that at times Exodus says the Lord gave the law to the people, and at other times Moses gave the law. "Who was it then?" he asks. "Couldn't an inspired book get such simple details straight?" He indicates that this inconsistency points to multiple authorship over a long period of time, stemming from different traditions. He arrives at these conclusions because he subscribes to the evolutionary model and the humanist world-view. Yet one must admit that one author could have written Exodus and for literary flavor alternated the phrases "God spoke the law" and "Moses spoke the law." The phrases are not contradictory, but interrelated. It is assumed that when "God gave the law," Moses heard it and spoke it to the people. It is assumed that when "Moses gave the law" he did so after hearing it from God.

Davis states that many of the books of the Bible began in oral tradition. And he asserts that the authorship of many of the New Testament books remains clouded. But this is an exaggeration with the implication that if we don't know who wrote the books then their trustworthiness is doubtful. Of the twenty-seven books in the New Testament, only five do not specifically state the author at the beginning

(Matthew, Mark, Luke, Acts and Hebrews). What's more, even liberals do not debate the authorship of Luke and Acts. So only three books can be considered clouded unless one has sufficient reason to believe that the authors are lying about their identity.

The theory of oral tradition opposes what nearly all of the biblical texts claim about themselves. Moses claims to have written the Pentateuch with the exception of Genesis. The prophets claim personally to have written their visions. Luke and John claim that they wrote their gospels. Paul, who wrote thirteen biblical books, calls his epistles letters, implying that they were written. In order for one to subscribe to the theory of oral tradition he is forced to imagine oral visions which speak of being written, he is forced to imagine oral letters which were written in large letters, circulated, and read before the churches. These are absurd notions, for the very texts which were allegedly passed down orally speak of their written nature.

Statements regarding Form Criticism

Liberals claim that throughout history, especially in ancient history, readers of the Bible regarded the story of Jonah (and other similarly difficult for the naturalists to believe narratives) as a parable. In other words, they claim that it was not until after the Enlightenment that people began to think of ancient stories in terms of historical truth, but prior to the Enlightenment everyone agrees that Jonah was merely a parable. Jesus, however, seemed to take the story of Jonah quite literally. He said that the only sign he would give to his evil and adulterous generation was the sign of Jonah, for just as Jonah was in the belly of a whale for three days, so would the Son of Man be in the belly of the earth for three days. Unless Jesus viewed his future death and resurrection merely as a parable, he regarded Jonah as a historical fact. Repeatedly other New Testament authors cite Old Testament stories and treat them as facts upon which they build their own truths.

There is a further issue raised with the liberal assertion that Jonah is a parable. If we could conclusively determine that the book was not intended as a parable, would the liberals then be willing to admit that the events did indeed take place? In other words, is there rejection of the events based purely on literary grounds—that the book did not intend us to believe this? Of course not. Liberals would find another reason for squeezing their way out of being forced to believe in supernatural events.

Furthermore, one must guard against an arbitrary approach to deciding which Old Testament narratives are parables and which relate true historic events. Of course, the naturalist's criteria are not exactly arbitrary. Naturalists do not come to the conclusion that Jonah is a parable based on their study of the text. There is nothing in Jonah, in the Bible, in the Talmud, or in Early Christian writing that suggests the book was a parable. Instead, they come to this conclusion because they cannot accept the supernatural elements, but for some reason they want to uphold the value of the book. Their reasons for upholding the value of the book are various, but may include either a reluctance to have their scholarship immediately rejected by a Christian audience which would be put off by a more bold approach, or a desire to be in fellowship with the Christian community. In any case, Christians ought to show greater discernment and not fail to notice the motive behind assertions such as that Jonah is a parable.

Statements regarding reliability of Scripture

Davis states that the King James Version of the Bible mangles the order and meaning of the ten commandments. He rightly points out that the King James Bible says "you shall not kill" and that the intent of the Hebrew is closer to "you shall not murder." What Davis does not mention is that those two words have undergone a reversal in meaning over the last four hundred years. In the days of King James the meaning was clear to the listeners. So while Davis thinks smugly that he is illuminating his audience to yet another example where they have been led down a primrose path of misinformation, in reality he is merely illustrating the need for modern Bible translations. But even if Davis had a valid criticism for the King James Bible, he still has not in any way discredited the reliability of Scripture. The problem would lie with modern human translation, not ancient inspiration.

In the same vein, Davis makes the well-worn argument against the translation of the Red Sea which should instead be spelled Reed Sea. Here again he is evidently attacking the reliability of Scripture, but at best he can only succeed in attacking the work of Bible translators. But all widely-used modern translations

direct their readers to this point. So any criticism must be directed at the King James Version, neither the Biblical authors, nor modern translators.

Similarly Davis says that Jesus was not Christ's real name. The implication is that if the Bible couldn't even get his name right, then how can we trust anything else it says about him? Even if Jesus were a miss-translation, again Davis would not be attacking the credibility of the Bible but of modern translators. But his claim is an exaggeration. True, Jesus was a Jew and his Hebrew name was Yeshua, or Joshua in English. But clearly he was surrounded by people his whole life who spoke Aramaic and Greek. The Greek name for Yeshua is Jesus. This is a natural translation, and everyone in Jesus' day, and even every educated American up until the eighteenth century would have known this. The biblical authors wrote in Greek, so they used his Greek name. No one would have viewed this as a compromise of history.

Davis attacks the reliability of Scripture because of apparent contradictions. He mentions that the "gospels can't even agree on how many times Jesus entered Jerusalem." If they can't get such basic facts straight, then how can they be reliable? But academic honesty compels liberals to admit that no gospel ever claims to give an exhaustive list of how many times Jesus went to Jerusalem. No gospel says he went only one time, only two time, or only three times. In fact, none of the gospels or books of the Bible claims to be an exhaustive list of important historic events. On the contrary, the apostle John writes, "Jesus did many other things and even the whole world could not contain the books that could be written about him." But in their endless effort to write something provocative, liberals are trying taking John up on his dare.

Davis attacks the reliability of Scripture on moral grounds. He states that the laws of the Bible are no longer the majority view. Since that is the case, clearly some key element of this so-called inspired book is no longer viewed as authoritative. So in those areas where the vast majority of people don't even give God's law a second thought (such as ritual purity, laws for clothing and sowing) the Bible cannot be esteemed as an authoritative law book. This reasoning, however, reverses the logical order of understanding moral authority. Davis' a priori question is "Does the majority of people subscribe to this law?" Yet nearly all ethicists agree that the a priori questions are, "Does the higher authority (natural law, the greater good, God) still require this law?" Furthermore, as discussed earlier, there is biblical rationale for abandoning the laws in question. Were there no biblical rationale for no longer following these laws, it is reasonable to assume that a large portion of Christians would still be following them today. Davis fails to examine the reason these laws fell out of common consciousness. Christians no longer follow the purity laws precisely because they do view the Bible as reliable, and the Bible makes clear that anyone who follows the Jewish law renders the work of Christ as worthless.

Davis is inconsistent in his treatment of the reliability of Scripture, and he seems to pick and choose to doubt or support the events of Scripture arbitrarily. In general he comes to Scripture with a hermeneutic of suspicion, yet there are times when he makes historical statements indicating that he has a wealth of research and evidence on a given subject, even though his sole source is a verse from the Bible. For instance, Davis asserts with absolute certainty that Nazarites were people set apart from birth never to cut their hair, never to touch anything dead, and never to drink wine. The only sources for this information are the biblical accounts of Samson and Samuel. Yet obviously Davis deems this portion of scripture as reliable. Why does he not claim, as he does with nearly every other narrative in scripture he examines, that Nazarites probably never existed? Or that the idea of Nazarites was borrowed from another culture? Or that a later group of people invented the idea of Nazarites in order to explain the origin of long-haired people? Perhaps Davis believes that supporting the text will make him sound like a scholarly historian. Even more certainly, one may assume that he supports scripture here because there is nothing either supernatural involved or ethically related. So the narrative is "safe" for deeming reliable. In any case, Davis never sets forth a clear set of criteria for textual criticism, so one assumes that his method of determining the reliability of Scripture is his own intuition, presuppositions, and agenda. So it appears that he wants scripture both ways: painstakingly reliable in certain details, and pure legend elsewhere. And his naturalist world-view determines the difference between the two.

Another example of this double standard is Davis' treatment of the stories of Solomon. He whole-heartedly endorses the passages which describe the temple. He supports the text as if he had personally done archaeological research and found it as the author described. Yet he completely disregards the Queen of

Sheba's visit to Solomon. In fact, he doubts whether there was even such a Queen. How does Davis choose to support the temple narrative, but not the visit of the Queen. The answer seems clear: there is nothing threatening to the humanist world-view or the evolutionary model in the temple description. But if Solomon really was one of the richest men in the world, if he really did make alliances with neighboring nations and became one of the most powerful men in the world, then perhaps God really was supernaturally involved in the success of Solomon and the nation of Israel. Perhaps God really did give Solomon supernatural reason. Perhaps the nation of Israel really was special to God. These possibilities are unthinkable to humanists such as Davis, so their world-view requires them to believe that Solomon was an inconsequential king of an obscure village.

Davis states that though the Song of Solomon is traditionally ascribed to King Solomon, the Persian words in the text make this impossible. In addition, he claims that the book must have been written around the time of the Jewish return from exile (454 BC) because of the Persian words and because it resembles Arabic poetry. One reaction to this claim is that because the book does indeed claim to have been written by the King, then the pseudonymous author was lying. And if he was lying, then his book does not belong in Scripture. Davis does not wish to be so offensive or provocative, so instead he pretends that pseudonymous authorship was widespread and accepted. But there is no evidence to support that claim, and in fact the Jews discarded books from the canon which they believed were pseudonymous. This is the reason that the books of the Apocrypha were never accepted in to the Jewish or Protestant canon. But Davis didn't come to the conclusion of pseudonymous authorship through an examination of evidence anyway—his naturalist presuppositions require him to arrive at this point. A second problem with his criticism of the Song of Solomon is his rationale that the book was written in 300 BC because of the Persian words. Does Davis really believe that there are so few people in the world who understand ancient languages that he will be able to make this claim uncontested? The languages of the Ancient Near East, including Aramaic, Syriac, Sanskrit, Hebrew, and even Greek and Latin were in use even 1000 years before Christ. Though Persia became a world power in 300 BC, its languages were in use, albeit primitive forms, long before this time. It is not by any means a stretch of the imagination to believe that the Song of Solomon was written in 950 BC, during the time of Solomon.

Liberals seem to agree that nearly every book in the Bible was written hundreds of years after the events they cover, obviously by pseudonymous authors. But the biblical book subjected to the most outrageously late date is Daniel. Davis says that it can be "dated with some certainty to 165-160 BC." This so-called certain date is based solely on one verse in the book which mentions the rise of four kingdoms, the fourth kingdom of iron. Everyone agrees that this verse refers to Roman rule over Jews. But while historic Christians have allowed for the possibility of prophecy, liberals take this one verse as proof that the book had to have been written after the Roman rule over Israel began in 165 BC. So the controversy of dating Daniel does not rest on an examination of evidence, but whether one's world-view allows for the possibility of prophecy. In fact, the evidence points to a much earlier date. Indeed, if it were not for this one verse surely liberals would agree that the book was written at least as early as the Persian rule during the fifth century BC. But liberals also claim that the existence of Aramaic words in the book prove it was written after the date the author of the book claims to have been writing (in the sixth century BC). But no scholar can deny that Aramaic was in usage hundreds of years prior to even the earliest date of Daniel.

Because liberals must contend that Daniel was written at a late date since it contains prophecy, they are forced to explain the meaning of the book not within the context of Babylonian rule (550 BC), but within the context of Roman rule (165 BC). In other words, they must explain why this late writer chose to write the book, if not simply to recount history. They claim, therefore, that King Belshazzar is an allegory for Antiochus, the Roman ruler over Israel. In addition to the other responses to this methodology, one more issue must be raised, and that is the question of discovery. Why, in the twentieth century, is this idea just now coming forth? Are we really to believe that today we have so much more information than in the Early Christian days that we are able to discover radically new theories? If anything, the passage of time seems more likely to cloud discovery, not foster it. The ancient Rabbis and ancient Christian scholars were not ignorant of history and they were certainly not less fluent in Scripture. So any radically new theory must be

first view as an attempt to get published or awarded a dissertation. And if the theory carries on, its proponents ought to be able to find some precedence in the body of biblical studies.

So Davis says that one should read Daniel as “inspired allegory, not as history.” In other words, there was no den of lions, and no men thrown in a fiery furnace. But what exactly does Davis mean by “inspired?” He never says. What if one could prove that the book of Daniel really were written in the sixth century BC? Davis says he rejects the events of Daniel only because he does not believe we were intended to believe them: since they’re allegory. But if we could prove that the author intended to portray them as history, then would Davis be persuaded? Surely not. He is using the allegation that Daniel is an allegory as a cover for his skepticism and rejection of supernatural events.

Liberals claim that the gospels are unreliable because of “startling differences” such as the fact that only Mark records that many dead of Jerusalem rose and walked into the city during the crucifixion of Jesus. If this event were true, surely it would have been more widely recorded. This is a valid point, but one cannot exclude the reliability of the gospels because the writers chose to omit certain details. Furthermore, everyone knows that even if all four gospels recorded this event, liberals would not be more likely to believe it occurred.

Davis says that Mary’s virginity was not an issue for early Christians, but the issue became important in order to win over Gentiles. This proposition derives from the same line of reasoning as the assertion that Jesus was the political rebel and Paul was the revisionist historian/Greek philosopher. The starting point for the liberal is that there was no virgin birth, because this is not possible. But Jesus is still the hero, so someone else is responsible for this myth. The Bible prophesied that Jesus would be born of a virgin, it records that this happened, and it gives theological reason for the event. But rather than say the Bible is outright wrong the liberal prefers to explain the difficulty in some more favorable manner. So they say that these problematic verses crept in to win the Gentiles. This way Jesus remains the non-supernatural hero and the Bible is not completely slandered. This is not research, it’s philosophy. It’s liberal religion which cuts the foot in order to fit the Bible in to the shoe of liberalism.

Statements regarding inconsistencies

Another appropriate title for Davis’ essay might be, “All the inconsistencies of the New Testament.” If he can prove contradictions then he can justify his lack of faith in the supernatural and he can demonstrate that the Bible is not inspired by God (anymore than the Illiad or The Grapes of Wrath). For example, he says that Mark and John say Jesus was born in Nazareth, but Luke and Matthew say he was born in Bethlehem. He states that Matthew and Luke “cut the foot to fit the shoe” in order to “put him in Bethlehem to fit Isaiah’s prophecy.” According to Davis, Jesus spoke of himself as from Nazareth, not from Bethlehem, and Davis disregards the census as myth so he says there was not historical reason for Jesus to be in Bethlehem. He dismiss Herod’s census because, he says, if a census truly were taken there would be some historical evidence. But isn’t the Bible historical evidence? This line of reasoning demonstrates that to the liberals every fragment of ancient literature is a goldmine of historical evidence except for the tens of thousands of fragments of biblical literature. So whether or not one accepts the census, there is still the question how Jesus can be both from Nazareth and Bethlehem. Yet liberals must admit that this problem is an exaggeration. When someone is asked, “where are you from?” There are several possibilities—they may be asking where were you born? Or where were you reared? Or where do you live? Jesus was born in Bethlehem, but reared in Nazareth, and lived most of his life in Galilee. Davis portrays this as a great contradiction, yet he intends to portray that the Bible says Jesus was born in Nazareth and born in Bethlehem. Granted, that would be a contradiction, but the Bible does not say he was born in Nazareth, as Davis hints.

Davis says that at times Moses wrote the law, and at other times God wrote the law. “Can’t an inspired author get something so simple straight?” he asks. The implication is that the Bible is a garbled hodgepodge of fragments scrambled together. If the narrative can’t keep straight such simple details, then surely it’s not inspired by God. It would be a danger, therefore, to take everything in Scripture at face value. He concludes that these inconsistencies demonstrate that “we have to determine what is appropriate to us and what was appropriate to ancient nomads.”

Statements regarding the Canon of Scripture

Davis rightly points out that Esther is the only book in the Bible which does not mention the name of God. He states that the Hebrews debated whether to allow the book into the Bible until 500 AD. Where Davis found the obscure support (if any) for this claim is a mystery to this author. But this, perhaps more than most of his other theses, is an insult to his readers. It is a gross exaggeration, if not an outright lie. In fact, the book of Esther was included in the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Old Testament. The Septuagint was finished by 100 BC, and it was translated from the long held, fixed canon of Hebrew Scripture. So even the most critical, liberal scholar must say with certainty that Esther was included in the Old Testament by 100 BC. The motive for this statement is clear—if Davis can prove that the list of book in Scripture were disputed for not hundred, but thousands of years, then clearly no one can be sure that the books of the Bible are inspired. If God truly superintends the process of Scripture in any way, then this controversy would not have spanned such a long period of time.

Davis claims that “for 2000 years humans have been deciding what books are inspired.” While there may have always been people like himself who have doubted the inspiration of Scripture, by no means has the church debated the issue for 2000 years, or even 200 years for that matter. In fact, Peter quotes both Mark and Paul as Scripture. So even before the New Testament was finished the authors of the New Testament and the church viewed it’s books as Scripture. Paul expected his letters to be circulated and read as the word of God. Anyone who did not recognize what he was writing as the word of God would not be recognized by God, he says. The early church immediately began compiling a list of books in the canon and carried on this tradition until 454 AD when the process was not begun, but solidified. They did not vote on the list of books, but examined the lists which had independently been compiled over the previous 4 centuries, and they reached a unanimous decision.

Statements regarding History

Similarly Davis says, “Yom Kippur was not celebrated until 500 BC.” There is no evidence to suggest that this holiday was not instituted by Moses, as the book of Exodus indicates. Ex 30:10 states, “Once a year Aaron shall make atonement on the altar’s horns.” These words were written during the years of wandering in the desert from 1446 BC to 1406 BC, not a thousand years later.

Davis states, “whether events in Abraham’s live happened is purely speculation, as is the existence of Abraham.” This statement sheds light on his criteria for understanding the reliability of historical accounts. If there were no primary written account of an event, but only oral legend, then it would seem appropriate to say “whether this event happened is purely speculation.” But when a written account exists, and that account claims to have been written by an eyewitness, and there is no evidence to contradict either the eyewitness nor the event, then such a conclusion seems inappropriate. One must ask, what more evidence does Davis require in order to confirm pure speculation? He seems to imply that he will only believe in the account if he has some evidence other than the eyewitness’ writings. In other words, he takes a false until proved true approach to biblical narrative, and he never states what sort of proof he is looking for. Furthermore, one can be sure that he does not subject other histories to the same method of “false until proved true.” This is a special method of interpretation which he reserves solely for the Bible: for stories which his world view cannot support.

Davis states that there is no evidence of Moses outside of the Bible, and therefore he implies that Moses probably did not live. What Davis does not mention is that there is almost no contemporary literature from the time of Moses anyway. So one must wonder in which of the contemporary ancient writings is the mention of Moses notably absent? The answer is none. Davis would have a point if there were some body of literature concerning the same region and events, but no mention of Moses. But by his own admission (in that he says there is no external evidence of the events in Moses’ life) there is no literature in our hands today which fails to mention Moses. Furthermore, in the study of ancient history, since there is more often than not only one source of information, it seems more reasonable to deem that source reliable, since it remains uncontested, than to deem it unreliable because it remains un-collaborated. It seems clear that Davis takes a

“hermeneutic of suspicion.” In other words, he doubts nearly everything in the Bible unless it is collaborated by some non-biblical source—a luxury seldom afforded to scholars of ancient history.

Furthermore, it is likely that if a biblical account were collaborated by some other source, Davis would not then in turn admit that the account were true. Instead he would likely say that the biblical story was borrowed from the other source. He would likely do this, even if there were no compelling reason to argue the other source came first. It is as fashionable to doubt the biblical authors, as it is to uphold the authors of ancient Sumar.

Davis states that not until after Jesus’ death was he called the Christ. The biblical text refutes this. Peter called Jesus the Christ, and Jesus blessed him for this. Jesus told Pilate that he was the Christ.

Nevertheless, he maintains that these verses are later reinterpretations. Because liberals do not want to lose their Christian audience, they are reluctant to attack Jesus, but their naturalist world-view forces them to reinterpret who he was. They prefer to view Paul and other later Christians as the culprits of outlandish miracles, and to see Jesus as a man who fits perfectly within the naturalist paradigm.

So the contemporary liberal consensus is that Jesus was a political rebel who fought for the rights of the poor and oppressed. He was not a particularly spiritual or religious man. In fact, he fits perfectly into the naturalist and humanist world-views. He really makes the perfect Messiah for liberal theology. But after Jesus died, things went awry. Paul, who they say was more of a Greek philosopher than Jew, made Jesus out to be a God. Jesus would have been astonished, stupefied, and certainly petrified if he would have known this was going to happen. This picture encapsulates what the majority of liberal scholars, mainline denominational seminaries, and even mainline liberal pastors believe. They want to preserve Jesus as their hero, because they desire to maintain community among Christians. But in order for Jesus to be their hero, he must fit within their world-view. But Jesus cannot fit within their world-view if we take the gospel accounts at face value. So in order to fit their hero into their world-view they must explain why the gospel accounts have altered the picture of Jesus so radically. But there is no driving force to retain Paul as a hero, so he is credited with the demise of Jesus’ great liberal agenda.

Another example of this desire to make Jesus the hero is the feminist interpretation of the Bible. Davis states that Jesus “treated women as equal to men in many cases.” Christians agree with this statement, but it illustrates how liberals cling to the statements of Jesus which allow him to fit well within their paradigm of a social liberator, yet they regard anything attributed to Jesus which doesn’t fit their paradigm as a later addition.

If the liberal simply says that none of the supernatural elements in the Bible are true, then he will quickly lose his Christian audience and his book sales. Furthermore, he is left with the nagging question in his own mind as to how these stories came about. The consensus among liberals today is that the stories were added by gospel writers who knew the events did not take place, but used these stories to illustrate great spiritual truths. The problem with this interpretation is that often the great spiritual truth illustrated by a miracle is so greatly tied into the miracle that it is no longer great once the miracle is removed. For instance, liberals say that the virgin birth was added to the life of Jesus to illustrate theological truth. But what truth does it illustrate? That had Jesus not been born of a virgin we would still be slaves to our sinful nature. If we remove the miracle, we abolish the theological truth. There is no separation, so it is nonsense to say that the biblical authors knew their supernatural stories were not true.

Statements regarding hermeneutics

Davis argues that obsolete commands show problems with a literal interpretation of Scripture in modern times. He is referring to commands regarding the planting of crops, weaving of fabrics, purity of the house, and allotted foods. At first, his argument seems convincing. If nobody abides by these rules today, then evidently nobody takes the whole Bible literally. What he fails to mention is that some of these so-called obsolete laws were abandoned by Christians due to the explicit words of Jesus who “declared all things clean” (Mark 7:19). Furthermore, Paul clearly stated that to abide by the Jewish rituals was to render the death of Christ worthless. Paul’s central thesis in Romans and Galatians is that one cannot hold to both the Law and the Gospel. In addition, the author of Hebrews actually says of these laws, “He has made the first covenant

obsolete” In other words, the most literal interpretation of the Bible does not require one to follow these obsolete laws, but on the contrary, a literal interpretation of the Bible requires one not to follow them.

Statements regarding archaeology

Davis states that Jericho was unfortified by 1300 BC, implying that by the time Joshua marched around the walls of the city, there would have been no walls to crumble. What he doesn't admit is that the method of dating ancient cities nearly always relies exclusively on ostrcology (the study of the artwork on broken pieces of pottery). In some rare cases archaeologists have primary literary evidence which provides more accurate dating, but when they rely exclusively on ostrakon, the date is derived by a re-creation of artwork patterns. These re-creations are theories at best, and at worse they are fodder for doctoral dissertations, but nothing more. Without any other evidence, there is no way that an honest archaeologist can confidently conclude that Jericho was destroyed within a two or three hundred-year timeframe.

Statements Regarding Contradictions in Scripture

Davis believes he has landed a gold mine of doubt in his discussion of the Pharaoh's slaughter. He asserts that Exodus reveals its flaws of revision when the story mentions an older brother of Moses, who was saved from the Pharaoh's deadly decree. He calls this a "bothersome detail" in the book. Davis asks, as many pseudo-scholars have done through the ages, "Why wasn't Aaron killed instead of an attempt on Moses?" This question, though quite fashionable, derives from the common confusion of three infanticides in Scripture. Davis implies that Pharaoh decreed that the firstborn sons should be killed. Actually, this decree was that all male children born after the issue of the decree should be killed. The male children born before the decree were spared. One assumes that Aaron was born before the decree, and that Moses was born after. The second infanticide was carried out by the Holy Spirit during the Passover. Here the firstborn sons were killed. And the third infanticide was issued by Herod where all sons under the age of two were to be killed. So we see that it is not the detail in Exodus which is bothersome, but the negligence of critics which is truly bothersome.

Statements convoluting Scripture

Davis believes that if he can make the God of the Bible seem foreign, strange, distant, or in any way different enough from the common evangelical paradigm then people will lose trust in Scripture. So he makes passing statements such as "God approval of a man who sacrificed his daughter" (referring to Jephtha's daughter in Judges 11). He intends his audience to think that if God approves of human sacrifice, then surely the God of Judges is not the God of today. What Davis doesn't mention is that the bulk of Old Testament narrative is value-neutral. In other words, one may expect that everything in the Bible is either condoned or condemned. Since there is no explicit condemnation of Jephtha for sacrificing his daughter, then Davis assumes that God approved. But this is a grossly simplistic method of interpreting the Bible. Most Old Testament narrative simply presents what happened, and then what happened next. Solomon had a thousand wives, Lot's daughters slept with him, Jacob stole Esau's birthright, Jacob stole Laban's flock by trickery, and so on. None of these actions is explicitly condemned, because that is not the tenor of the narrative. The authors intended the audience to use their common sense and to enjoy the story. Imagine what an anti-climax would be created by a moral final vindictive condemning the obvious.

Statements regarding ethics

Davis says of the proverb "spare the rod and spoil the child" that this is "bad advice from a good book." He urges his readers to realize that "even hinting the Bible condones corporeal punishment in an age of abuse is a grievous mistake." He continues, "What was once acceptable in a primitive culture is no longer the case." One problem with Davis' line of reasoning is that one need not fear "hinting" that the Bible condones corporeal punishment—the Bible makes it resoundingly clear whether Davis, his pastor, or anyone

else acknowledges that fact. There is no way honestly to dodge the fact that the Bible condones corporeal punishment, yet Davis urges people to not even hint at this fact. In essence, he is hinting at the fact that he advocates dishonesty. A second problem with Davis' reasoning is that he indicates that our modern culture is less primitive than the culture of Proverbs. One may ask, "On what grounds does he believe we have made progress?" What are Davis' criteria for measuring progress? It can be assumed that his criteria are intuition, personal preference, and community consensus. Or, because of the confidence with which he dismisses scripture and states his own moral claim, perhaps Davis believes he is the standard of moral truth.

Similarly Davis states that modern Bible teachers ought to tone down the fact that the Jews were responsible for the death of Jesus. He fears that acknowledging this fact may lead to endorsing anti-Semitism. But the liberal methodology here is troubling. Liberals claim that we ought to change the facts or at least hide them in order to prevent anti-Semitism. Wouldn't it be more responsible to teach the whole counsel of God, including the trial of Jesus and the command to love one's neighbor?

Davis also tackles the scriptural condemnation of homosexuality. He states that a better understanding of the verse would be that the ancient Greek phrase implied violence, child molestation, or a debauched pagan expression of homosexuality. He claims that Paul did not intend to forbid a loving peaceful homosexual relationship between two adults. This assertion cannot be supported by text or linguistic criticism, and few liberals even make this case anymore. Instead, they find it easier simply to disagree with Paul. Yet for some reason Davis is reluctant to disregard Paul in this area. His reluctance causes him to search for some way to uphold Paul, and the text, but still allow for homosexuality. Surely the option of condemning homosexuality never entered his mind.

The World View of Don't Know Much about the Bible

Honesty demands the historical critic to express his biases at the outset. Davis implies that his book is neutral. In fact he says that his intention is merely to relate the historical facts. But scholars with both a conservative and liberal bias admit that no neutral interpretation of history exists. Davis is no exception. Regarding anthropology, he is a humanist. Regarding history he is an evolutionist. And regarding science he is a naturalist. His work, therefore, reflects this world-view. Specifically, he believes that the most valuable contribution of the Bible is what man can know about man. He rejects miracles in the classic sense: that is, he allows for no supernatural events in the world, neither the miracles of Jesus, the prophets, nor God. And he believes that historical accounts are the synthesis of revision and redaction.

Davis seldom explicitly states what he does believe, instead his essay is more a matter of what he doesn't believe. So the essence or details of his faith must be inferred or reconstructed. Davis does not believe Jesus was virgin born, he did not view himself as a Messiah, and he didn't literally rise from the dead. Jesus was highly esteemed women, equality, and the poor. The Bible is not inspired in the sense that God spoke to people, instead it is man's attempt over time to express what they believe about God. And in short, the Bible is a book of faith, not history. In what does Davis have faith? It seems that the essence of his faith is in the moral teaching of the Bible, at least the moral propositions with which he agrees.

Davis claims that faith is of great value. It has sustained Jews and Christians through persecutions and trials and through moral choices. But these allegedly gracious appeasements to faith are essentially condescending. Faith sustains the weak, but Davis happens to be informed that the objects of faith are historical non-realities. But, according to Davis, the Bible is not of theological propositional value. The reader may debate this, and Davis might even debate it, but if he truly believe that the Bible has theological value he would not be able to say such things as "the Israelites fashioned a God to be less human," and "the Bible is a display of [man's] power." If the Israelites fashioned God, then we can fashion him too. And if we can fashion God, then the Bible is of no authoritative value.

In conclusion Davis states that his book "set out to be a road map that remains morally instructive and spiritually vibrant." He says, "If you find faith, then Amen." But in reality there is nothing that will lead someone to find faith. It would be like saying to someone reading a cookbook, "If you find how to fix your car, then Amen." It almost seems as if he is apologizing for his own lack of faith. If there is anything morally instructive it is that we should follow our own path, or at least the consensus of our community in relation to

ethics. And if there is anything spiritually vibrant it must be the spirit of an unknowable God expressed by a barely knowable Bible. And so Davis says that, “to accept the Bible [merely] as literature does not renounce the fundamental truths.” But he never states what are these truths. And clearly, there are none which he endorses except that God cannot be known and that there are no supernatural events on earth.