

▸ 12. What Jesus Christ Said About the Old Testament

from Dr. John Warwick Montgomery, “Sensible Christianity” [audio series]

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I. ▸ **Introduction**

- A. ▸ The Old Testament was in existence when Jesus was on earth, and we want to see how He treated it, what His view of it was.
 - 1. ▸ Jesus *never* negatively criticized the Old Testament!
- B. ▸ What about “The Sermon on the Mount?”
 - 1. ▸ In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is *extending* the Old Testament teaching; He is certainly *not* contradicting it.

II. ▸ **Adam, Noah, and Jonah**

- A. ▸ Indeed, Jesus used those passages of the Old Testament that we find today to be the most *difficult* as the bases for His own doctrinal teaching.
 - 1. ▸ Adam and Eve, Noah & the ark, and Jonah & the leviathan.
 - a. ▸ are the parts of the Old Testament that people today think are nothing but “children’s stories!”
 - 2. ▸ Jesus used the Adam and Eve story as the basis for His own teaching on marriage and divorce.
 - a. ▸ Pharisees came to Him and said, “Moses allowed a bill of divorcement.”
 - b. ▸ Jesus replied, “From the beginning it was not so.”
 - c. ▸ He quoted Genesis 2:24: “For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother and cleave unto his wife, and the two shall be of one flesh.”
 - 3. ▸ It is perfectly plain that a factual issue is being dealt with.
 - a. ▸ The Pharisees presented that factual issue.
 - b. ▸ Jesus replied with a factual reference to Genesis.
- B. ▸ How about Noah and the ark?
 - 1. ▸ several places in which Jesus referred to the Noah story
 - 2. ▸ “As it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be when the Son of Man comes; they were eating and drinking and giving in marriage, and the flood came and took them.”
 - 3. ▸ Jesus was (quite obviously) saying, “Just as factually as the flood actually occurred, so I’m going to (factually!) return, come again.”
 - 4. ▸ Surely Jesus would not use a literary parallel for a *factual* event, if His major point was to emphasize the factuality of the coming event.
- C. ▸ How about the story of Jonah and the Leviathan?
 - 1. ▸ The Hebrew word means “a big beast, a monster.”
 - 2. ▸ So the King James translators, wanting to do a version in English that would be readable by people.
 - a. ▸ So they translated the Hebrew word leviathon as “whale.”

3. ▶ Jesus said, “Just as Jonah was in the belly of the monster, so I will be in the heart of the earth; and I will rise again.”

III. ▶ **Fact Versus Myth**

- A. ▶ Even Rudolph Bultmann, one of the most radical of recent higher critics of the New Testament and one of the leading advocates of the “Form Critical Method,” said that obviously Jesus was paralleling His own resurrection with Jonah.
 1. ▶ And he said, since we all know that Jonah is a myth, we shouldn’t be uncomfortable in the least with Christ’s resurrection as a myth.
 2. ▶ Bultmann argues for a total removal of all “myth” from the Gospel materials.
- B. ▶ I had a friend who studied at Basel, Switzerland, under Karl Barth.
 1. ▶ As a result of studying under Barth, he thought that there was no sense in regarding the story of Jonah as a factual event.
 2. ▶ However, one day he woke up to the fact that Jonah was paralleled with Christ’s resurrection.
 - a. ▶ At that point my friend had to make a choice!
 - b. ▶ And thank God he made the right choice—in favor of the *historicity* of both of them rather than the non-historicity of both of them.

IV. ▶ **Literary Allusion?**

- A. ▶ Now of course some people say that Jesus could have been using a literary allusion, as we could say, “As MacBeth did something, so I will do something.”
 1. ▶ is really a *weak* kind of argumentation
 2. ▶ Where the issue is factual, you’re going to use a factual parallel.
- B. ▶ If the argument is that the people of Jesus’ day didn’t know that Jonah and the whale were mythical, but Jesus knew, then we get into a subject which we’ll be discussing later:
 1. ▶ the “kenotic theory” (which limits Jesus’ knowledge to the knowledge of His day).
 2. ▶ We’ll see that the problems connected with the view are far too great to permit that kind of interpretation.
 3. ▶ Jesus clearly regarded the material as factual.

V. ▶ **True in the Whole**

- A. ▶ Notice also that Jesus never made the distinction which some people make today between the *theological* material in the Bible and the *non-theological* material.
 1. ▶ “Limited inerrancy”
 - a. ▶ phrase means that the Bible is inerrant when it deals with theology, morals & ethics, but that it *isn’t* necessarily reliable when it deals with history, geography, science, or other “secular” & “testable” matters.
 2. ▶ Jesus never *once* made such a distinction.
 3. ▶ In fact, Jesus quoted from all the Old Testament; he put verses from one book of the Old Testament next to verses from another.

- B. ▶ Jesus never “compared Biblical authors,” either.
 - 1. ▶ You *never* hear Jesus saying, “Now Ezekiel says *this*, but Isaiah in his cultural situation says *that*.”
 - 2. ▶ Jesus says simply, “It is written . . .!” Written by whom? “It is written” happens to be in the passive tense in the Greek, and it therefore requires a personal agent. Who is the personal agent? Obviously it is God.
 - 3. ▶ Jesus is saying, “This has been *written by God*.” And Jesus regarded the whole Old Testament that way.

VI. ▶ **Jesus and the Devil**

- A. ▶ It is very instructive to see how Jesus dealt with the devil in the wilderness, in the passages at the beginning of the synoptic Gospels.
 - 1. ▶ According to those passages there were no contemporaries around, no audience to be confused by those encounters.
 - 2. ▶ It wasn’t a situation in which Jesus could even conceivably be “fitting His teaching with anything of His own time.”
 - 3. ▶ When the Devil quoted the Old Testament, that would have been the perfect opportunity for Jesus to disavow the notion of “fundamentalism.”
 - 4. ▶ He could have said to the devil, “Stop quoting verses, as if that settled the issue, Satan!”
 - 5. ▶ “Let’s get to the true theological heart of the problem.”
- B. ▶ But Jesus never said anything even roughly like that.
 - 1. ▶ Instead, he quoted Scripture right back to the devil.
 - 2. ▶ Do you see what’s going on there? The devil quotes out of context, and Jesus replies, “The trouble with you is not that you quote the Bible, but that you don’t take all of it. If you took all of the Old Testament, you would get this in context, and if you got it in context, then you wouldn’t be perverting it.”
 - 3. ▶ Jesus held to the *entire reliability* of the Old Testament.
- C. ▶ Even most liberal scholars agree to this! They say, “Of course, Jesus believed the Old Testament.”
 - 1. ▶ behind their admission: “Well, after all, every Orthodox Jew of His time took that view.”
 - 2. ▶ *Nobody* then was being critical of the Old Testament.
 - 3. ▶ Jesus’ own view of the Old Testament was definitely that the Old Testament is a reliable book and is not to be criticized *in any way*.
 - 4. ▶ He quoted it as absolute authority and in talking this way, He did *not* distinguish between “secular” and “religious” material.

VII. ▶ **The Kenotic Theories**

- A. ▶ However, it is argued by some people that “. . . just because Jesus said this was the case, that doesn’t necessarily mean it is—even if He was and is fully God!”
 - 1. ▶ How can that be argued?

- a. ▶ It's argued in terms of what has come to be called the "kenotic theory."
- b. ▶ "Kenosis" is a Greek word meaning "limitation," and it is used in the Philippians passage which says that Jesus "emptied" himself and became a man.
- c. ▶ One form of the "kenotic limitation theory" is that, in order for Jesus to become a man, He had to be limited to the knowledge of His own day.
- 2. ▶ In other words, if you came zooming down into this world with divine knowledge, you couldn't have been a true man.
 - a. ▶ So, since Jewish people in that day believed in the inerrant authority of the Old Testament, Jesus also believed in the inerrant authority of the Old Testament – but that doesn't mean that this was necessarily a *valid* belief.
- B. ▶ critics' attitude: "We today know better, because we have advanced knowledge that Jesus didn't have" about the problems in the Bible.

VIII. ▶ **Voluntary Ignorance?**

- A. ▶ Another form of the "kenotic argument" says that Jesus didn't *have to* be limited in His knowledge, but that He *chose* to be limited in His knowledge in certain respects.
 - 1. ▶ While Jesus was here on earth He *consciously chose not to contradict the ideas of His own time* where that would cause an unnecessary disturbance.
 - 2. ▶ In other words, in order to communicate with the people of His own time, Jesus made certain that His statements were in conformity with the statements of His culture.
 - 3. ▶ In a way these theories are quite clever, because with them you can "... have your cake and eat it, too."
- B. ▶ You can hold to the deity of Christ and at the same time agree to all kinds of Biblical criticism that makes the Old Testament look like a very unreliable book.

IX. ▶ **What Is Humanity?**

- A. ▶ What about the validity of these "kenotic" views?
 - 1. ▶ Let's first begin with the idea that Jesus *had to be* limited to the knowledge of His own day in order to be a true man.
 - 2. ▶ The assumption behind this idea is that if you have advanced knowledge (above or beyond that of your times), you can't be "truly human."
 - 3. ▶ But is this the proper way to define "humanity" or "humanness?"
 - a. ▶ Then Einstein was non-human!
 - 4. ▶ His knowledge certainly went beyond that of his contemporaries, but that is something to be said *in favor of* His humanity—not *against* it.
- B. ▶ Example:
 - 1. ▶ In the *Rowe vs. Wade* Supreme Court decision on abortion, the conclusion of the court was that during the first trimester of pregnancy, the fetus deserves no legal protection.
 - 2. ▶ In essence is saying that when someone doesn't yet have his brain fully formed, he isn't "human."

3. ▶ Once you start that kind of thing, there is absolutely no stopping it.
4. ▶ It is then possible to go to the end of life and eliminate people who don't think clearly any more, thereby creating a more healthy human race.
5. ▶ This kind of thing is a complete *misconception* of what it means to be human.
6. ▶ To be human means to have a *human genetic pattern*, and you get a human genetic pattern at the moment of conception.

X. ▶ **Borrowed Ideas?**

- A. ▶ In other words, Jesus did *not* have to be limited in knowledge in order to be “human.”
 1. ▶ However, suppose He *did* have to be limited in knowledge in order to be “human.” What would that say about every thing He taught?
 2. ▶ It would say that everything He taught was conditioned by His own time—*not* just His view of the Bible!
 3. ▶ What could you rely on?
 - a. ▶ You would have *no standard* at all for knowing which statements were reliable and which ones were not!
- B. ▶ Two German scholars, Strack and Billerbeck, pointed out a number of years ago that many of Jesus' teachings paralleled the writings of the Jews between the Testaments.
 1. ▶ If you were to think that Jesus had to be limited to the ideas of His time, once you had noticed these parallels, your conclusion would be that there was hardly a thing Jesus said that couldn't very well have been “picked up” from the ideas circulating in His time! And you would end up *not* being formed by anything at all that Jesus said in any eternal sense.

XI. ▶ **Fallible Messiah?**

- A. ▶ Let me give you an analogy on this.
 1. ▶ I arrive to preach in your city with a long white beard and white robe, and upon arriving I announce that one thing was *not* been put into the publicity for these lectures, namely, that I'm God.
 - a. ▶ As I'm getting off the plane and saying this, a little dog runs up to me, but I give him a good swift kick.
 - b. ▶ You say, “Now, just a moment. You claim to be God, and you treat that little dog that way?”
 - c. ▶ I reply, “You don't understand. My incarnation involves *kenosis*, and therefore I'm limited to the moral ideas of my own time, so I have no objection to kicking dogs, because other people in my time are kicking dogs.”
 2. ▶ As you think about this, it bothers you, but you forget it for the moment. Then comes my public lecture, which contains factual errors and misuse of logic; it is a *catastrophe* of a lecture!
 - a. ▶ “How can you possibly claim to be God and say those things?”

- b. ▶ I say, “You don’t remember what I told you at the plane. When God becomes man, in order for Him to become “truly man,” He becomes limited to the knowledge of His own time, and I’m in that position.
- c. ▶ “Certainly there were errors and contradictions in what I said, and certainly my judgments are not necessarily absolute judgments, but that’s just because I’m here on earth as a human being, and you’ve got to expect that sort of thing.”

XII. ▶ **Jesus the Nonconformist**

- A. ▶ What about the second *kenosis* theory?
 - 1. ▶ view says that Jesus didn’t *need* to get into this position, but that He *chose* to do so
 - a. ▶ Jesus *chose* to limit His ideas to His own time so as not to create problems.
 - 2. ▶ If you read the New Testament, you can hardly take this seriously.
 - a. ▶ He got crucified!
 - i. ▶ If you “conform your ideas to your own time” and do an effective job of it, you certainly *won’t* get crucified.
 - b. ▶ Again and again He *criticizes* His own time, including the religious ideas of His own time; Jesus goes after the Pharisees and the Saducees “hammer and tongs.”
- B. ▶ Is it conceivable that when Jesus dealt with the very religious foundation of Jewish ideas, namely, the Old Testament, He would have limited Himself to their erroneous ideas?
 - 1. ▶ He surely would have corrected them as much as He did in other respects.
 - 2. ▶ Jesus was “the world’s worst conformist!” You simply can’t put Him into the category of “conformist” when it comes to the Biblical statements that He made.
- C. ▶ This shows again that there is something else working here when people present the “*kenotic* theory.”
 - 1. ▶ Why is it that they’re willing to accept what Jesus says in other respects, but won’t accept what He says relative to the Bible?
 - a. ▶ Answer: because they think they’re smarter than Christ when it comes to the Bible!
 - b. ▶ They think they’ve got information that is superior to Jesus’ information.
 - 2. ▶ But if Jesus is God Almighty on the earth, then isn’t that a rather presumptive concept?

XIII. ▶ **Controlled Knowledge**

- A. ▶ However, *kenotic* theorists sometimes cite Jesus’ statement about not knowing the hour of His coming, as if that supported the *kenotic* theory:
 - 1. ▶ “No man knows the hour of my coming; not the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”
 - 2. ▶ Does this support the *kenotic* theory? It does just the opposite!
 - a. ▶ The passage indicates that Jesus was aware of what He knew and what He didn’t know.

- b. ▶ If Jesus said, “I don’t know the hour of my coming; in this one respect I’m limited,” then quite obviously He knew that in other respects he wasn’t limited.
 - c. ▶ The very fact that He states He doesn’t know the hour of His coming indicates that He is concerned that we [**check, verify! (ed.)**] are aware of what He knows and what He doesn’t know.
- B. ▶ The real problem with many people is that they begin a very careful treatment of this one verse @@@@@ [**check, verify! (ed.)**] they don’t believe in the full authority of the Biblical text at all; and that is obviously absurd logic.
- 1. ▶ These people “throw most verses out right and left”—but then when they finally find *one* verse that seems to do something for them, they get all excited about it.
 - 2. ▶ It is one of the common characteristics of modern liberal Biblical scholarship that “. . . the liberal suddenly becomes a fundamentalist at the point of any verse he is interested in!”