

Principal learning:

-- Word Biblical Commentary:

In reading Durham's introduction to the *Word Biblical Commentary* on Exodus, I appreciated the fact that he took the translation back to the original Hebrew, and that in fact this was one of the things that enticed him to work on the project, several decades ago. He brought up challenging points, that culturally the initial writer of Exodus and compilers of the Pentateuch did so not for historical reasons, but for theological. This flies in the face of what we are taught to value: "Just the facts, ma'am." In my present-day reading of the book, I do not want to let my own cultural presuppositions blind me to what written to the initial audience. I was intrigued by Durham's mention of attempting to retain some of the humorous overtones in Exodus. I am eager to see what exactly this was an allusion to.

-- Dictionary of the Old Testament:

One of the key things I gleaned from the readings in *Dictionary of the Old Testament* is that while the authorship of the Pentateuch was initially contributed to Moses, most scholars agree today that such an attribution is erroneous. In thinking it over, it does seem like a logical conclusion to draw, that somewhere in the dialog between God and Moses that the creation story of Genesis would have been revealed (either way, it parallels portions of the *Enuma Elish*). Moses was obviously illuminated (no pun intended) about a great many things. However, there is simply not enough textual and peripheral evidence to say *who* penned Exodus and the accompanying books, let alone that Moses did.

Seems to me if we did know, quite a few theologians would have to find another line of work. It

might just be due to my own pragmatism or self-justification of reluctance to dig deeper, but these types of arguments do not really interest me terribly. I feel the same way about these debates as I did when in high school and we had to discuss whether William Shakespeare was the name a real person or a *nom de plume* for some elusive writer. Authorship does not change the fact that superb writing was actually produced. In the case of Exodus, it still comprises a portion of the inerrant Word of God.

What I did find fascinating was the effort around placing the dates of the Exodus story, such as the types of weapons that were used, possible indicators of the plagues having been recorded in extra-Biblical sources, and the treasure city of Ramses being one of the locations cited (Exodus 1:11; 12:37). Not unlike the authorship problem, the case of the Pharaoh's identity continues to be debated. Popular belief (reflected by Dreamworks' movie adaptation *Prince of Egypt*) holds that Ramses II was the Pharaoh described in the Exodus story, but this has been and remains a topic of debate. There is not a conclusive amount of evidence to indicate which Pharaoh was reigning when God brought his people out of Egypt.

By far my favorite part of the reading in *Dictionary* was the discussion of how we as modern (or post-modern) readers tend to view ourselves with an sense of superiority and entitlement, reading back onto historic text our own sense of values. This was mentioned as our modern sense of the legal system being projected onto the guilt offerings discussed in Leviticus. Likewise, the founding fathers of the United States used clever eisegesis (encouraged by the clergy of their day) to justify the genocide of North America's original inhabitants. Viewing their defeat of the British as deliverance from the Pharaoh of England, they took this as permission to inhabit a new type of Canaan, wiping out opposition. We tread a dangerous line when scripture is mis-interpreted. While this de-humanizing of the enemy is what made possible the founding of the USA, as well as the holocaust of World War II.

Not surprisingly, the slaves in colonial times identified with the Israelites depicted in Exodus,

patiently awaiting change that only an act of God could bring about. Oddly enough, even the American Civil War was spun in a spiritual light (on both sides of the fighting). I am glad that slavery has since been abolished in the United States, but am saddened to think that it still exists around the world in many forms. I pray that the US would collectively learn from our mistakes, and even harken the voices of our youth. I was moved recently to hear of the two high school students who started the Save Darfur initiative (www.savedarfur.org). I think the world needs more things like this, as well as the preaching and teaching of the Word.

Questions:

In the readings from *Dictionary of the Old Testament*, there was a chart on page 265 describing the fates of various cities. One thing in particular caught my eye. Some of them were listed as having been "burned" while others "decimated" and I was wondering by what criteria a city is considered to have been decimated rather than simply burned. Call me naïve, but it seems to me that burning a city would pretty much decimate it. Obviously, I am missing something. I pictured Jesus' prediction (Mark 13:12) that not one stone would be left upon another, as what decimation would look like (or possibly the destruction Sodom and Gomorrah).