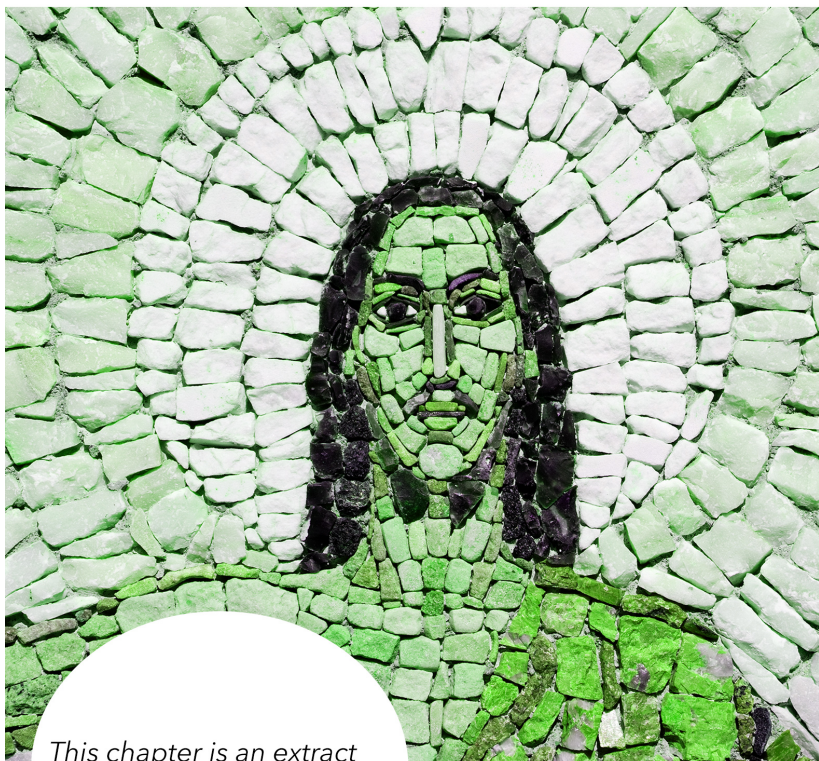


CHAPTER 17
THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT



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VERDICT

ON JESUS

LESLIE BADHAM WITH PAUL BADHAM

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CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

The Significance of the Old Testament

The Bible is more than an historical document to be preserved. And it is more than a classic of English literature to be cherished and admired. It is a record of God's dealing with men, of God's revelation of Himself and His will. It records the life and work of Him in whom the Word of God became flesh and dwelt among men.

Preface to the Bible (RSV)

Higher education would be lost on people who had not had long years of preparatory training. 'See' says the educationist, 'before you can impart advanced information on any subject, the road must be cut that leads to it.'

So obvious a fact need not be laboured. No one expects a child engaged on five-finger exercises to tackle Bach, nor a person lacking all literary appreciation to enjoy Chaucer or Milton, or the *Oxford Book of English Verse*.

How did it happen, then, that the teaching of Jesus, so highly demanding on moral and spiritual perception, was not wholly lost on those who heard him?

For an answer one has to turn to the long centuries of training and enlightenment recorded in the Old Testament. It provides precisely that evidence of preparation that we felt we should expect if Jesus were in fact a messenger from the Most High.

But is it not antecedently improbable that God would make a special revelation of himself to any one people? Was it not 'odd of God to choose the Jews'? Does God have racial favourites?

The difficulty dissolves if we realise just what being 'favourites' meant. It meant, as Jeremiah said, 'great things and difficult'. It meant being set apart, shaped, used. It meant being the servants of a purpose beyond their inclinations and national prejudices. They were told, as indeed it happened, that the revelation was not for them only, but that 'through them all the families of the earth should be blessed' (Genesis 12: 3).

As a scientist will isolate a specimen for special culture or experiment, or as a teacher will choose some pupils for intensive training that others might afterwards benefit from their work, so the Bible states that God chose the Hebrews to be the bearers of his truth before all nations. 'I, the Lord, have called thee in righteousness and will hold thy hand and give thee as a covenant to the people, as a light to the Gentiles' (Isaiah 42: 6).

Much in the character of the Hebrews fitted them to be chosen for special training. Sensitive to illumination, and yet slow to live up to it, their very 'toughness' as a people required that emphasis and repetition, that frequency of

occurrence, that those of critical mind might look for in a revelation purporting to be divine.

The very grimness of their experiences when they defied God's will, as they frequently did, may have been intended to serve as proof of the truth of God's word, and as a warning for all time, of the consequences that follow its rejection. Certainly all subsequent history has borne witness that it is by the principles enunciated by the Hebrew prophets that nations rise and fall. If any truths have been proved by events, then the truths of the Old Testament have that permanence of application that we should expect of a revelation emanating from God.

The inspirational nature of Hebrew enlightenment is strongly suggested by the way it led them intuitively, and almost despite themselves, to levels of knowledge above that of their contemporaries. Consider the sensitive moral perception behind teaching like this: 'When an alien settles with you in your land you shall not oppress him. He shall be treated as a native-born among you. You shall love him as a man like yourself because you were aliens in Egypt. I am the Lord your God' (Lev. 19: 33). Again, 'If I have ever rejected the plea of my slave or of my slave-girl when they brought their complaint to me, what shall I do if God appears? What shall I answer if he intervenes? Did not he who made me make them?' (Job 31: 13-14).

Does history show any people as God-conscious, as Godfearing as the Hebrews? Think of the prestige and authority accorded to their holy leaders, and the vehemence and power of the voices that proclaimed without fear or favour 'Thus saith the Lord'.

The same reverent awe is apparent in the scrupulous way they preserved their records. Dr Davidson in *The Old Testament* quotes the strict rules by which the copyists were bound: 'No word, letter, or even accent was to be set down without checking from the codex. Should a king address a scribe while he was writing the divine name, the scribe must ignore him.'

Old Testament texts discovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls witness to the care with which such rules were obeyed, for here we have copies of Old Testament writings that are a thousand years older than any previously known, and they correspond with remarkable fidelity to the later manuscripts, establishing how faithful was the transmission of the holy word when checked for variations over a thousand years.

'Modern archaeological and linguistic methods of study have further confirmed our confidence in the Biblical story. Biblical archaeology has illuminated the historical setting of the events and cultural background with which Biblical faith is concerned.'⁴²

Tens of thousands of texts like those found at Mari, Nuzi, Ras Shamra, Tell-el-Amarna, take us right back to Old Testament times, and the result is reassuring. But more important than the historical basis underlying the Old Testament is the theological interpretation that is given to the events described. The Old Testament was written and

⁴² Dr. G. E. Wright, *Biblical Archaeology*, pp. 19, 25.

cherished by people convinced that they had things of supreme importance to pass on.

Looked at objectively, it is plain that the illumination that came to the Hebrews was of such a nature, and so scaled to meet them at successive stages of development, that it cannot be explained save by the fact of divine inspiration—mediated indeed, through fallible human agencies, but unmistakably showing signs of God's over-ruling purpose.

And what was the purpose of this illumination, this age long discipline and instruction, if it were not to prepare people's minds for the teaching of Jesus?

If a drama moves along reasonable lines of development, if there is evidence of grasp and mastery in the unfolding of the plot, we hopefully anticipate that we shall be granted an equally reasonable and satisfying conclusion.

The Old Testament invites a similar confidence. It unfolds a sublime drama, but it breaks off rather than reaches an end. We look for some gathering up of the themes, some satisfying conclusion, but without the coming of Christ the Old Testament would merely tantalise us, with problems unanswered, promises unfulfilled, themes loose and without pattern. But with the life and teaching of Jesus, the Old Testament finds its logical fulfilment. The Old Testament illuminates the New, and the New gives point and sublime significance to the Old. There is an organic relationship between them. They are as related as root and blossom.

Jesus assumed a knowledge of the Old Testament in those who heard him. It had laid a foundation on which he could

build. For it was more than a rough foundation. It was, in itself, a piece of massive architecture—needing something, but demanding that ‘something’ to be of surpassing excellence.

When an architect has designed an arch, and when numerous workers have slowly brought it to completion, there comes the moment when the keystone is required. Without the coming of Jesus, the arch of the Old Testament, spanning so many centuries, would have lacked its keystone. It stands now locked into organic unity, a process-built, progressive revelation.

Naturally it took time. God who in nature works through slow processes, abiding his time for every fruit to come to its perfection, would not act differently, or be less patient, in the nurture and training of complex humanity.

The Old Testament seems scaled to meet humanity’s growing apprehension. Every main idea starts from simple beginnings and with many setbacks and delays, grows in scope and height towards the fullness that enabled the contemporaries of Jesus to understand his teaching.⁴³

Without the basic morality of the Mosaic code how could the Sermon on the Mount have been understood? The acceptance of the old was the necessary condition for the perception of the new.

⁴³ H. E. Fosdick, *Guide to Understanding the Bible*; G. Herbert, *The Authority of the Old Testament*.

It was necessary for Moses to forbid specific acts. It was possible for Jesus to deal at a higher level with the inner thoughts from which such acts proceed. Moses dealt with visible deeds, Jesus could go on to speak of invisible motives. Moses dealt with sin, Jesus with the roots of sin.

The continuity is obvious. The development inevitable. Obviously if God was to be known in terms of Fatherhood, his revelation could not stop with the disclosure of Law. No fatherly relationship can be based on tablets of stone. As Jeremiah foresaw, a new and more intimate relationship had to be established. The time had come for God to say, 'I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it upon their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people' (Jer. 31: 33). It was the work of Jesus to fulfil that prophecy in very truth.

As morality advanced, moving from the act to the thought, from the deed to the motive, from the legal relationship to one of voluntary response, so the theology that gave rise to it in the Old Testament moves upward to meet the full revelation of Christ, and shows similar progressive advance.

Every prophet seems to have been entrusted with some special contribution to the knowledge of God's character. Amos stressed his justice, Hosea his loving kindness, Isaiah his holiness, Jeremiah his demands on the community, and Ezekiel his call to the individual.

These broad conceptions of God's character were well known to those who heard Jesus. He addressed a people who had reflected on the prophetic revelation and had accepted it as authoritative.

The time had come then, when the revelation could be completed; and who could do that save the one described by Hegel as ‘the unique figure in whom the whole history of religion culminated’?

By the fullness of his teaching, by the sublimity and faultlessness of his life, Jesus gave ‘the good life’ a new persuasiveness, and a new dimension, and a more intimate relevance for human need. By him, too, the full portrait of God was made real to humanity. Schooled as he was, in the finest Old Testament theology, even St Paul found that he had gained a wholly new conception of God by thinking of him as ‘the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ’. The first two verses of the Epistle to the Hebrews expressed what centuries of faith have confirmed: ‘God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in times past by the prophets has in these last days spoken unto us by his Son.’

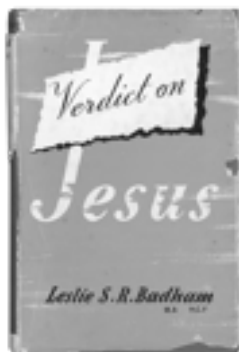
There is no suggestion of two separate revelations. The one is the perfect flowering of the other. Jesus himself was explicit about the relationship between himself and the Old Testament. He knew that it was the older teaching that made his own possible. ‘Other men have laboured,’ he said to his disciples, ‘and ye have entered into the fruit of their labours.’ He was equally confident that the older teaching looked to him for completion. ‘I am come,’ he said, ‘not to destroy but to fulfil.’

It is hard to have this vision of a slowly heightened and progressive revelation, moving upwards from the implicit to the explicit, from the partial to the perfect, without seeing behind it the continuous love and purpose of God, which

Christians have seen as the key to the understanding of the life and purpose of Jesus.

7 Decades

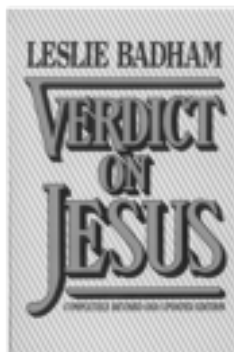
Verdict on Jesus through the years



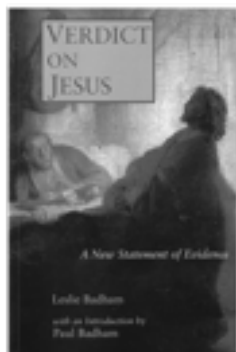
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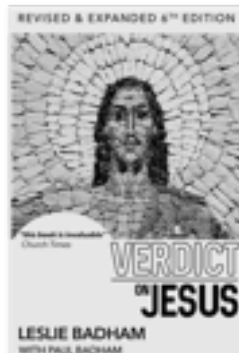
1983



1995



2010



2020

Leslie Badham

Author of Verdict on Jesus

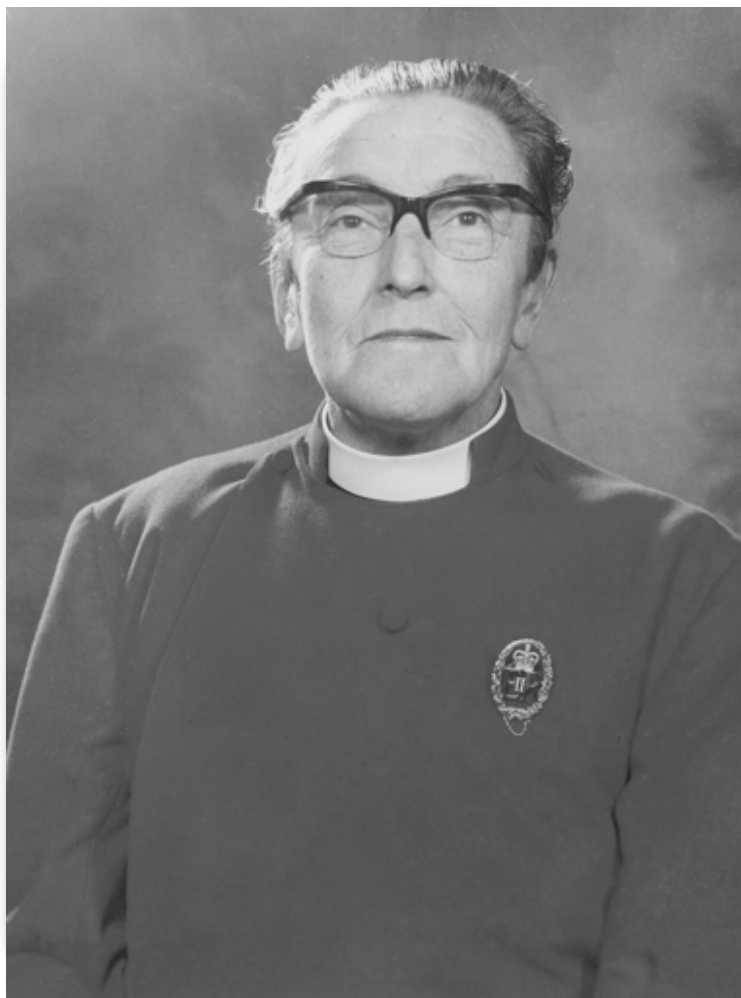


Top left: Leslie Badham with Effie, his fiancée, at her graduation from the LSE in 1935

Top right: Leslie and Effie Badham with their children David, Christine, Clare and Paul in 1963

Middle: Leslie Badham with Queen Elizabeth II at Windsor Parish Church in 1965

Bottom left: Leslie Badham RAF Chaplain 1940-45



Leslie Badham (1908–75)

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