

FTB #61 INHERIT THE WIND (SCOPES TRIAL): A LOT OF HOT AIR

The Scopes Trial of 1925 is often one of the most misunderstood trials of this century, primarily because, just as in the trial, we have been set up and framed by the movie “Inherit the Wind.” While the movie had characters representing the real people involved, they didn’t represent the facts accurately and added much information to try and make Christianity look silly.

There were three main people involved in this case: Clarence Darrow, Williams Jennings Bryan and John Scopes. Darrow, an outspoken agnostic and defender of Scopes, was portrayed in the movie as being hated by the small community of Tennessee, even being called the devil as he came into town. This, however, wasn’t true at all. In fact, Darrow admitted his surprise to how well he was treated even saying he hadn’t felt that kind of hospitality anywhere before.

Williams Jennings Bryan was a Young Earth Creationist at heart as well as a three-time Democratic Presidential nominee. He was Secretary of State under Woodrow Wilson and was known as a kind and generous man as well as a great orator. When Bryan died, Darrow even admitted to voting for him twice. The movie portrayed Bryan as a raving lunatic with such a spiritual bias that he couldn’t think logically or control his temper. His long history in the public eye clearly revealed that nothing of his character was accurate in the movie.

The movie made John Scopes look like a persecuted victim when, in fact, he was actually a willing participant. To understand this you need to know the history leading up to this trial. The Butler Act had passed saying that it was unlawful to teach Evolution in Tennessee in regards to human origin (not with plant or animal) and the ACLU in New York set out to challenge this law. It wasn’t the citizens that were upset with Scopes, it was the ACLU upset with the Butler Act and they are the ones who filed the lawsuit. The well-documented facts are that the ACLU put an add in the paper saying, “We are looking for a Tennessee teacher willing to accept our services in testing this law in the courts.” George Rappleyea, a local businessman (coal plant manager), saw the add and approached Mr. Scopes to answer this add, thinking this kind of publicity would be great to boost a failing economy. Scopes was merely substitute teaching in a biology class for two weeks where he read questions from a chapter

dealing with evolution in the mandated textbook for a test review. He himself admitted that he never did teach evolution at all but this did not affect Mr Rappleyea at all, thinking that they could ignore that fact and twist the truth a little bit, which is exactly what they did. Scopes was schooled by the Darrow in exactly what to say, as were the students in the classroom, to admit that they were taught evolution. While the movie showed a stressed Scopes in danger of losing his girlfriend and facing prison, none of this was true. Scopes was never in danger of jail nor did he have a girlfriend at the time. It was all cordial and well-planned.

The trial never really focused on Scopes, but rather the Butler Act, trying to make it unconstitutional and make fundamentalist Christians look silly. The movie certainly did attempt to make a mockery of Christianity, however, in the real trial it wasn't like that. Bryan never got to say his closing arguments because Darrow, who was suppose to defend Scopes, gave his closing argument saying that Scopes should be found guilty. This meant that Bryan couldn't give arguments in support of Creation so they were never heard in the courts. Scopes was found guilty after a 9 minute deliberation and was fined \$100 which the ACLU paid for (His graduate school after this trial was also taken care of).

"Inherit the Wind" was more fiction than truth. Though the movie portrayed Bryan dying at the end of the trial because of his tirade, he actually died in his sleep five days after the trial due to complications with diabetes. Hours before dying, Bryan expressed his desire to have his closing arguments published so that world would hear the truth, yet the media didn't make much to do of that. The movie also has the Rev. Jeremiah Brown who was more like a Jeremiah Wright, yet there was no Rev. Brown or anyone else involved. This character was made up and used to make Christians look ignorant and unloving. The producers had Rev. Brown's daughter pleading for her father not to call curses down on Scopes and Darrow and, as a result, he calls curses down on his own daughter. They also had Bryan beginning to lose it on the stand, quoting the Books of the Bible and apparently a past presidential speech, but neither of these things, nor anything like that happened.

Throughout this trial, evolution was confused with terms like embryology and aging, things that evolution-opposing creationists would agree with. In essence, Darrow was successful in turning this case into a false biology class which reversed the momentum of the push to ban evolution. Now look where we are today. There were so many lessons that we should have learned from this case, but the ignorance brought about by this

movie has kept the truth from being seen. The theologians of that day were saying that the Bible was written by men so we could use science (man's work) to help interpret the Bible. One methodist pastor said, "To science and not to the Bible must man look. . . as to the process of man's creation."¹ The Dean of Divinity School at the University of Chicago said that the understanding of Genesis and creation, "Is no more denied by evolution than it is by the laws of light, electricity and gravity."¹ These men, and many like them during the time of the Scopes Trial were saying that science can cause us to interpret or reinterpret Genesis- God's Word.

To understand the full absurdity of these statements, let's look at the scientific evidence that these theologians of the past were saying could interpret the Bible and were used to support evolution in the Scopes Trial:

- 1) Piltdown man was used as proof that evolution had occurred, yet in 1953, 28 years after the trial, the skull was proven to be an elaborate hoax.
- 2) The Grand Canyon formed slowly over millions of years by the Colorado River. Though some still teach this today, especially the textbooks and tour guides, many secular geologists today have challenged this idea saying that it is a result of catastrophic events in the past. As creationists, we agree and say it was Noah's Flood, but they are willing to concede to that just yet.
- 3) Gill slits in embryos show we were once in the fish stage in the womb. Nobody with any knowledge of anatomy today will admit this anymore. The "slits" turned out to be wrinkles that turn into the jaw, glands and ear. They aren't gills at all.
- 4) Over 180 useless organs leftover from evolution (vestigial organs). Nearly all of these have been rejected as left-overs and modern science has shown that they all have uses. For example, the appendix cited in the trial, is now known to be where immune systems are initiated and taking it out increases ones susceptibility to leukemia, Hodgkin's disease and certain cancers.
- 5) The horse evolution of Equidae was said to be the "most conclusive story of evolution." Yet in 1979 David Raup, the curator of Geology at the Field Museum of Natural History, said, "The evolution of the horse in North America has to be discarded."¹

So much for science helping interpret the Bible. The truth is these were all lies used to reinterpret the Bible. This is the problem with science, the evidence that is seen is always interpreted. This is why the Bible only must be used to interpret the Bible. However, instead of theologians

recognizing the mistakes of the past, today we have many of them saying the same things. I could fill many pages with such examples of compromise and ignorance. Dr Pattle P.T. Pun, from the science department at Wheaton College, a well-known Christian college in America today said that IF YOU LEAVE OUT SCIENCE, “It is apparent that the most straightforward understanding of the Genesis record, without regard to all of the hermeneutical considerations suggested by science, is that God created heaven and earth in six solar days … that death and chaos entered the world after the Fall of Adam and Eve …”.¹ Gleason L. Archer, another famous theologian of our day said, “From a superficial reading of Genesis 1, the impression would seem to be that the entire creative process took place in six twenty four-hour days … This seems to run counter to modern scientific research, which indicates that the planet Earth was created several billion years ago … . The more recently expanded knowledge of nuclear physics has brought into play another type of evidence which seems to confirm the great antiquity of the earth, that is, the decay of radioactive minerals.”¹ All of this despite the continuing piles of information showing radioactive dating to be inaccurate. Other writers like Charles Hodge, Davis Young, and Hugh Ross, all reinterpret Genesis using non-Biblical information. Why don’t we learn from this? In a 1994 TIME magazine article about Charles Alexander it stated: “In the years before he got into journalism, senior editor Charles Alexander taught science at two high schools in Tennessee. He told his students about early man and the origins of life and touched on the dinosaurs, ‘And just about everything I taught them,’ he says, ‘was wrong.’”¹ In the Smithsonian there was a sign by the origin of man display saying, “A lot has happened since this exhibit opened in 1974. The science of human evolution is a fast-changing field. Much of the material here is now out of date. We’re developing a new exhibit based on the latest findings.”¹ Man’s ever evolving interpretations of science continue to keep many in the dark.

We read in 1 Tim 6:3: “If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, he is conceited and understands nothing.” In Psalms 49:13 we are warned, “This is the fate of those who trust in themselves, and of their followers, who approve their sayings. Like sheep they are destined for the grave, and death will feed on them.” I for one am going to stand on the Word of God for truth. A Word that has been substantiated by history, science and archaeology. A Word that does not change. As the Psalmist tells us, “Those who know Your name will trust in you, for you, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek you” (Ps 9:10).

1. The World's Most Famous Court Trial, second reprint edition, Bryan College, Dayton (Tennessee), 1990, p. 229
2. Ibid.
3. 'Conflicts between Darwin and paleontology', Field Museum of Natural History Bulletin, Vol.50 No.1, January 1979, p. 25.
4. Pattle P.T. Pun, 'A Theology of Progressive Creationism', Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith, Vol.39 No.1, March 1987.
5. Gleason L. Archer, A Survey of Old TestamentIntroduction, pp. 196–197
6. 'To Our Readers', TIME magazine, March 14, 1994, p. 4
7. Smithsonian Natural History Museum, Washington, DC, 1996