

## A GOOD OVERVIEW OF BIBLE "HISTORY" IN THE BOOK SAINT SAUL SKELETON KEY TO THE HISTORICAL JESUS

This interesting book by Donald Harman Akenson reveals several interesting facts. The prophecy in Daniel's seventy weeks is revealed to be predicting an Anointed One and not a Christian style Messiah or Christ (page 36-7). Christians tend to believe that it predicted the time Christ would be active in Jerusalem and that he was the Anointed One. The King James Bible mistranslated the text to make it speak of the Messiah in the Christian sense (page 36). Now Anointed Ones or Moshiahs can be kings, priests or even prophets (Psalm 105:15). Never does the Old Testament say that anything like the Christian Messiah is its spine and core. Yet Jesus himself said the opposite which was a lie put into his mouth or told by himself if he lived. Christianity imagined from the very start that the Old Testament was just a preparation for the coming of the Saviour. The book points out that the Christian practice of looking for references to the Messiah in the Old Testament where there are none eg Isaiah 53, and then ignoring how it uses the expression Anointed One to refer to a wide range of different people and kinds of people is illogical and biased and underhand (page 38). The Qumran scrolls also show that Anointed One could be anybody who had a job from God and not a special saviour of the world. The Damascus Document speaks of the Messiahs of Aaron and Israel (page 40). This refers to at least two Messiahs but could be read as meaning there would be several. The majority of the Jews, the chosen people, were not expecting or looking for the coming of the Christ (page 41).

The Book of Daniel refers to one like the semi-divine Son of Man who will rule an everlasting kingdom (page 45) but who is not the Anointed One of the Seventy weeks prophecy who works only in Jerusalem and does not have an everlasting kingdom but ends up with nothing. This shows the Son of Man who is like the Jesus of the modern Churches was not predicted in the seventy weeks prophecy.

Page 49 says there was no uniform Judaism in the days of Jesus and Saul, but it was made up of different groups all with different beliefs and emphasis. The Jews of the Dead Sea even put a spiritual temple not the physical one at the fore of their theology! They did not follow exactly the same legal code either for there is no evidence that they did and there is evidence that they all interpreted the law differently. Jesus was once called to work out which of the different disputes about when divorce should be legal was near the mark.

Page 57 argues that when Jesus forbade any attempt to go to Gentiles with his message but just to focus on the Jews that this saying of his must have been authentic for the Church did start seeking out Gentiles within a decade after his resurrection and the command was too well-known to leave out of the gospel. Well known or not there was no obligation to put it in! It could still have come from the Jewish Christians who lived in Jerusalem and who claimed to be apostles and recipients of visions.

The early Church used lots of different names such as believers Nazarenes, Jesusers, Jessians and disciples and sometimes the Way (page 63). Strictly speaking it was not an early Church for there is no hint that they all thought they had exactly the same identity as a body (page 63). All the factions had in common was a faith in Jesus. The name Christians was meant to be an insult for it came from outsiders (page 64) so it naturally took it decades to catch on. Rome would have found the word Christian offensive for it implied that the Christ or Messiah in Heaven had to be obeyed before the Roman Emperor and that Christians out of loyalty to Christ could not reverence the Emperor as an infallible and holy god. They made the Roman regime look ridiculous and without credibility. So the believers in Jesus were not Christians in the first century. A few were, but that is all.

Page 74, says that Jesus predicting that not one stone would be upon another when Jerusalem would be attacked should be granted poetic license for a part of the Temple, two towers and a piece of the Western Wall survived the disaster. But Jesus was not writing poetry and using poetic license to simple people who tend to take prophecies literally would not have been something he would have done. He meant it literally. But he was wrong.

The book argues that the gospels were all written after the destruction of Jerusalem which happened in 70AD because they try to console people who have lost the Temple that there is no need for it anymore for Jesus is the new Temple (page 77). That makes sense. Jesus' risen body becomes the Temple that is not made of human hands (Mark 14:58). The latest date for the creation of the gospels is 140 AD when evidence that they existed becomes available. A lot of that evidence is questionable! The late dating is rejected because the Jewish revolt of 115-117 AD is not mentioned. But then again who are we to decide if the gossellers would want to write about it? Their main goal was to promote Jesus as the new Temple and they were entitled to leave things out.

Paul speaks as if the second coming could take place any minute and tried to prepare all his followers for this even to the

extent of telling single ones not to bother looking for wives and so he knew that Jesus never predicted the destruction of the Temple and the siege (page 134). He would say the gospels are lies for saying different.

Josephus writes little of Jesus and more about the Baptist and his movement indicating that the latter was more important (page 79). This would be a hint that even then the Baptist was the triumphant messenger from God and Jesus was still more or less a nobody.

If Jesus was baptised by John as the gospels say, then it follows that Jesus was John's disciple (page 81). Jesus then could not really have been God or the Son of God.

Galatians 2:12 indicates that Peter far from being head of the Church and an infallible pope was actually under the authority of James (page 82). The verse says that Peter was afraid to upset the emissaries of James so he did something uncharitable. He showed himself up in front of Paul who made a show of him for doing that. He feared these men more than Paul and the only reason could be was that James was not only his boss, but had the power to destroy his apostolical career and perhaps declare him a fraud!

Page 85 admits that most historians accepted the secret gospel of Mark as providing a piece of Mark's gospel that the Church left out for it didn't suit its dogmas. But the book says it was a joke about Jesus being gay. There is that impression but there is no need to go that far in the interpretation. Plus, if that was the joke Morton Smith who discovered the gospel could not dare present it to the scholarly world for fear of derision and the end of his career. If Smith had written the story as many say, he would have been too afraid of people seeing the joke and making a joke of him!

The book is sceptical of the existence of the Book of Q (page 111, 321-327) and tells us that there is no physical evidence whatsoever that it existed (page 112) and says that it was invented in the late twentieth century (page 326). This is only right. Q is alleged to be the source of what the Synoptic gospels have in common. But maybe Mark made up his gospel out of thin air and plagiarised stories about different religious figures and Matthew and Luke copied parts of him with a bit of editing here and there?

The book sees no reason to believe that Luke really wrote the Luke Gospel or Acts either (page 135). The epistles of Paul that mention this person are rejected as inauthentic (page 136) technically forgeries so we don't know if Luke even existed.

Luke would have known Paul but the author of Luke and Acts seems to know nothing of Paul's epistles (page 137).

Acts says Paul persecuted Christians and killed them and went into every Christian house in Judea to drag believers out but Paul says the believers there did not know him by face (page 138). But Paul in his letters says he persecuted the Christians (Philippians 3:6) which I take to mean he persecuted them by getting to know their religion and spearheading attacks based on doctrine and philosophy on them. He gives no intimation that he once violently persecuted them – his murdering of Christians is something that the Book of Acts speaks about. He said he persecuted them according to the Law and not his interpretation of the Law which means that he made life difficult for them for the Law did not command the killing of Jews for heresy but only very serious heresy and the Christians then were not serious heretics and indeed accepted by many Jews as true Jews.