

## Lecture 25: Conclusions and Reflections.

Reading: Kugel 662-689.

Why study the Bible?

1. It's fun/interesting/intriguing;
2. It's a classic! Part of a good humanistic education;
3. A/the foundation document of Judaism;
4. A/the foundation document of Christianity, hence of western culture (stories, art, theology, philosophy, etc.);
5. Ultimate source for various traditions in Quran and in Islam;
6. For guidance how to be a good person / how to lead a good life / inspiration / knowledge of God.

The first two reasons apply to many books/subjects.

The next three also apply *mutatis mutandis* to many books/subjects.

Merriam Webster Online Dictionary: *mu-ta-tis mu-tan-dis*

1 : with the necessary changes having been made

2 : with the respective differences having been considered

#6 is what makes the Bible the Bible.

The people who canonized the Bible, its earliest interpreters, did so because they accepted reason #6 (Kugel).

Modern scholars began with an attempt (Protestant in origin) to get back to the original word of God = the original biblical text (Briggs, discussed by Kugel), but that is not how it turned out.

- MBS are functional atheists, treat the book like any other human artifact, looking for signs of redactional activity, contradictions, etc.
- Attempt to recover original (= contextual) meaning of texts
- Attempt to recover the historical "facts"; hermeneutics of suspicion
- Ancient Israelites were simply one of the peoples of the ANE
- No attempt to use the Bible to get closer to God (except in epilogues!)

"Has biblical scholarship destroyed the Bible?" For traditional Jews and Christians, according to Kugel, the answer is yes (see esp. 681)

- Kugel never states clearly whether he believes biblical scholarship to be true
- Kugel has a narrow definition of Judaism; self-defined as Orthodox
- In defense of MBS: what scholars reject is sometimes, at least, what later generations said about the Bible, rather than what the Bible says about itself; for Kugel this distinction may not matter but it is worth noting nonetheless
  - ♦ Mosaic authorship of the Torah, Davidic authorship of the Psalms

- ♦ The divine origin of the Bible is (for Christians at least) a given because of 2 Timothy 3:15-17: *from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.*<sup>16</sup>*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,*<sup>17</sup>*so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.* But important to note that many books in the Bible do not claim divine inspiration or authorship (e.g. narratives. Wisdom lit., Psalms).
  - ★ Even traditionalists have to concede that prophetic books have a large human component in their composition (inspiration rather than revelation);
  - ★ Maimonides says that the Torah is written in human language, hence its unphilosophical images of God.
- Modern Bible Scholarship is based on *sola scriptura*;
- For Jews and Christians the meaning of the Bible is circumscribed by its place within a community of believers.
- For traditional Jews and Christians (Catholics) the meaning of the Bible is circumscribed by tradition but liberal Jews and Christians can live with scriptural polyphony.

For me (sjdc) it is certainly preferable if the ugly / troubling parts of Scripture have human, rather than divine, origins:

- Command to exterminate the Canaanites and Amaleqites;
- Low status of women in society and law (women as objects rather than subjects);
- Adultery and male homosexual intercourse are punished capitally (Lev 18 and 20);
- Validation of slavery (nb: NT too validates slavery);
- Execution of juvenile delinquents (Deuteronomy 21:18-21).