Why I Will Never Stop Teaching “Unbiblical” Things

I had a rather nasty private message from a pro-polygamist yesterday over my post on the ancient Near Eastern context of polygamy. Although I never made any claims that there was a specific Torah law in place against it (although there are two that limit it), a lot of words were put in my mouth and assumptions made – among them that I am unloving, irresponsible, calling YHVH a liar (well that wasn’t in the PM but on the share thread), and that my teaching was actually “damning.” Wow. I was also accused of teaching “unbiblical things.”

Well, the last accusation is true – and I am not ashamed to admit it. In fact, I am going to share with you why I wish more people would both study and teach “unbiblical things” – meaning “things that are alluded to in the Bible, but not explained.”

As scholar John Walton is fond of saying, “The Bible was written for us, but it was not written to us.” In other words, the Bible was written by and to people who understood a whole world of context that we are unaware of. No different than if someone from the tribes of the Amazon was taught to read in English, given a random book and expected to understand and teach our culture perfectly. He couldn’t do it – no matter how learned and wise he was in his own culture, even if he was a genius with an IQ of 160 he would be ignorant of our culture and would probably make assumptions based on his frame of
reference which he would impose on our culture — innocently presenting to his students a skewed picture. In this same way, we are as ignorant of many biblical things as that Amazonian is of American culture. It isn’t his fault, and it isn’t our fault — this isn’t about fault at all — it is about what we do and do not know and how it affects the way we see things.

Historically, Christian and Jewish scholarship is filled with a lack of understanding of the ancient Near Eastern world. This lack of understanding has led to a sad dearth of knowledge about what even the most basic things meant to them — and things that we passed over and shrugged at, or worse filled in the blanks out of our own imaginations, sometimes hold the very keys to our faith. Aren’t we tired of questions like —

“Why on earth did Abraham cut all those critters in half in Genesis 15?”

“How could Abraham justify sending Ishmael and Hagar away?”

“Why did David have an idol in his house?”

“What was the time of year when “the kings went to war”?”

“Why can’t we boil a kid in its mother’s milk?”

“Why did the Israelites genuinely see nothing wrong with worshiping YHVH alongside other gods?”

“Why wouldn’t Laban go near his daughter Rachel when she was having her period?”

“Why did Leah and Rachel give their handmaidens to Jacob when they were unable to have children?”

“What did the phrase “righteousness and justice” mean to the people?”

“Why was Yeshua (Jesus) (1) crucified, (2) at the city gate —
and what did that mean in the ancient world?”

“Why was it important that Joseph was of the royal line of David, but it didn’t matter whether or not Mary was?”

“Why was it important that the Commandments be written on two stones instead of one?”

“Why did God appear as a pillar of fire and a pillar of cloud?”

“What was the difference between the Sadducees and Pharisees and why were some Pharisees bad and others good?”

“Why did Yeshua tell the people to go ahead and give Caesar his coin back?”

“Did Jacob really see an actual ladder in the sky?”

You won’t find a single answer in the Bible – but you will find the answers to all these things in the archaeology of the past 100 years. You want to discover the truth about what was spoken to Daniel, in that “knowledge will increase?” Hundreds of thousands of ancient Near Eastern documents, from the times of Abraham forward, have been uncovered and translated – shedding light on what we once consigned ourselves never to understand. If we go looking only in the Bible for instance, we will assume that Laban was simply observing Leviticus 15 purity laws when in actuality Mesopotamians of that era believed that menstrual blood contained demons! Laban’s interactions with Jacob, all of them, make perfect sense when we look at the ancient laws of the region – from why he tricked Jacob, to his consternation over his household gods, to the cries of his daughters that he had sold them as slaves. The Bible says nothing because it didn’t have to – what Moses wrote, everyone understood. What Joshua wrote, everyone understood. What the prophet Samuel wrote, everyone understood. And what the gospel writers wrote, everyone understood. But according to Peter, what Paul wrote – not
everyone understood. Why? Because they lacked context. If I tell someone from another country that on the 4th we are going to launch some “rockets” they may consider an act of aggression but an American thinks about 4th of July fireworks – every culture has things they say that need no explanation to the people to whom they are said.

People who refuse to teach “unbiblical” things – well how do they know that what they call “biblical” is really biblical? What if they teach that not boiling a kid in its mother’s milk means we can’t eat meat and cheese together when they could have just taught about the Ras Sharma dig where they discovered proof that boiling a kid in the milk of its mother was an ancient Canaanite fertility ritual? Aren’t they guilty of teaching unbiblical doctrine based on a lack of biblical context? People who teach that Mary is descended from the royal line of David are inadvertently disqualifying Yeshua as Messiah in the eyes of Jews because they know that the legitimate kingship has to come through the male line – but those who know ancient Near Eastern adoption law know that when Joseph delivered Yeshua and named Him, that He legally became a claimant for the throne of David.

I see many of the people who don’t understand context falling away when the tough questions are asked – just last year someone I loved took the attitude that “if it doesn’t make sense in the plain reading, then it must not be true.” She denied Yeshua as Messiah and now she is an atheist because she must have discovered that the same rules applied to the Hebrew Scriptures that she was applying to the Gospels. The Bible isn’t lacking – the ancients just had no need to explain the obvious everyday things that are sadly no longer obvious or everyday – or even any day in many cases. They had no need to explain things in depth because no one needed explanations – and if they had explained then the Bible might be 100,000 pages long. As Ryan White likes to say, they didn’t have a photocopiers back then, they were writing on animal skins and
brevity was essential.

And so yes, I will continue to teach unbiblical things – its the only way to protect myself and others against doctrines and teachings that are the product of assumption and imagination – and often rooted in agenda. Anyone who wants to read can read, and whoever wants to ignore can ignore. I am not forcing anyone to listen to me or read, I don’t send out social media friend requests in order to post things on other people’s pages. Frankly, I mind my own business; I study everyday and I share with whoever is interested. What I don’t do is go after people who disagree. Everyone has the right to listen, read, watch and believe what they choose and I don’t have the right to try and control that. All I can do is present what I have learned, and if I am unloving, irresponsible and especially if I am calling YHVH a liar then I pray He will stop me by any means necessary, I genuinely do. So far, the only people who have been angry at me are those whose doctrines get stepped on because I have never once sought to invalidate the scriptures – in fact, the more I learn, the more impressed with them I become and the more convinced I am that they are in no way to be considered of modern invent.

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