

“Why Were Things Like Polygamy OK in the Old Testament But Not Now?”

What about the issues in the Old Testament with families like masters sleeping with their servants and men having many wives or even the issue of “inter-family” relationships and the like? Was it a population issue? When did the law change? Why was it okay then and not now?

Great question! The problem is, the Bible rarely makes commentary on historical events. If it did, we would see notations like “[and this was not only sinful but STUPID because God’s plan for marriage is one man, one woman for life, and bad things happen when we disobey His commandment].”

The fact that sinful, unwise behaviors are recorded (without commentary) in the Bible doesn’t mean it was OK any more than newspapers reporting on crime means they condone it. They’re both just telling you what happened.

Hope this helps!

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

“Why Did God Reject Cain’s Offering?”

I was reading to my grandchild about Cain and Abel. The book we read said Cain was jealous of Abel because God rejected the

sacrifice Cain made and accepted Abel's. She asked me why, can you tell me?

The difference in the sacrifices was really about the difference in their hearts. If you read the actual story in Genesis 4, you will read that Abel, who was a rancher, made his offering of the first of his flock and of the "fat portions" of his flock. In other words, he gave God the first and the best of what he had. Cain, a farmer, only gave God "some" of his crops. He was greedy and self-centered and apparently wanted to keep the best for himself. God rejected Cain's sacrifice because Cain rejected God's right to his heart.

Hope this helps!

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

"What is the Value of the Old Testament for New Testament Christians?"

What exactly is the significance of the Old Testament for us Christians (other than to point towards Jesus Christ)? How does the Old Covenant apply to someone under the New Covenant (if at all) in daily life?

Thank you for writing Probe Ministries. You ask some very good questions!

As to your first question, "What exactly is the significance of the Old Testament for us Christians," I would probably want

to say the following. First, the OT teaches us a number of crucial doctrines which are essential for Christianity. These include creation (Gen. 1-2), the fall of man (Gen. 3), the promise of a Deliverer (Gen. 3:15, etc.), the holiness of God (Leviticus), the need for a substitutionary blood sacrifice (Leviticus), the essential requirement of faith in God and His promises (Gen. 15:6), and God's discipline of His wayward people (seen throughout the OT). We also learn a great deal about God's interactions with people in the past (see 1 Cor. 10:6 in context), as well as His plans for the future. The wisdom literature and poetry (Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon) are, for the most part, timeless. They include wise advice on getting along successfully in the world, in relating to both God and our fellow man, as well as offering us examples of how to approach God in prayer and worship. Of course, as you said, its primary importance is to point us to Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah and Savior of the world. Finally, it's interesting to note that in passages like 2 Tim. 3:14-17 and 2 Peter 1:20-21, the "Scripture" which is in view is primarily the OT. This is so because the NT was still in the process of being written. And it wouldn't exist in its present form (i.e., 27 books bound together and recognized by the church as authoritative in matters of faith and practice) for a few centuries.

In your second question you ask, "How does the Old Covenant apply to someone under the New Covenant (if at all) in daily life?" First, let me point out that there are many moral commandments which are the same under both covenants. In fact, nine of the Ten Commandments are repeated and enjoined upon believers in the NT (all but the Sabbath day observance). Thus, there is clearly some continuity between the two covenants. However, there are also some important differences. For example, the dietary laws set forth in passages such as Leviticus 11:1-47 and Deuteronomy 14:1-21 were temporary laws given by God only to Israel. These laws are not applicable to Christians today under the terms of the New Covenant. This is

not only made clear in Peter's vision, recorded in Acts 10:9-16, but it is stated explicitly by Christ Himself in Mark 7:14-23. Notice in particular what Jesus says in vv. 18-19. In part, this text reads, "Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him; because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated?" Then notice the parenthetical statement which concludes this verse: "Thus He declared all foods clean." In other words, the dietary restrictions given by God to Israel have been nullified. Christians today are not bound by such laws. Today, the Old Covenant under which Israel operated is obsolete (Hebrews 8:13). Thus, while some of the moral commandments of the Old Covenant are reiterated for us in the New Covenant, strictly speaking, I do not believe that Christians are obligated to any of the duties or requirements of the Old Covenant. After all, the Old Covenant has been done away with by God Himself. Thus, any obligations that apply to us are repeated for us under the terms of the New Covenant. The New Covenant not only tells us how to live pleasing to God, etc., it also provides the means (through the indwelling of God's Holy Spirit) to live consistently with it (as we walk in faith relying on the power of God's Spirit).

In the New Testament, the book of Hebrews has a great deal to say about this New Covenant. In an article on "Covenant," Trent Butler describes some of the special features of the New Covenant as related in the book of Hebrews:

"The emphasis is on Jesus, the perfect High Priest, providing a new, better, superior covenant (Heb. 7:22; 8:6). Jesus represented the fulfillment of Jeremiah's new covenant promise (Heb. 8:8, 10; 10:16). Jesus was the perfect covenant Mediator (Heb. 9:15), providing an eternal inheritance in a way the old covenant could not (compare 12:24). Jesus' death on the cross satisfied the requirement that all covenants be established by blood (Heb. 9:18, 20) just as was the first covenant (Ex. 24:8). Christ's blood

established an everlasting covenant (Heb. 13:20)." (*Holman Bible Dictionary*, gen. ed. Trent C. Butler [Tennessee: Holman Bible Publishers, 1991], 312)

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries

“Which Version of the Bible is Most Accurate?”

Do you know which version of the Bible is most accurate? The main ones I’m considering for thorough Bible study are the King James Version, New International Version, and the New American Standard Version. Are the NIV and NASB inferior to the KJV? Also, what study bible do you feel is most helpful? Life Application, Scofield, Ryrie?

I would never recommend the KJV for Bible study because language has changed so much since 1611, and better manuscripts are now available as the basis for translation than what they used for the KJV. (I suggest you read [our article on the King James debate](#).)

The NIV is a dynamic translation, where the translators sought to communicate the general idea and thoughts behind the original languages, rather than an actual word-for-word translation, which can tend to be more wooden. I no longer use the NIV exclusively (although I did for 20 years) because I am frustrated by the fact that they translate the word “flesh” as “sin nature,” which leads to a misunderstanding of the Christian life, I believe. I have joined the ranks of a

growing number who have returned to the NASB for serious Bible study. However, I am very much enjoying the NET Bible (New English Translation), which can be downloaded for free (www.netbible.org) although the beta version is now out in print. Each page has more translator notes and study notes than actual text, which gives the reader a VERY full understanding of what's going on in the original languages. I am using the NET Bible to augment my NASB reading; it's like listening to color commentary during a sports telecast.

In terms of the study Bibles, that is really a personal preference issue depending on one's theology. The Life Application, Scofield and Ryrie Bibles are dispensational, and the Reformation Study Bible is reform in its theology. The Student Bible is especially good, as is Kay Arthur's Inductive Study Bible. All the study Bibles you mentioned are good and have their fans. The best way to judge, I think, is to compare the notes on the same passage between the various versions.

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

“Seven Spirits of Revelation?”

I recently encountered a group that believes the seven spirits of Revelation are seven aspects of the Holy Spirit ... and the Trinity is actually a “nine-ity” (for lack of a better word). I obviously do NOT believe this hogwash, but I was wondering if this belief has ever been promulgated in history. I personally believe it's a new heresy, but I wanted to check.

The interpretation of the “seven Spirits” in the book of

Revelation as a reference to the Holy Spirit is actually not new. A number of interpreters throughout church history have adopted this position as their preferred view. However, it is by no means the ONLY view that has been advanced throughout church history.

John refers to the “seven Spirits” in Revelation 1:4; 3:1; 4:5 and 5:6. William Barclay points out that the Jews “talked of the seven angels of the presence,” citing 1 Enoch 90:21. Of course John does refer to seven angels of the seven churches (1:20). What he means by “angels” is not entirely clear. He could be referring to the pastors of the churches, or he might be referring to guardian angels of the churches. Thus, some commentators believe the reference to the “seven Spirits” is a reference to seven holy angels before the throne of God.

Barclay mentions that another “explanation connects the idea of the seven Spirits with the fact of the seven churches.” Since seven is often used as a number of completion, or perfection, in the Bible (and in the book of Revelation in particular) it is thought that the “seven” churches are representative of all churches, each of which has a share in God’s Holy Spirit in order to carry out its ministry to the world.

A third view ties the reference to the “seven Spirits” to Isaiah 11:2. The Greek translation of this verse in the Septuagint reads: “The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and piety; by this spirit He shall be filled with the fear of God.” In this view, the “seven Spirits” of Revelation refer to this sevenfold ministry of the Holy Spirit, particularly evidenced in the life of Jesus, the Messiah.

Which of these views is correct? I honestly don’t know. Maybe the correct view is none of the above! It’s important to point out, however, that those who see the “seven Spirits” as a

reference to the Holy Spirit would not typically endorse any but a Trinitarian view of God. Barclay cites Beatus as having said, "The Spirit is one in name but sevenfold in virtues."

Thus, while I personally do not know what John intends by his reference to the "seven Spirits", those who interpret this as referring to the Holy Spirit are usually not heretics. They could be, of course; but one need not reach that conclusion from this particular interpretation. It is actually an old and well-accepted view.

Hope this helps. God bless you!

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries

"Is There a Distinction Between the Law of Moses and the 10 Commandments?"

Is there a distinction between the Law of Moses and the 10 commandments? Does the Law of Moses include the 10 commandments in verses like Acts 13:39, Rom. 3:28 and Gal. 2:16? Does the book of the law contain the entire law found in the first five books of the bible including the 10 commandments? Which verses in the bible can I use to explain that the entire Law of Moses includes the 10 commandments? There are some cultists out there who teach that there is a distinction between the law and the 10 commandments so that they can use the 10 commandments as a means of justification using verses like Matt. 19:17, 1 Cor. 7:19, 1 John 2:3-4, 1 John 5:2-3, Rev. 12:17, Rev. 14:12. They claim that the law

was done away with (sacrifices and such) but insist that the 10 commandments are a binding means of justification. It sounds to me like a vain attempt to support a “works based” FALSE gospel!

The Law of Moses includes the Ten Commandments. All the laws of Moses are contained in Exodus through Deuteronomy and include over 600 laws. Of course, sometimes the first five books of the Bible are also referred to as the Law (e.g. Matt. 5:17).

Yes; the Law of Moses includes the 10 commandments in verses like Acts 13:39, Rom. 3:28 and Gal. 2:16.

Which verses in the bible can I use to explain that the entire Law of Moses includes the 10 commandments?

Matthew 5:17-48 is quite clear about the Law (v. 17) including the ten commandments (vv. 21 and 27 – compare with Exodus 20:13, 14). Romans 13:8-10 also make this clear.

The cults which try to make a distinction between the Law of Moses and the ten commandments are in error. The entire Old Covenant (including the ten commandments) has been done away and replaced with the New Covenant (see Hebrews 8:7-13; etc.). Verses like Galatians 2:16 make quite clear that we are not justified by any works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, it is important to realize that nine of the ten commandments (all but Sabbath keeping) are repeated in the New Testament. These commandments are not a means of justifying us before God. However, they do give us God's principles regarding how those who HAVE BEEN JUSTIFIED through faith in Christ ought to live their lives. Good works are the proper fruit of justification. We are not justified by our works, but justification should produce good works. We are saved by God's grace through faith in Christ (Eph. 2:8-9). But we are created in Christ Jesus for good works (Eph. 2:10).

The Lord bless you,

Michael Gleghorn

Probe Ministries

“How Do I Find Bibles in their Original Languages?”

I need help finding the New Testament in the classic Greek language, and also the Old Testament in the original language it was written in. I need a history lesson about these scriptures to inform me of the true origins of their creation.

You can get your own copies of the Greek New Testament and Hebrew Old Testament from any good Christian bookstore. If they don't have any in stock, they should at least be able to order them for you. Also, you can probably order these items from the web (e.g. Christian Book Distributors, etc.). However, in order to really profit from these resources, it's best to master both languages.

Probably the best one-volume work on the Bible that I'm aware of is Norman Geisler and William Nix's *A General Introduction to the Bible* (Revised and Expanded edition). But you can find plenty of profitable studies on the bible.org website. Indeed, they have an entire section on Bibliology at http://www.bible.org/topic.asp?topic_id=5. On their homepage, you can even order a Greek/English NT. I would become very familiar with this site. They have lots of great information that can be of great use to you.

The Lord bless you,

Michael Gleghorn

“How Could a Compassionate God Order the Genocide of the Canaanites?”

My eldest daughter and I have been discussing portions of the Bible with which she is struggling. One of the problem passages she asked about is “Why does God order the genocide of the Canaanites?” Now of course I can give her the answer in the Bible, i.e., that God gave them 400 years to repent and that their sins were horrible, etc.; but her real question is ethical. How can God who has such compassion for the innocents in Ninevah order the wholesale killing of innocent children in Palestine? Is the God of the OT and the God of the NT the same Person? How can I reconcile these, in modern terms, “unthinkable” crimes against humanity with the God of compassion revealed by Jesus?

We’re also looking for good articles regarding “why I can trust the Bible” and the “relevance of the Bible” for today.

Thanks for your help.

Great questions!

We need to revisit the assessment of the Canaanites as “innocent.” From God’s perspective, there is no such thing as an innocent human being (apart from Jesus Christ). Every human heart is evil and bent on sin and rebellion. I see a strong parallel between God’s actions against the Canaanites and the actions of an oncology surgeon. He has to cut out what may

appear to be healthy tissue but which is actually infected with cancer cells. The Canaanites were infected with sin. I don't understand about the children, but I do know that a compassionate God ordered it. Something to consider, then, is the question of "Do children go to hell?" Probe's founder, Jimmy Williams, addresses this issue [here](#).

Yes, the God of the New Testament is the same as the God of the Old Testament, a God of love and grace. Evidence of His love and grace are rampant throughout both testaments. I think we need to cultivate a spirit of humility before an infinite God we cannot fully understand because "all the available facts are not all the facts." God never committed any crimes against humanity, much less unthinkable ones, because we cannot see ourselves, or Him, accurately. We have to depend on God's revelation of human nature—which is that, apart from God, we are wicked and rebellious and evil, even at the same time that we are His image-bearers. And on His revelation of His own nature—which is that He is holy and just, and He would have been completely within His rights to allow every single human being to go to hell because that is what we deserve. But He didn't.

I'm afraid there is no "silver bullet" answer to these questions, _____, because we don't have all the facts and just have to trust that God is good all the time, and He knows things we don't. Along these lines, may I also suggest you read the article "[I Can't Forgive God for Taking All Those People in the WTC!](#)".

My colleague Rick Wade goes into great detail on this question in these two articles:

[God and the Canaanites](#)

[Yahweh War and the Conquest of Canaan](#)

Probe's founder, Jimmy Williams, explores the question here:

["How Can a Just God Order the Slaughter of Men, Women and](#)

[Children?"](#)

Concerning your question about apologetics articles, we have:

[Are the Biblical Documents Reliable?](#)

[Authority of the Bible](#)

[The Christian Canon](#)

[Archaeology and the Old Testament](#)

[Archaeology and the New Testament](#)

[The Relevance of Christianity: An Apologetic](#)

You might also find it helpful to browse our

[Theology/Apologetics](#) Topics pages.

Hope this helps!

Sue Bohlin

Probe Ministries

“Is the Bible Wrong About the Cleansing of the Temple?”

In John 2:13-25 is the story of when Jesus cleansed the temple. It immediately follows Jesus turning the water into wine, and immediately precedes the conversation with Nicodemus. In Matthew 21:12-16 is the same story immediately precedes the cursing of the barren fig tree. In Mark 11:15-18 the cleansing of the temple takes place immediately after the cursing of the fig tree.

Now, as I see it, there are only three possibilities.

1. The text in either Matthew and Mark or in John is in error about the time of the cleansing of the temple. And

either the text in Matthew or Mark is wrong about the time of the cursing of the fig tree.

2. The gospels were not written in chronological order.
3. The same incident happened more than once (highly unlikely).

What is your take on this? Did I overlook something?

Thanks for your question! You have raised an important (and relatively common) difficulty in interpreting the gospels. Let me first say that the gospels were not necessarily written in chronological order. In fact, it is generally accepted that many of the incidents recorded in the gospels were NOT written in chronological order. As a general rule, the only exception to this is Luke's gospel, in which he specifically states his intention "to write it out...in consecutive order" (Luke 1:3).

A good book which you may want to consult about some of these issues of gospel interpretation and harmonization is Craig Blomberg's *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1987). Since this is not an area of personal expertise for me, I will simply give you Blomberg's observations on possible ways in which the difficulties you have noticed might be resolved.

Concerning the cursing of the fig tree, Blomberg believes that Matthew has simply telescoped the events of two days "into one uninterrupted paragraph which seems to refer only to the second day's events." He points out that Matthew's introduction, "Now in the morning," does "not specify which day is in view, and there is no reason to exclude an interval of time between verses 19 and 20." He continues by noting, "Mark does not deny that the fig tree withered immediately, only that the disciples did not see it until the next day." He concludes by pointing out that the gospels leave out a wealth of detail (indeed, John states this explicitly in 20:30), and such omissions simply become more evident when compared with a more detailed account in another gospel.

Blomberg offers a couple of solutions to the problem of the cleansing of the temple. The first solution holds that John has simply woven this incident into his gospel thematically, rather than chronologically. In other words, there is only one cleansing and John, for thematic considerations, has simply chosen to relay this incident in a manner unrelated to its actual chronological occurrence in the life of Christ. He offers a couple of reasons in support of this view. The second solution (which commends itself to my mind) actually acknowledges two separate cleansings, one at the beginning and one near the end of Jesus' public ministry. He offers six arguments in support of this second position (172):

1. The details of the cleansing given in John's account are completely different from those given in the Synoptics (i.e. Matthew, Mark, Luke).
2. If Jesus felt strongly enough about the temple corruption to cleanse it once at the beginning of His ministry, it is not really too difficult to believe that He might do it again at the end of His ministry.
3. Since cleansing the temple was an overtly Messianic act, about which some of the Jews would have approved, it is not surprising that He could get away with doing this once at the outset of His ministry. However, when the Jews began to realize that Jesus was not really the sort of Messiah they were looking for, a second cleansing would have almost certainly sealed His fate (see Mark 11:18).
4. In the Synoptics, Jesus is accused of having said that He would destroy the temple and rebuild another in three days not made with human hands (Mark 14:58). But a similar comment by Jesus is only explicitly mentioned in John 2:19. Furthermore, since the witnesses in Mark's gospel get the statement slightly wrong, and cannot agree among themselves (Mark 14:59), it may be a confused memory of something Jesus said two or three years earlier, rather than just a few days

earlier.

5. Jesus' statement in the Synoptics is more severe than that in John. Only in the Synoptics does He refer to the Gentiles need to pray at the temple, and only in the Synoptics does He refer to the Jews as "robbers."

6. In John 2:20 the Jews refer to the temple rebuilding project having begun 46 years earlier. This would mark the date of the cleansing at around AD 27 or 28. But Jesus was almost certainly not crucified until at least AD 30. And it is most unlikely that John would have simply made up such a figure. Therefore, it is quite likely that John is describing a distinct (and earlier) cleansing from the one mentioned in the Synoptics.

When I approach the gospel narratives with the attitude that they are innocent until proven guilty, keeping in mind that they have been thoroughly demonstrated to be generally reliable historical sources, the six arguments listed above strongly incline me to the view that there were in fact two temple cleansings in the life of Christ—one at the beginning of His public ministry, the other at its conclusion. At any rate, that is my take on this particular issue.

Hope this helps!

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries

“Evidence that Jesus Didn’t Become the Christ Till Centuries Later?”

I was recently at the A&E (aande.com) website when I came across a set of videos that they offer. One of them titled “Unknown Jesus” caught my eye. I read the short description and they claim to have found evidence that Christ wasn’t assigned the title of Christ until many centuries later by the Greeks and that he may not have existed until a couple of centuries after his proclaimed death. This is supposed archaeological evidence also. Can someone please write me back with your comments please? Thank you.

Thanks for your question. Although I have not seen the tapes, I am familiar with similar arguments. Unfortunately, these men are presenting poor and biased research. The claims they make will not be taken by any serious historian.

Jesus definitely existed in the first century. We have several Jewish and Roman sources clearly telling us so. Josephus, a Jewish historian, recorded the events of Israel for the Roman Empire from 37-100 AD. Not a follower of Christ, he wrote, “Now there appeared about this time Jesus, a wise man if it be lawful to call him a man. He was a doer of wonderful works ... He was the Christ and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had him condemned to the cross...” Tacitus, a Roman historian who wrote in 115 A.D., recorded Nero’s persecution of the Christians. He wrote, “Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of the procurators, Pontius Pilatus...”

Here these historians confirm the existence of Jesus and even give him the title “Christ” in the first century. There are

several other historical accounts outside the New Testament that verify the existence of Jesus. Pliny the Younger, Thallus, Suetonius, etc... We also have the gospels which were circulated in the first century. We have a fragment of the book of John dating as early as 125 A.D. This fragment proves how early the books were written and circulated by the first century. Finished copies of the gospels were around as early as 70 A.D. The gospels base their entire account on a historical person: Jesus and his acts, they clearly claim, happened in the context of history. If their claim was false and Jesus never existed, the gospels would have been refuted by the enemies of Christianity and they would never have lasted because their claims would be proven false. They were written in the generation of the eye witnesses who could have easily disproven their accounts. It is amazing no one doubts or questions the historical existence of Jesus until many centuries later. It is not that Jesus did not exist till centuries later, it is the critics who make this assertion whose arguments do not appear till centuries later. If Jesus never existed, why was this argument not around in the first or second century?

Whatever new archaeology has been found, I do not believe can counter the overwhelming evidence for Jesus being a first century person.

Thanks for writing. I hope this helps.

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