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Session 18, Tough Laws, Joshua to Jericho

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Welcome to another deep dive. This time, you know, we've got a pretty hefty reading list to get through, focusing mainly on, well, Old Testament laws and, you know, the fall of Jericho and the book of Joshua. I've got to be honest with you, some of these laws are kind of hard to swallow from, you know, our modern point of view.

So I'm really excited to see what kind of insights we can dig up together today. Yeah, it's true. These ancient texts can seem pretty harsh, I guess, when you look at them through a 21st-century lens.

But, you know, instead of rushing to judge, we're going to try and take a step back and understand these laws within their historical and cultural context, you know. What might seem shocking to us now could have been totally normal or even, you know, crucial back then. Yeah, I like that approach.

It's all about understanding the why behind the what, you know. And speaking of challenging perspectives, the lecture brought up this really interesting point about how the emphasis we have now on tolerance and diversity can sometimes lead to, well, intolerance of certain viewpoints. Yeah, it's kind of a fascinating paradox, isn't it? The example they gave was how some people might be offended to see crucifixes displayed at a Catholic university while it's, well, pretty unlikely that anyone would demand a cross be placed in a mosque.

You know, it really gets you thinking about how our own values and assumptions shape what we see as tolerant. For sure. It definitely highlights the complexities of navigating these different cultural and religious viewpoints.

Yeah. Let's dive into some of these tough laws from the Old Testament. The whole concept of herem in warfare really stood out to me.

It's mentioned in Deuteronomy 20.1 and C, where entire cities, like everyone and everything in them, are while they're devoted to God through complete destruction. Yeah, the term herem is often translated as utter destruction. And it was meant to completely remove the influence of those cultures that were considered idolatrous and hostile to the Israelites.

It's definitely hard to grasp from where we stand now, where doing something like that would be seen as, well, horrific. Right. Yeah.

My first thought was, how do you square this with the idea of a loving God? How could destroying whole cities, including women and children, be seen as devotion? It's a far cry from the turn-the-other-cheek stuff we usually associate with faith. It certainly challenges our modern ideas about morality and warfare. I mean, some scholars would say that herem has to be understood in the context of a holy war, where God himself was seen as the ultimate judge and warrior.

Others suggest that the language they used is more symbolic, not meant to be taken literally, more about highlighting how serious idolatry was and the need to separate themselves from pagan practices. So there's no easy answer to how we should interpret harem today. Yeah.

But it does force us to face the complexities of interpreting these ancient texts and to grapple with the ethical dilemmas they present. Exactly. And it's important to remember that the Bible itself has a lot of different perspectives on war and violence, reflecting how the understanding of God's character and his interaction with humanity evolved over time.

Yeah. And the lecture actually brought up a modern comparison, though it's a tough one: the use of atomic bombs in World War II. They argued that, while horrific, the bombs were ultimately intended to save lives by ending the war quickly.

What are your thoughts on that comparison? It's definitely a thought-provoking parallel, although it's a sensitive topic, for sure. I mean, obviously, there are huge differences between ancient warfare and modern conflicts, but the comparison does highlight those timeless questions about the ethics of war and the choices leaders have to make in times of crisis. It also reminds us that we should approach sensitive topics like this with humility, you know, recognizing that judging the past from the comfort of the present comes with its own ethical challenges.

That's a really important point. It's so easy to judge based on our own values and experiences, but truly understanding things requires empathy and a willingness to consider different perspectives. Speaking of challenging laws, let's move on to some of the other decrees in Deuteronomy that might raise some eyebrows today, starting with those concerning rapes.

Yeah, those are definitely tough passages to navigate. The lecture pointed out the difference they made between rape that happened in the city, where a woman was expected to scream for help, and rape in the field, where screaming wouldn't necessarily make a difference. This distinction seems to reflect the social norms of the time.

And, well, the challenges of proving a crime without witnesses or modern forensic techniques. So could we see these laws as attempts to address the issue of consent and evidence within the limits of their time? It's certainly different from our legal system, but maybe it reflects a similar desire to protect victims and make sure justice is served. That's a really insightful observation.

It encourages us to consider the values and principles that might be behind these seemingly harsh laws. Instead of just dismissing them as barbaric, we can ask ourselves: what were they trying to achieve? What were the limitations they faced with their legal system? And how does that compare to how we understand justice today? Yeah, those are great questions. It's like putting on your historical detective hat and trying to figure out the motives and constraints that shaped these ancient legal codes.

Exactly. And that's where the work of historians, archaeologists, and biblical scholars becomes so important. You know, by carefully examining the cultural, social, and legal

contexts, we can gain a deeper understanding of these texts and avoid imposing our own modern biases.

Right. It seems like the key is to look beyond the surface level of these laws and try to understand the deeper values and concerns they might be addressing. What about the death penalty laws in Deuteronomy? I mean, there's a whole list of offenses from false prophecy and idolatry to even rebellious sons.

All of them carried the death penalty. It just feels so harsh compared to our legal system now. Yeah, you're absolutely right.

The list of capital offenses is extensive, and it definitely clashes with our sensibilities today. But the lecture proposed an interesting alternative perspective. Maybe these laws, instead of being rigidly enforced legal codes, function more as, well, statements of values.

Huh. It's a really intriguing idea. So rather than thinking they actually executed people for these things, we might see these laws as saying, this is how seriously we take these offenses.

These are the foundations of our society. Exactly. It's a way of signaling what they considered right and wrong, what's acceptable and what's not within their society.

It's similar to how we might have laws today that are rarely enforced, but still reflect our values and priorities. So it's more about establishing a moral framework than about actual day-to-day enforcement, like a cultural compass pointing towards the ideals they were striving for. Precisely.

And it highlights the importance of looking beyond the surface level of these ancient texts to understand the deeper values and principles they embody. It reminds us that context is key when we're looking at ancient cultures and their legal systems. We've covered some heavy stuff so far.

War, rape, the death penalty. But there's more to unpack. What about the laws concerning polygamy and slavery? These are bound to raise questions for anyone reading the Bible today.

You're right. Those are sensitive and complex issues that need to be considered carefully. On polygamy, the lecture stressed that God's original design for marriage was one man and one woman, like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

But it also acknowledged that polygamy was already a cultural practice in ancient Israel, and Deuteronomy addressed it within that reality. Deuteronomy 21.15 talks about the case of a man with two wives, one he loved and one he didn't, and the law aimed to protect the rights and well-being of the less favored wife. So it's not about condoning polygamy as the ideal, but more about mitigating the potential harm and ensuring fairness within a system that already existed.

Exactly. It's about providing a framework for justice and protection within the existing social structures, even when those structures might fall short of God's original design. It's a

nuanced approach that reflects both the realities of their time and the desire to uphold certain ethical principles.

And what about slavery? It's a topic that makes a lot of people uncomfortable, especially given the horrible history of chattel slavery in more recent centuries. You're right to bring that up. The professor emphasized that the type of slavery addressed in the Old Testament was mostly debt-based servitude, meaning people would sell themselves or their children into service to pay off debts rather than being treated as property, the way we usually think of slavery today.

So it's more like indentured servitude, where people had a set term of service and certain rights and protections under the law. Right. And Deuteronomy 15.12 even says that Hebrew slaves had to be set free after six years of service.

So while the Bible doesn't explicitly condemn slavery as an institution, it does offer guidelines to protect the rights and well-being of those in servitude within that specific cultural and economic context. It's interesting to see how the law tried to handle these complex social issues given the realities of their time. It reminds us to be careful about imposing our modern values onto these ancient texts.

There's a lot of nuance there that we might miss if we aren't paying attention. Absolutely. Context is everything when we're dealing with ancient texts.

And it's important to approach these topics with humility, recognizing that our own views are shaped by our own time and culture. All right. So this next topic kind of threw me for a loop.

I wasn't expecting this. The lecture talked about the Bible's take on how we should treat animals, which honestly never even crossed my mind as something that'd be addressed in these old texts. It's definitely a part of biblical ethics that people don't talk about much.

But when you really look into it, there are some surprisingly progressive ideas about how animals should be treated. The professor used a couple of interesting examples from Deuteronomy to illustrate this. Oh, yeah.

I'm definitely curious to hear that. Because I got to admit, my knowledge of animal rights in the Old Testament is pretty much zero. Well, one example is that it's forbidden to yoke an ox and a donkey together for plowing.

It's in Deuteronomy 22. At first glance, it might just seem like some random farming rule, but there's a deeper principle going on there. Yeah. I can see how forcing animals with different strengths and abilities to work together would be kind of messed up and could even hurt them.

It seems like common sense now. But it's interesting to see this kind of practical wisdom in these ancient laws. Exactly.

It shows a sense of fairness. They recognize that different creatures have different needs and limits. And what's really cool is how this simple farming rule can actually be applied to other areas of life.

The apostle Paul uses the analogy of being unequally yoked in the New Testament when he's talking about relationships. Oh, that's right. In 2 Corinthians 6.14, he says believers shouldn't be yoked together with unbelievers.

So an ancient farming practice turns into a metaphor for spiritual compatibility. It really shows how these old ideas can still be relevant today. For sure.

It's a great example of how looking deeper into the cultural context can help us find whole new layers of meaning in these texts. Another example the professor gave was the instruction in Deuteronomy 25.4 not to muzzle an ox while it's threshing grain. Yes, I remember that one.

It's basically saying that an animal has the right to enjoy the fruits of its labor. It almost feels like an early version of animal rights. I had no idea the Bible had so much to say about how we should treat animals.

Yeah, it's a surprising insight, right? I mean, the Bible clearly values human life, but it also acknowledges that we need to treat animals with compassion and respect. These laws suggest that our relationship with animals shouldn't just be about using them or controlling them. There's this element of shared responsibility and care that's built into these principles.

This is really making me rethink my assumptions about the Old Testament. So we've been talking a lot about these Old Testament laws, but I'm wondering: how does all this apply to us now, especially for those of us who see the Bible as a guide for our lives? How do we navigate these ancient laws in today's world? That's a really important question, and one the professor addressed directly. He made a clear distinction between Israel as a nation, with its own specific civil and religious laws, and the church as a spiritual community.

His point was that some Old Testament laws, especially those about governing the nation or ceremonial practices, might not apply directly to Christians today. So it's about figuring out which laws were meant for a specific time and place, and which ones reflect more universal principles that can still guide us today. Exactly.

And that's where the idea of discerning the underlying principles behind the laws comes in. Instead of getting caught up in the exact wording of the law, we should focus on understanding the spirit of the law, the values and intentions behind it. Right.

That makes sense. Can you give an example of how that might work? Like, how do we connect these ancient laws with the ethical dilemmas we face today? Sure. Let's take divorce.

It's something people still debate and struggle with. The Old Testament allowed divorce in certain situations. But Jesus, in the New Testament, taught that God's original plan was for marriage to be a lifelong commitment.

But even in the Old Testament, I remember the professor saying that divorce was allowed because of the hardness of hearts. It wasn't presented as the ideal. Right.

And that's a crucial point. The law often had to deal with the reality of human weakness and brokenness. So while divorce was allowed, there were still guidelines and protections in place to prevent unnecessary harm and ensure fairness, especially for women, since it was a patriarchal society.

So even though the specific rules around divorce might be different between the Old and New Testaments, we can still see this underlying principle of trying to protect everyone involved and uphold the sanctity of marriage as much as possible. Exactly. And that principle can still guide us today, even though the specific legal context has changed.

And we can use the same approach with other tough topics, like how we treat animals. We might not be yoking oxen and donkeys together anymore. But the idea of treating animals fairly, recognizing their needs, and avoiding unnecessary suffering is still relevant.

It's like taking an old blueprint and adapting it for the modern world. We might need to change the materials or the design a bit, but the core principles of fairness, compassion, and responsible stewardship still hold true. Okay, we've covered a lot of ground, from harem and warfare to what the Bible says about treating animals.

But before we wrap up, I want to go back to the story of Jericho, specifically the role of Rahab. Oh yeah, Rahab. Her story is fascinating.

This Canaanite prostitute ends up being really important in the Israelites' conquest of Jericho. And her story brings up some interesting questions about faith, obedience, and the unexpected ways God works. It's crazy to me that someone who was seen as an outsider, even a sinner back then, ends up being so crucial to the Israelite victory.

What do you think her story tells us about God's grace, and His willingness to work through people in situations we wouldn't expect? Well, it's a powerful example of how God can use anyone, no matter their background or past mistakes, to achieve His purposes. The professor highlighted what Rahab said to the Israelite spies, I know that the Lord has given you this land. She'd heard about the God of Israel, she'd seen His power, and something in her heart connected with that truth.

Yeah, and she didn't just believe; she acted on that belief, even though it meant risking her own life to protect those spies. It makes you wonder what made her do something so bold against her own people. It seems like Rahab saw something different in the God of Israel, something true.

Her faith wasn't just an idea in her head; it was something real that motivated her to take a stand, even when it meant going against her own culture and putting herself in danger. It's a powerful reminder that faith can show up in the most unexpected places, and that God often works through the people that society overlooks or dismisses. But her story gets even wilder.

The professor pointed out that Rahab wasn't just spared from the destruction of Jericho; she actually became part of the lineage of Jesus. That's right. It's incredible to think about.

This Canaanite woman, once an outsider, is listed as one of Jesus' ancestors in the book of Matthew. What a twist! It really speaks to God's redemptive power and his ability to weave together different parts of human history into his grand plan. Her story is a beautiful example of how God's grace can change lives and rewrite destinies.

It challenges our ideas about who's in and who's out, and reminds us that God's love and mercy are for everyone who turns to him, no matter their past. It's truly inspiring and hopeful. It's a powerful reminder that transformation and redemption are always possible with God.

It's not about where you come from or what you've done, but about where your heart is. Speaking of the heart, the professor pointed out that Rahab's faith wasn't just in her words, but also in her actions. She didn't just passively believe.

She actually did something. She protected the spies, even though it was risky for her. Yeah, that's so important.

It's easy to say you believe in something, but real faith is often shown in how we live our lives, the choices we make. Rahab's story reminds us that faith isn't just an idea. It's a call to action, to be brave and trust, even when it seems scary or different.

Right. It makes me think of that verse in James: faith without works is dead. Rahab's story perfectly shows what it means to live out your faith in real, impactful ways.

She saw a chance to do what she thought was right, and she took it, even though it went against everything her society expected. And her story also shows how important courage and conviction are. She had to stand up to her own community, even her own king, to do what she felt was right.

That takes a lot of bravery to go against the flow and choose a different path, especially when it could cost you everything. It's inspiring to see how Rahab's faith gave her that courage. It wasn't blind obedience.

It was this deep belief that she was aligned with a bigger purpose, a higher truth. It makes me think about the tough stuff we face today, when we might be called to stand up for what we believe in, even when it's not popular or it's hard. Rahab's story reminds us that real faith often needs that kind of courage, that willingness to step outside our comfort zones and face the consequences.

Absolutely. Her story makes us look at our own lives and ask ourselves, where is God calling me to step out in faith? Where do I need to stand up for what's right, even when it's tough? These are the kinds of questions that Rahab's story brings up, and they're really relevant for all of us today, no matter who we are or what we believe. So to wrap things up, we've explored these ancient laws from Deuteronomy, we've dug into their complexities, and we found some unexpected insights along the way.

We've seen that these laws, while often harsh from our modern perspective, reflect some really deep values, a concern for justice, a desire to protect the vulnerable, and a

recognition that God is sovereign over all of life. And we've seen that even within these seemingly strict laws. There's room for grace, compassion, and the unexpected work of God.

The story of Rahab, the outsider who became an ancestor of Jesus, is a perfect example of this. It reminds us that God's ways are not our ways, and that his love and mercy can reach anyone and change lives in amazing ways. Yeah, the professor put it really well when he said that.

This deep dive wasn't about giving easy answers or judging. It was about wrestling with tough questions, understanding the historical context, and appreciating the values in these ancient texts. And through that process, we've discovered some really thought-provoking insights that can still speak to us today.

Exactly. We've seen how these ancient laws, while from a specific time and culture, can still help us understand justice, ethics, and that constant human struggle to live right with God and each other. And maybe most importantly, we've been reminded that God's story is a story of redemption and transformation, a story that keeps unfolding in our own lives and in the world around us.

This has been an amazing deep dive, and I want to thank you for joining us on this exploration and discovery journey. We hope this has sparked your curiosity and encouraged you to keep wrestling with these challenging and important questions. So until next time, keep digging, keep seeking, and keep your hearts open to the surprising and transformative power of ancient wisdom.