

WAS PRESIDENT BARTLET RIGHT?

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We were discussing the Old Testament last week. Many people tend to avoid it ... and are often encouraged to spend time in the New Testament.

I tried to show last week that the Old Testament is vital to us. It is revelation to us from God. The Bible is one book ... with one author ... from Genesis to Revelation.

Even the term "Old Testament" can create a view that it's old ... out-of-date ... decaying ... for an ancient people living in ancient times.

Most believers treat the Sabbath and the Holy Days as not relevant ... partly because they're associated with the Old Testament and ... as everyone knows ... "the Old Testament is all done away".

But as we saw last week though ... the New Testament believers preached Jesus and the Kingdom of God entirely from the Old Testament. The New Testament Church only ever had the Old Testament scriptures for many decades.

Jesus said that man was to live by every word that proceeds from the Mouth of God ...the only words in those days were the Old Testament.

The Bereans searched the scriptures daily. The only ones there were ... the Old Testament.

Paul taught the Romans and Corinthians that the lessons of the Old Testament were written down for our admonition ... for our benefit.

2 Timothy 3:10-17 (NKJV)

10 But **you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, 11 persecutions, afflictions**, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra—what persecutions I endured. And out of them all the Lord delivered me.

12 **Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.**

13 But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.

14 **But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them,**

15 and that **from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.** (*That would suggest that the Old Testament was still important ... still valid*)

16 **All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,**

17 **that the man of God may be complete, (spiritually mature) thoroughly equipped for every good work.**

The New Testament writers in their letters didn't ignore the Old Testament. They often quoted it ... or at least alluded to it ... to support their views.

There are approximately 695 separate Old Testament quotes in the New Testament. If we include allusions ... hints and references ... there are over 4,000.

Of 404 verses in the Book of Revelation ... almost 69% (278 verses) contain some allusions to the Old Testament. Of the 39 Old Testament books ... some scholars believe as many as 24 are referenced.

We may find some Old Testament books more difficult to understand. Names and locations may be unknown to us ... you can see some cultural or historic references that might go over our heads ... but we shouldn't just stick with the shorter ...

simpler books. The Bible ... all of it ... is inspired. Holy Men of God were moved by the Holy Spirit. We may just have to put more effort into it! "Study to show yourself approved unto God a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth".

So ... hopefully ... we can see that the Old Testament is still important to us ... just as it was to Jesus ... Peter ... Paul ... Timothy ... the Early Church (and of course ... we do have the added benefit of the New Testament too).

So ... we should spend good quality time in reading and being familiar with the Old Testament.

As we ended last week's message ... we did refer to a further alleged problem with the Old Testament. Many people read it and conclude it is irrelevant ... out-of-date ... full of laws and practices that are frankly embarrassing to Christians. Modern-day readers scoff at its primitive laws ... repudiate them as unworkable ... possibly not even Christian ... and just confirm their belief that the Old Testament is just not relevant today.

I've read a script taken from an episode of the TV series "West Wing". The President was annoyed that a radio talk-show host hadn't stood up. So he mocked and scoffed at her Christian beliefs ... particularly that she'd called homosexuality a sin on her radio program. Let's read the story again:-

WEST WING Episode 25 (Oct 2000)

The atmosphere was electric. The president of the United States was about to address a gathering of radio talk show hosts in the White House. As the president entered the hall, they all stood and applauded. All, that is, except one — a woman with strikingly blond hair, wearing a bright green suit. At first, her presence rattled the president. He lost his train of thought several times before he finally spoke directly to the sitting talk show host.

"Excuse me, doctor," the president said to her. "It's good to have you here. Are you an M.D.?"

"A Ph.D.," she retorted smartly.

"In psychology?" he pursued.

"No, sir," she said.

"Theology?"

"No."

"Social work?"

"I have a Ph.D. in English literature," she replied.

"I'm asking," continued the president, "because on your show people call in for advice and you go by the title 'doctor,' and I didn't know if maybe your listeners were confused by that and assumed you had advanced training in psychology, theology, or health care."

"I don't believe they are confused. No, sir," she responded.

"Good," said the president, raising his voice sarcastically. "I like your show. I like how you call homosexuality an abomination."

"I don't say homosexuality is an abomination, Mr. President," she replied haughtily. "The Bible does."

"Yes, it does!" he shouted. "Leviticus 18:22." The president was just warming up. "I wanted to ask you a couple of questions while I had you here. I'm interested in selling my youngest daughter into slavery as sanctioned in Exodus 21:7. She's a Georgetown sophomore, speaks fluent Italian, always cleared the table when it was her turn. What would a good price for her be?"

After a brief moment, he continued: "While thinking about that, can I ask another? My chief of staff, Leo McGarry, insists on working on the Sabbath. Exodus 35:2 clearly says he should be put to death. Am I morally obligated to kill him myself or is it OK to call the police?"

Now on a roll, the president steamed on triumphantly. "Here's one that's really important, 'cause we've got a lot of sports fans in this town. Touching the skin of a dead pig makes one unclean, Leviticus 11:7. If they promise to wear gloves, can

the Washington Redskins still play football? Can Notre Dame? Can West Point?

"Does the whole town really have to be together to stone my brother John for planting different crops side by side? Can I burn my mother in a small family gathering for wearing garments made from two different threads?"

"Think about those questions, would you? One last thing; in this building when the president stands, nobody sits."

The president paused to catch his breath. The silence that invaded the room was deafening. The once self-assured talk show host slowly rose to her feet, her face reddened with shame. Her quick come-backs and commanding presence wilted away. She had no response. The president of the United States had left her speechless.

The very Bible that she had used to beat up on homosexuals had now beaten her into submissive silence.

Imagine the humiliation you would feel if you were standing in her shoes. What would you — what could you — have said? Had the president of the United States really demonstrated that the Bible was out of date and absurd? Should it indeed be relegated to the scrap heap of history? Do the very Scriptures that condemn homosexuality commend slavery? Should football be outlawed because touching pigskin makes one "unclean"? Should we kill those who work on the Sabbath as prescribed by Scripture? Should we stone men for planting different crops side by side or burn women for wearing clothing made of two different threads?

The impact of this encounter between Dr. Jenna Jacobs and President Josiah Bartlet can hardly be overstated.

*More than 11 million homes tuned in to watch the drama unfold as NBC's Emmy award winning *The West Wing* used Dr. Jacobs to caricature Dr. Laura Schlessinger as a rude and bigoted religious talk show host.*

The article concludes with:

Millions of Christians, no doubt, wavered in their faith.

They wondered whether the Bible they had put their trust in had been exposed as antiquated and absurd.

As the article concludes ... millions of Christians probably wavered in their faith. On the face of it ... the Old Testament at least (maybe the whole Bible) had been exposed by the President Josiah Bartlet as antiquated and absurd.

Could you defend these Bible passages? Should we pretend they're not there? Is it proof that the Old Testament is out-of-date? Let's have a look.

This type of attack on the relevance of the Bible ... or Old Testament ... or even God ... often is connected to when believers condemn homosexuality and quote the Bible as their authority.

On chat shows ... if the host wants to create a bit of controversy ... he may ask a Christian ... "Do you approve of gay people"? Lots of people beat around the bush ... "Not my place to judge" etc ... but some state bluntly ... "No! Homosexuality is a sin ... it's an abomination to God"! When the chat show host asks where it says that ... most people at that point will turn to Leviticus.

This is the one that President Bartlet referred to:

Leviticus 18:22 (NKJV)

22 You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. *It is an abomination.* (God speaking here!)

Leviticus 20:13 (NKJV)

13 If a man lies with a male as he lies with a woman, both of them have committed *an abomination.* **They**

shall surely be put to death. Their blood shall be upon them. (*Capital punishment*)

In reality ... the average American believer (probably in the UK too) is almost entirely Biblically illiterate. Barely 40% of believers can even name the first 5 books of the Bible ... let alone be familiar with what's in them! 60% of believers can't name 5 of the 10 commandments. 12% believe Joan of Arc was Noah's wife.

They're essentially ignorant of the bible. Their Church teaches (maybe) that homosexuality is wrong ... a sin ... and are happy that it's mentioned in the Bible. So if someone refers to Leviticus chapters 18 and 20 ... they're convinced.

But then the attack comes from the host.

"Oh ... so we shouldn't permit homosexuality because Leviticus/the Bible condemns it"?

"Correct".

"So you believe we should obey the teaching here in Leviticus 18 and 20?"

"Oh yes!"

"So you believe we should put homosexuals to death"?

Usually silence ... then "No".

"So you believe the first half of the verse ... but not the second?"

Usually the believer gets confused and flustered at this point. Then the attack (as with the President)... moves on:-

Leviticus 19:19 (NKJV)

19 "You shall keep My statutes. You shall not let your livestock breed with another kind. **You shall not sow your field with**

mixed seed. Nor shall a garment of mixed linen and wool come upon you.

The host will then usually say: "Do you do that"? The answer typically is "No".

"So. Are you just picking and choosing what you want? You want to condemn gay people based on the Bible ... but you don't practice it yourself? Hypocrite!"

Often they move on to:-

Leviticus 20:9 (NKJV)

9 **"For everyone who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death.** He has cursed his father or his mother. His blood shall be upon him.

So we have to put to death a child who curses their parents? (Deut 21 ... stubborn and rebellious child should be put to death).

"Do you believe we should stone disobedient children"?

The answer is usually "No".

"So then ... why do you criticise gays? You're a hypocrite ... picking and choosing what you want"!

Wow! The Bible does look absurd ... doesn't it? At least ... the Old Testament.

Let's continue with the President's points about the footballs.

Leviticus 11:1-8 (NKJV)

1 Now **the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron,** (*God speaking*) saying to them,

2 "Speak to the children of Israel, saying, 'These are the animals which you may eat among all the animals that are on the earth:

3 Among the animals, whatever divides the hoof, having cloven hooves and chewing the cud—that you may eat.

4 Nevertheless these you shall not eat among those that chew the cud or those that have cloven hooves: the camel, because it chews the cud but does not have cloven hooves, is unclean to you;

5 the rock hyrax, because it chews the cud but does not have cloven hooves, is unclean to you;

6 the hare, because it chews the cud but does not have cloven hooves, is unclean to you;

7 and **the swine, though it divides the hoof, having cloven hooves, yet does not chew the cud, is unclean to you.**

8 **Their flesh you shall not eat, and their carcasses you shall not touch. They are unclean to you.**

Leviticus 11:24-25 (NKJV)

24 **By these you shall become unclean; whoever touches the carcass of any of them shall be unclean until evening;**

25 whoever carries part of the carcass of any of them shall wash his clothes and be unclean until evening:

The President mentioned the footballs. "If they promise to wear gloves ... can they still play football"?

Now ... if we get into a discussion about why we don't eat pork ... rabbit ... shellfish ... we might turn to Leviticus Chapter 11. "See ... we're not to eat these". But then someone will point to stoning disobedient children ... not wearing garments of mixed fibres ... capital punishment for homosexuals ... not mixing seeds in a field ... etc ... then demand to know "what makes you think you can just pick and choose what you want"?

Can we explain? Or ... are we in difficulties?

What about selling your daughters into slavery? Does the Bible really say that?

Exodus 21:7 (NKJV)

7 **And if a man sells his daughter to be a female slave, she shall not go out as the male slaves do.**

Wow! Are we sure the Old Testament is really for us today? Is it antiquated and absurd? Of no relevance? Best avoided? Do we hope no one asks us any "difficult questions"? Should we be embarrassed?

Was Jesus wrong when He said man should live by every word of God? Was Paul wrong when he told Timothy the Holy Scriptures made him wise unto salvation?

So. What do we do with these scriptures and other similar ones? When we point to Leviticus Chapter 23 for the Holy Days ... are we just picking and choosing?

Fundamentally we need to understand that there are different laws for different purposes and for different times and different circumstances. We can't just lump them altogether as equivalent.

Generally ... we'll find that the laws tend to fall into one of several categories:-

- God's Eternal Moral Laws (murder)
- Civil Laws ... applying to the nation of Israel
- Sacrificial/Ceremonial Laws applicable to the Temple/Temple Worship/Priesthood
- Laws that were not good (temporary ... not God's best ... but designed for rebellious ... stiff-necked ... hard-hearted people)
- Physical Laws

Laws are different. Some temporary ... some permanent/Eternal. Some for certain individuals. Some very serious ... with the death penalty. Others ... much less so.

1 Timothy 1:3-11 (NKJV)

3 As I urged you when I went into Macedonia—remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine,

4 nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith.

5 **Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith,**

6 from which some, having strayed, have turned aside to idle talk,

7 desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say nor the things which they affirm.

8 **But we know that the law is good if one uses it lawfully, (properly)**

9 knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers,

10 for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers, and if there is any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine,

11 according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God which was committed to my trust.

1 Timothy 1:8 (AMP)

8 **Now we recognise and know that the Law is good if anyone uses it lawfully [for the purpose for which it was designed],**

We need to better understand what types of law we are dealing with ... and interpret it "lawfully" in accordance with its original purpose.

It's not guesswork. **The Bible is fairly clear in telling us what applies to us ... and what doesn't.**

We look at this in more detail ... but let's just clarify some of the President's allegations whilst we're here.

Leviticus 19:19 (NKJV)

19 "You shall keep My statutes. You shall not let your livestock breed with another kind. **You shall not sow your field with mixed seed. Nor shall a garment of mixed linen and wool come upon you.**

The President asks: “Does the whole town have to get together to stone my brother John for planting different crops side by side? Can I burn my mother in a small family gathering for wearing garments made from two different threads”?

Horrific penalties! Absurd laws!?

But where is the Bible penalty? Is it death by stoning or burning? No! The Bible gives no penalty ... just an instruction: Don't do these things (in a future week ... we will look at why. There are important teachings and lessons involved).

The President (and script writers) are mocking the Bible for ridiculous rules it doesn't even have! And most Christians watching the West Wing will be troubled ... and fooled ... because most are too ignorant of the scriptures anyway (less than a half of Americans can name the 4 gospels ... one-third of British adults think that the Harry Potter theme comes from the Bible).

So. NO BIBLE PENALTY ... but ... do these laws still apply to us? Yes ... and No ☺ We will get to that in a future week.

Exodus 21:7 (NKJV)

7 “**And if a man sells his daughter** to be a female slave, ***(servant or maidservant in some translations ... see note below)*** she shall not go out as the male slaves do.

The President: “I'm interested in selling my youngest daughter into slavery as sanctioned in Exodus 21:7. She's a Georgetown Sophomore ... speaks fluent Italian ... etc. What would a good price for her be”?

Notice: The President referred to selling into slavery.

The KJV version ... (Old) NKJV ... NIV ... NET ... AMP ... all say a servant or maidservant or handmaid. Some translations use the word “slave” (interesting that the word “slave” only appears once in the KJV ... and that's in italics, so it isn't in the original Hebrew [of Jer 2:14]).

Without getting side-tracked into slavery ... this would be much more like an indentured servant. We have to understand in these times there was no social security. If people fell on very hard times and ended up destitute ... all you might have available to exchange for food ... clothing ... accommodation ... might be your labour. People could offer themselves ("I'll work as a shepherd for you for five years in exchange for my needs") ... or ... as in this case ... if times are desperate ... a young woman might be put into service in a wealthier home ... hopefully with her consent ... where she can earn a living and where her family receive some compensation. (In some situations an arranged marriage might also be part of the proposition).

Probably fairly common? But in Israel ... note also that such servants would be free of their contract in the 7th year:-

Exodus 21:1-2 (NKJV)

1 "Now these are the judgments which you shall set before them:

2 **If you buy a Hebrew servant, he shall serve six years; and in the seventh he shall go out free and pay nothing.**

Our modern-day concept of slavery ... blacks in chains being brought across from Africa ... toiling in cotton fields ... being sold at auctions ... probably being mistreated cruelly. This is very different from the actual economic system of slavery or servitude that applied in virtually every country and culture in old times.

Nothing like Alex Hayley's "Roots" TV programs. There were lots of protective rules in Bible times.

For example:-

Exodus 21:16 (KJV)

16 And he that **stealeth a man**, and selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, he **shall surely be put to death.**

So. Death penalty for all of those involved in the slavery we read about in the 15th-19th centuries.

The Bible does not approve of what you and I think of as slavery. But it does acknowledge that there are bond servants ... indentured servants ... working classes ... of most of the world in those days. And He does impose rules and regulations to properly protect people.

So. The President is guilty of twisting scripture ... deliberately misquoting ... to make it look foolish. He paints an exaggerated and inaccurate view.

Whether it's the TV President ... or others ... we shouldn't be too surprised. They don't like God's laws!

Romans 8:5-7 (NKJV)

5 For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.

6 **For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.**

7 **Because the carnal mind is enmity (hostile) against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.**

Out of interest ... what would happen if we agreed with the critics? That the laws of Leviticus are "done away" ... no longer relevant to New Testament believers.

So ... we throw out the prohibition on homosexuality ... on mixed seeds ... mixed fibres ... we throw out the prohibition on eating pork ... or touching pig skin ... we're safe to ignore Leviticus' teachings?

If that's the case ... what about ...?

Leviticus 20:11-12 (NKJV)

11 **The man who lies with his father's wife has uncovered his father's nakedness; both of them shall surely be put to death.** Their blood shall be upon them.

12 **If a man lies with his daughter-in-law, both of them shall surely be put to death. They have committed perversion.** Their blood shall be upon them.

Leviticus 20:17 (NKJV)

17 **"If a man takes his sister, his father's daughter or his mother's daughter, and sees her nakedness and she sees his nakedness, it is a wicked thing.** And they shall be cut off in the sight of their people. He has uncovered his sister's nakedness. He shall bear his guilt.

Leviticus 20:19-20 (NKJV)

19 **"You shall not uncover the nakedness of your mother's sister nor of your father's sister, for that would uncover his near of kin.** They shall bear their guilt.

20 **If a man lies with his uncle's wife, he has uncovered his uncle's nakedness.** They shall bear their sin; they shall die childless.

Those are some of the laws of incest. So. Is incest now okay?

If Leviticus is "done away" ... not relevant ... can we assume that God has no restriction on sex within families?

Leviticus 20:15-16 (NKJV)

15 **If a man mates with an animal, he shall surely be put to death, and you shall kill the animal.**

16 **If a woman approaches any animal and mates with it, you shall kill the woman and the animal. They shall surely be put to death.** Their blood is upon them.

If Leviticus is now irrelevant ... Is bestiality okay now?

(As an aside here ... the way things are going ... both of these may end up acceptable in our society in 20/30/50 years?)

Whilst we're here. We are throwing out Leviticus ... so ...?

Leviticus 19:18 (NKJV)

18 You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but **you shall love your**

neighbour as yourself: I am the Lord. (Still God speaking)

Do we throw this away too? After all ... it's in Leviticus ... right next to verse 19 about not mixing seeds or fibres. So ... if verse 19 is "done away" and not relevant for New Testament believers ... what do we do with verse 18? Throw that out? Is that "done away with"?

We know the answer to that. Was Jesus dismissive of these laws? These words came out of the Mouth of God ... and Jesus said we should live by every word that came out of the Mouth of God.

Mark 12:28-31 (NKJV)

28 Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that He had answered them well, asked Him, "Which is the first commandment of all?"

29 Jesus answered him, "**The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.**

30 And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. This is the first commandment.

31 And **the second**, like it, is this: **'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.'** **There is no other commandment greater than these.**"

Jesus told us that man should live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. He's consistent.

And if Jesus upholds Leviticus 19:18 ... "Love your neighbour as yourself" ... wouldn't it be fair to assume He'd uphold Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 which condemn homosexual conduct?

Or does Jesus pick and choose too? Like most churches and most believers?

So. Although the West Wing President was guilty of twisting scripture ... deliberately misquoting it ... adding a few words

here and there ... to make it look foolish and absurd ... it does challenge us to know what the Bible actually teaches ... and what parts of the Old Testament are truly relevant to us today.

And it does challenge us to show that we have a responsible ... consistent approach ... and aren't guilty of picking and choosing (like a restaurant menu). Is that how we treat the Word of God ... picking and choosing? We need to rightly divide the Word of Truth.

To be continued.