

SESSION 7: LAWS, LISTS & LAND (PART 2)

PREPARATION FOR THE SESSION

Read Exodus 21; Leviticus 16; Deuteronomy 5-11, 15, 27-28; Galatians 3.

Summary of the Video: Module 1, Episode 7

We begin with the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16). It is one of the most vivid depictions of what Christ has done for us on the cross. His sacrifice both kills and banishes sin, guilt and shame.

Next up, we enter some apologetics issues in the Pentateuch. When responding to questions and arguments against Christianity, Andrew Wilson invites us to “remember the three C’s: Context, Covenant, and Christ.” These three help us to understand what the text means, the situation in which it was written, and the ideal to which it points. In this video, we take a peek into how to address slavery and polygamy in their context, the covenant story, and the redemption and character of Christ.

The middle portion of the video (34:15-1:16:44) consists of a lecture by Dr. Peter Williams, “Does the Bible Support Slavery?” *Lanier Theological Library*. We consider Williams’s teaching on slavery so that we might gain an appreciation for how to read the Bible faithfully in context. He begins by getting us to clarify what we mean by “slavery”. He then contends that the Bible does not support or condone “slavery” according to the modern way we define slavery. Then he shows how modern translations have increasingly preferred the word “slave” rather than “servant” from the 1700s to today. But this preference, Williams argues, is misleading because “slave” doesn’t communicate what the Hebrew word has in mind. The Hebrew word simply means “someone who is dependent on someone else in a relationship.” To this end, he clarifies several differences between ancient slavery, the west African slave trade (1700-1800s), and God’s prescriptions about slavery. Most importantly, he invites us to ask what kind of book the Bible is and how this impacts what it teaches about slavery.

He contends that the OT “regulates” slavery without saying that it’s good. Slavery was a fact of ancient life. It was done poorly, so God put limits on it. In fact, “[b]ack then there wasn’t such a strong slave-free contrast, everyone was the servant of someone else.” For example, while we imagine that the Israelites were “slaves” of Egypt, the text of Exodus doesn’t call the Israelites “slaves” but it does call the Egyptians “slaves” of Pharaoh. The only text in which they are called “servants” is an attempt by the Israelites to establish their closeness, their relational nearness, to their masters so that their masters might have compassion. With the Williams video, don’t get buried in the details; listen with an ear to hear the main point of his lecture.

To anticipate the theme of a future episode, Andrew Wilson concludes by discussing the “blessings, curses, and exile” of Deuteronomy 27-28. Every treaty or contract has consequences for keeping or breaking it. Andrew Wilson connects these blessings and curses with Paul’s teaching in Galatians 3:10-14 to demonstrate how Christ receives the covenant curses on our behalf.

Terms You'll Need to Know:

Downton Abbey—a British TV show about a wealthy family and their teams of household servants.

Marcionite—the perspective of a 2nd century teacher named Marcion who travelled among churches teaching that the Old Testament should not be used by Christians to understand their faith (he also disregarded large parts of the New Testament) primarily because of references to God's wrath.

“Don't expose girls”—this refers to the ancient practice of abortion after birth; one would give birth and then leave the child in a remote place to die; this was common practice in various ancient cultures but Jews and Christians strongly prohibited it and worked against it.

Voldemort—the main villain in the Harry Potter series of books and movies.

12 Years a Slave—a film about the African slave trade in the United States.

Apartheid—the legal framework established in South Africa in 1948 to separate black and white people socially, economically, and politically (it formally ended in 1994).

Peter Williams—an evangelical Old Testament scholar based in Cambridge, UK.

Watch Video

Watch Module 1, Episode 7 (1hr 23 min; 40 minutes of which is a lecture by Peter Williams).

The Day of Atonement

- **ENACT** the whole chapter. Note particularly the five different animals involved, and how they point forward to the gospel in Jesus
 - A bull for a sin offering for Aaron (compare with Hebrews 7:23-28)
 - A ram for a burnt offering from Aaron to God
 - A ram for a burnt offering from the people to God
 - A goat as a sin offering (compare with Hebrews 9:1-14)
 - A goat for Azazel – the “scapegoat”
 - **TWO BALLOONS** – one burst, one released
- The conclusion to the process comes in 16:30: “For on this day shall atonement be made for you to cleanse you. You shall be clean before the LORD from all your sins”
- In the same way, by the sacrifice of Christ, we are able to receive cleanness from the LORD from all our sins, because Christ has both been sacrificed for sins and sent outside of the camp, carrying our shame away (cf. Heb 10:11-14; 13:13)

Apologetics Interlude: Slavery, Polygamy and Destruction of Cities

- Q: What do we do with those passages in the OT Law that legislate for slavery, polygamy and the destruction of Canaanite cities? We cannot handle them the same way as appalling pieces of narrative, since they are Law
- A: Remember the three Cs: Context, Covenant, and Christ
- Firstly, Context. What do I need to know about the history and literature? If I don't ask that, then I will assume that their situation is the same as mine, and get very confused
 - In our world, for example, when we hear talk about "slavery", we think of the West African slave trade. White people with guns kidnapping black people without guns, putting them on ships, and forcing them to work for no wages on sugar, tobacco and cotton plantations
 - But that's not what slavery means in their world at all. In fact, it's explicitly condemned (v16): whoever steals someone, or owns someone who has been stolen or kidnapped, deserves the death penalty!
 - In their world, slavery was something people would voluntarily sell themselves into out of economic need. If a daughter was sold as a slave or maidservant, they were treated like family members, and if they weren't, then they were allowed to leave without paying (v7-11)
 - Or, sometimes, people would become slaves because they were conquered or captured – like modern nations take prisoners of war. The alternative (which most nations used) was killing or mutilating them
- Similarly with polygamy. It is never endorsed, but in a nation where men died in battle and women didn't, it often happened (since there are many more women than men). So laws are passed to protect women
 - If a man takes two wives, and you imprison or execute the man, what happens to the second wife? She'll be abandoned, and no man in that culture will marry her because she's not a virgin
- And again, with the destruction of cities, literary context (which we'll look at in the next block) is critical

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Apologetics Interlude: Slavery, Polygamy and Destruction of Cities (cont.)

- Secondly, Covenant: where are we in the biblical story, and how does the Covenant we're in affect things?
 - The Bible is a big story, instructions which apply in one place do not necessarily apply in another place. That's true of the laws in Exodus 21, for example. No disciples today are intended to follow them
- This question is particularly important when you bear in mind that the law given to Moses, within the biblical story, was not actually God's ultimate design for the way his people would live
 - That sounds odd, so let me explain why I'm saying it. **JESUS AND DIVORCE**: "hardness of heart"
 - In other words, the Mosaic Covenant included all sorts of allowances for people's hard hearts
 - God could have banned divorce, but he knew people would divorce anyway – the only question was, would women be protected if they were? It's the same with polygamy
 - But if you go back to creation, Jesus said, it wasn't meant to be like that. One man, one woman, in marriage. No divorce. No polygamy
- When it comes to the destruction of cities, again, we have to think carefully about the Covenant story. God said to Abraham, "whoever blesses you I will bless, and whoever curses you I will curse, and in you all the nations of the earth will be blessed" (Gen 12:3)
 - **HARRY POTTER**: Harry is the hope of the wizarding world. So if you got the chance to kill Voldemort in book 1, you probably would, wouldn't you?
 - Israel is the hope of the world. They're the way the world gets blessed. So anyone who is out to destroy them must be stopped, and destroyed themselves if necessary
 - Today, however, we don't live in that part of the story. Jesus has come. That's why Covenant is important

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Apologetics Interlude: Slavery, Polygamy and Destruction of Cities (cont.)

- Thirdly, Christ. Ultimately, Jesus is the one to whom Christians look to see what God is really like
- What did Jesus say and do about slavery?
 - Luke 4: He said that his ministry was all about bringing freedom to the captives and the oppressed
 - Php 2:7: He humbled himself, taking on the form of a slave, in order to rescue people from their slavery
 - Mark 10:44: He said that anyone who wanted to lead must become the slave of many
 - And he established the church, where there was no privilege of Jew v Gentile, male v female, slave v free
- What about polygamy?
 - Mk 10: he sent people back to creation, to see that marriage was always about one man and one woman
 - Eph 5: he lived as the faithful husband, exclusively committed to his bride, God's people, and laying down his life for her. No other partners. No infidelity. No limits. No exceptions
- And destroying cities? Killing other people in warfare?
 - Matt 5: "You have heard that it was said ... But I say to you ..."
 - Yes, back then, that was necessary. But now, I'm saying to you to turn the other cheek, not to resist the one who is evil, never to avenge yourselves, make peace, and prefer suffering to violence
 - And of course, at the cross, Jesus did exactly what he told us to do, and allowed himself to suffer, and be crushed, rather than lift up his hand in violence and destroy his oppressors

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Blessings, Curses and Exile (Deuteronomy 27-28)



- It was typical to conclude covenants (or treaties) with a statement of blessings and curses or equivalent, detailing what would happen if either party broke it
 - Deuteronomy 27 sees the tribes divided in half, with six tribes sent up Mt Gerizim to declare the blessings, and six sent up Mt Ebal to declare the curses
 - The twelve curses pronounced are a sample of the law, rather than a particularly important group of twelve (v26 encapsulates all the others anyway)
- Deuteronomy 28 then takes the form of an extended speech from Yahweh about the consequences of obedience and disobedience
 - 28:1-14 summarise the blessings for obedience: fruitfulness, victory, prosperity and abundance
 - 28:15-68 summarise the curses for disobedience: disease, barrenness, invasion, exile and scattering among the nations
 - The latter is longer, and reflects Israel's history more closely
- This section is particularly important for understanding Israel's history (and the Gospels), because it shows what they would have expected when the curse was lifted
- Galatians 3:10-14 shows how this was fulfilled in Christ

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GROUP MEETING:

Discussion Questions

Before getting into these specific questions, spend a few minutes discussing what struck you or stuck with you from the video. What were some of the main points? Did any of Andrew's comments or questions open up the Bible in a profound way to you? Also, ask if anything was confusing or needs clarification.

1. How does learning about the Day of Atonement expand your appreciation for Christ's sacrifice?
2. How do the "three C's" help you understand God's instruction about slavery in the Old Testament?
3. Peter Williams primarily gives insight into the differing "contexts" of Old Testament, ancient, and modern slavery. What were some of the cultural differences that might help us understand the OT teaching on slavery?
4. What questions/concerns from Exodus to Deuteronomy would arise in your culture? What would be offensive and in need of an explanation?

5. Andrew Wilson and Peter Williams make the point that God accommodated the hard-heartedness of the people as he wrote the law. Life was not ideal; God enshrined laws in response to the deficiencies of human nature and cultures. What does this tell us about God's character?

6. Explain what you think Paul means in Galatians 3:10-14 based on what Andrew Wilson said about Deuteronomy 27-28.

Meditation on Scripture

Leviticus 16:20-22, 30

Deuteronomy 15:1-6

Deuteronomy 28:1-2, 9-10, 15, 20

Galatians 3:10-14

Putting This Session into Practice

God knows human weakness and corruption. He regulated slavery in response to it, but saw a much greater ideal for humanity (full freedom in Christ without oppression). Let's pray for modern slaves and oppressed people of all types. Spend a couple of minutes finding facts about oppression/slavery in your community. Then, pray each day this week that God would comfort, support and free the oppressed.