

Questions/answers on the Interpretation of Old Testament Scriptures

by James Blaine Chapman

This sermon explores the interpretation of Old Testament scriptures, emphasizing the importance of understanding God's sovereignty, human free will, and the significance of Old Testament prophecies and types.

Scripture: Genesis 6:4, Genesis 9:20, Exodus 7:3, Exodus 9:6, Exodus 20:5, Judges 14:4, 1 Samuel 31:4, 2 Samuel 1:10, 1 Kings 22:20, Job 2:4, Psalm 9:16, Ezekiel 18:20

Topics: "Biblical Interpretation", "Gods Justice"

Description

James Blaine Chapman addresses various questions from the Bible, shedding light on misunderstood passages and providing insightful explanations. From Noah's unintentional vice to the consequences of a father's iniquity on his child, Chapman emphasizes the importance of understanding the context and deeper meanings behind biblical events. He clarifies the significance of God's actions, such as hardening Pharaoh's heart, and highlights the mercy and justice of God in response to human actions. Chapman also delves into the symbolism and historical context of certain terms and practices mentioned in the Bible, encouraging a deeper understanding of God's word.

Transcript

QUESTION #176 -- Please explain Genesis 9:20-29. Did Noah backslide.?

ANSWER #176 -- Ever ready to take up reproach against a good man, people have been wont to say that Noah "got drunk" -- giving full implication to the sin involved. But the record of the case does not warrant this assumption. It appears from all circumstances involved, that this is the first example of known alcoholic effect upon an individual, and that Noah did what he did with no intention whatsoever of becoming intoxicated. This is the position taken by Adam Clarke regarding the matter, and I believe he is justified in so concluding. No, I do not believe Noah backslid. I believe he fell into an unintentional vice, but that his heart was right, and that thereafter he shunned fermented grape juice just as any intelligent Christian must do to keep a good conscience and a good influence among those who know him.

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QUESTION #177 -- In Judges 14:4 it says of the father and mother of Samson that they "knew not that it was of the Lord, that he sought an occasion against the Philistines." What does this mean?

ANSWER #177 -- The choice of Samson had all the appearance of being bad, and according to the usual rules it was forbidden. And like the most of mortals the parents could see no good in the course their son elected to pursue. It is the same way with us when a son elects to quit school too early or when he chooses a calling that seems to us to have no future. And it still turns out that God may have a purpose that we cannot foresee and that He does often make things work out for good in a manner very unexpected to us.

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QUESTION #178 -- Please explain the meaning of Job 2:4, "All that a man hath he will give for his life."

ANSWER #178 -- It should be observed, first of all that the devil is the author of these words-that should make us suspicious at the outset. The words "skin for skin" which appear as an introduction to the saying in question perhaps refer to the calamities which had already befallen Job, and the meaning probably is that they had but touched the skin or very outside of the man's interest, while his own health and life were in the nature of being the nucleus of the man, which if exposed Job would give up his integrity. But the devil was wrong. Job had something that he valued more than life itself, and that was his standing with God. And two hundred million martyrs have proved that there is something which a true Christian values more than life, and for which he will gladly surrender his life. A Christian man will not give his faith and assurance of acceptance with God for his life. Christ is more to His own than every good besides.

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QUESTION #179 -- Does the son bear the iniquity of the father as mentioned in Exodus 20:5? If so, please explain Ezekiel 18:20.

ANSWER #179 -- The son bears the consequence of his father's iniquity, but not the guilt of it. That is the teaching of the two passages taken together, and I do not think examples are hard to find. Take the case of the drunkard's child: that child bears the brunt of his father's iniquity in depleted fortune, weakened body, and it may be also in appetites predisposed toward drink. But still that child is not guilty because of his father's sin, and if he dies in his innocency he will be as infallibly saved as though he were a preacher's child, and if he repents and turns to God when he comes to responsible years, he will find mercy and help from God as quickly as though he had been "the model child" for health and well-being.

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QUESTION #180 -- In Psalm 9:16 what is the meaning of the words Higgsion and Selah which occur at the close of the verse?

ANSWER #180 -- Perhaps I could do no better than to quote from the Historical Digest of "The System Bible Study": "Higgsion -- Probably originally a musical term, which finally came to bear the additional significance of meditation and solemn sound." "Selah-Beyond the fact that 'Selah' is a musical term, we know absolutely nothing about it, and are entirely in the dark as to its meaning. The general drift of modern interpretation of the word inclines toward the theory that it denotes a pause in the vocal performance at certain emphatic points, while the accompanying instruments carried on the music. It may be remarked of this, however, as of other explanations of the word, that it is mere conjecture. The word 'Selah' appears seventy-one times in thirty-nine Psalms, and three times in the Book of Habakkuk (3:3, 9, 13), usually in places where very warm emotions have been expressed."

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QUESTION #181 -- Please explain Genesis 6:4. Who were the "giants"?

ANSWER #181 -- The giants, whoever they were, were members of the race of Adam. "The daughters of men" were the descendants of sinners, and "the sons of God" were followers of the true God. Perhaps we may think on racial lines and say the daughters of men were the daughters of Cain and the sons of God descendants of Seth. And when these intermarried their children took on the strength of their fathers and the meanness of their mothers and became "men of violence," as some translations read. And so it may be that we are to think of the giants of those days as being huge in strength and in wickedness, rather than of just immensity of meat.

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QUESTION #182 -- On the plagues of Egypt, Exodus 9:6 says, "All the cattle of Egypt died." Then in Exodus 9:19 the Egyptians are bidden to "gather thy cattle." How do you explain this?

ANSWER #182 -- The first quotation is not complete. The latter part of the verse says, "but of the cattle of the children of Israel died not one." That is to say, "All the cattle that did die belonged to the Egyptians, but not one died that belonged to the Israelites." There were left to the Egyptians still cattle both to be killed and saved alive in the ensuing plague.

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QUESTION #183 -- Please harmonize I Samuel 31:4 and 2 Samuel 1:10. That is, how did Saul really meet his death?

ANSWER #183 -- The account in I Samuel 31 is the inspired account. The other is a fabrication of the Amalekite invented for the purpose of ingratiating himself with David in the hope of receiving a reward. Saul was struck by an arrow from the bow of a Philistine archer, and afterward fell purposely on his own sword and died a suicide's death.

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QUESTION #184 -- In Exodus 7:3 God said, "And I will harden Pharaoh's heart." Did God actually harden Pharaoh's heart through His will and divine sovereignty?

ANSWER #184 -- God hardened Pharaoh's heart by giving him light and opportunity to repent and do right, just as He hardens any impenitent sinner's heart. Of course we ordinarily explain that the sinner hardens his own heart by rejecting God's call and refusing His promise, and this is true, when responsibility is the question in mind. But when you leave out all secondary factors, God hardens by the same means that He melts and saves -- depending upon whether the sinner rejects or accepts the call of God.

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QUESTION #185 -- In I Kings 6:7 we are told that neither hammer nor axe was heard in connection with the building of the temple. But in 2 Chronicles 3:9 we read "the weight of the nails was fifty shekels of gold." How can we harmonize these statements?

ANSWER #185 -- The golden nails were inserted in ready prepared sockets and were not driven with hammers.

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QUESTION #186 -- Please explain 2 Kings 24:8, and 2 Chroncles 36:9. The first says Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he began to reign, and the latter says he was eight. This seems to be an inconsistency.

ANSWER #186 -- It has been suggested that this king was taken in as associate with his father at eight and became sole monarch at eighteen. At any rate, eighteen was no doubt the correct figure, as it appears from Ezekiel 19:5-7 that he was fully developed in the principles and practices of wickedness. In the Hebrew numbers were indicated by letters, and a very slight change sometimes caused one letter to be mistaken for another. There is another number difficulty like this in 2 Chronicles 21:20:22:2. The text as it reads would seem to make the son two years older than his father. Here, too, two explanations are possible: (1) that there was an interlude between the father's death and the son's ascension, or (2) that in the course of time the copyists mistook the letter and thus changed the reading from twenty-two to forty-two.

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QUESTION #187 -- Please explain Jonah 3:10, where it says God repented of the evil He had threatened to do unto the people of Nineveh. Did God tell Jonah to preach that in forty days Nineveh should be destroyed?

ANSWER #187 -- God sent Jonah to preach that in forty days impenitent and sinful Nineveh should be destroyed. But when the people heard the preaching of Jonah they repented. God's threat was against an impenitent people, but He could show mercy to a penitent people. God does not change, but when people change He deals with them according to their change. It was that way in the beginning. God created man and was pleased with the results. But when man sinned and fell, God repented that He had made him and turned to destroy him with the great flood of Noah's day. God always does the best He can for all of us. But His best for us when we do not pray is not the same as His best for us when we do pray.

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QUESTION #188 -- Please explain Jeremiah 12:9, "Mine heritage is unto me as a speckled bird," etc. Seems to me Jeremiah is complaining that his pagan surroundings threatened to drag him down.

ANSWER #188 -- The passage begins with verse seven, and I think by reading it all you will see that it is God's lamentation over the desolation of His heritage. The word speckled is better translated taloned, and the thought is that God's own people were not kindly disposed toward Him. I think that song about the "Great Speckled Bird," and the whole idea of giving this speckled bird a high standing as representing holy people who are the derision of their neighbors though very acceptable to God, is a misinterpretation.

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QUESTION #189 -- In 2 Chronicles 11:15 I notice the Authorized Version reads devils where the Revised Version has it he-goats. Please explain such a difference in terms.

ANSWER #189 -- The Hebrew word seirim literally means hairy ones, and since the goat is known to have been an object of veneration in Egypt, it is likely that Jeroboam made images of goats as well as of calves for his idol worship. The Authorized Version gives the spiritual significance, but I think the Revised Version gives a more literal translation of the word.

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QUESTION #190 -- Please explain Jeremiah 31:15-17 where it says, "And they shall come again from the land of the enemy."

ANSWER #190 -- The literal theme is the return of the Children of Israel from the lands of their captivity, in which case there is of course no mystery whatever--just a promise of the restoration of Israel to national place and prosperity. But Matthew applies these words to the babes of Bethlehem who were slain when the soldiers of Herod were seeking the life of the infant Christ. Wilson suggests that the knowledge that these little babes were His substitutes affected our Lord in His attitude toward little children. And the words of comfort as thus applied should cause every bereaved mother to dry her bitter tears and take comfort in the promise that her little one will come again from the grave to live forever with the Lord and His redeemed.

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QUESTION #191 -- Who is the "queen of heaven" mentioned in Jeremiah 44:17?

ANSWER #191 -- We have here and in Jeremiah 7:18 a description of idolatrous worship, patterned largely after the form of worship used in the worship of the true God. But the object is "the frame or workmanship of heaven" of which the moon is the center. It may be said in direct answer to the question that the queen of heaven mentioned in the text is the moon. But it must be remembered also that the worship described and condemned included the sun, the stars and all the framework and system of the world and the heavens.

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QUESTION #192 -- Please explain Deuteronomy 24:12, "And if the man be poor, thou shalt not sleep with his pledge."

ANSWER #192 -- The Hebrews were forbidden by the law of Moses to exact interest or usury from their brethren when extending to them loans of money or goods. But they were permitted to take security for the return of the principal, even to the point of holding the man's outer coat. But in the case of the poor man, who must use his cloak for cover at night, mercy was to be shown in that the pledge was to be returned to its owner for his use as a bed; but the poor man was commanded to bring it back in the morning. By this means the poor man secured his borrowing during the trading day, and the lender trusted without security during the hours of rest. We have a remnant of this ancient statute in our provision for exemptions in cases of taxes and court judgments in our own land.

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QUESTION #193 -- If Moses wrote the Pentateuch, how could he include a description of his own death and burial? Was this revealed to him before he died?

ANSWER #193 -- There is no statement in the last chapter of Deuteronomy that intimates that Moses wrote it, and I can see no reason for claiming he did. Admission that this chapter was added by the hand of another, by Samuel or Ezra, as some think, in no way reflects upon the evidence that Moses wrote the other portions of the Pentateuch. At least, I find no personal difficulty in such an explanation, and that is what I believe.

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QUESTION #194 -- Please explain I Kings 22:20-22. I cannot conceive of God's tolerating a lying spirit, let alone give it room in heaven.

ANSWER #194 -- I believe, with Calmet, that we are not to take the words of the prophet literally, but as a picture setting forth results in terms of earthly kings. And we should also remember that permission is often mentioned as determining. The downfall of Israel and the slaying of King Ahab were encouraged by the lying prophets whom God permitted to influence the council for war, and not for peace.

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QUESTION #195 -- In Exodus 15:8 it says, "The depths were congealed in the heart of the sea." On that word congeal: did that mean the freezing of the water? The discussion seems to be on whether water can be congealed without being frozen. If it was frozen according to natural law, would that make the occurrence any less a miracle?

ANSWER #195 -- I think we do not gain much by trying to work this out. The freezing of sea water in that part of the world would certainly be something unforgettable. And for it to get cold enough for that, and yet not freeze three millions of Israelites in improvised camp life would also be something to challenge our credulity. I think it is simpler to accept it as a miracle in which the results are not clearly connected with natural causes. We believe in a God of infinite wisdom, love and power, and that makes it easy for us to believe He could congeal the waters in some other way than by manipulation of the temperature. It is easy for me to believe in miracles, because I believe in God.

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QUESTION #196 -- Please read Joshua 10:12, 13; Psalm 19:6, and then tell us does the Bible teach that the sun moves and not the earth?

ANSWER #196 -- The Bible is written in popular language -- not in technical language. And in popular language the sun rises and sets, for popular language describes the experience of the speaker and not the cause of his experience. There is nothing in the Bible inconsistent with the idea of a round world and of revolving planets. In fact there is not a proved fact of science that is at variance with the Bible. It is only the ideas that men read into the Bible and the presumptions of science that are contradictory.

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QUESTION #197 -- Concerning the sad story of the eleventh chapter of Judges, did Jephthah sacrifice his daughter in death?

ANSWER #197 -- There have been many efforts to show by the possibilities of the language used, and by the fact that human sacrifices were not in accordance with the religion of Israel, that Jephthah sacrificed

his daughter by devoting her to a life of celibacy. But after considering all that I have ever read or heard on the subject, I agree with Whedon and others in the conclusion that Jephthah's original vow, stated as though it were of very unusual character, involved the idea of a human sacrifice, and that what drew attention was the fact that it was his daughter, his only child, who came forth to meet him, instead of some less favored member of his household. And with such also I agree that the daughter was made a burnt offering unto the Lord in fulfillment of the vow. The only difference in this and what Abraham did on Mt. Moriah is in the literal phases of the matter, for Abraham fully purposed to slay and burn his son in sacrifice to God. When you recall the character of Jephthah as a desert man of little refinement, the case does not appear quite so unlikely. And it should be mentioned that while Jephthah's faith is commended in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, his vow is neither mentioned nor commended.

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QUESTION #198 -- Why was Cain's offering not accepted? I wonder if it was because it was not an offering of blood like Abel's.

ANSWER #198 -- Your thought regarding the matter is very good. Cain offered "the fruit of the ground," Abel brought "the firstlings of his flock." Cain's offering stands for native goodness and justification by works. Abel's was an offering of blood and prefigured the offering of Jesus and justification through atonement. If there was a difference in the spirit and temper of the brothers, that is to be expected—it was this spirit and temper that directed their gifts. So that one passes readily from the reason the offering was not accepted to the reason Cain himself found no favor. A bloodless religion has no power to change the heart of the worshiper. Genuine Christians do better than others only because of the grace of God which enables them to do so.

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QUESTION #199 -- Please explain Ecclesiastes 1:9-11: "The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun. Is there any thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new? it hath been already of old time, which was before us. There is no remembrance of former things; neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after."

ANSWER #199 -- This is just one of the preacher's arguments in showing the utter vanity of human courses. The book of Ecclesiastes should be studied as a unit. Practically all the intermediate arguments are made without taking God into consideration, and the conclusion is true only when this limitation is observed. But the final argument takes God in and the conclusion is, "Fear God and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man." I do not think that the verses quoted should be made to say that some former generation of men knew the radio, the automobile, and every present day invention. That application goes both too far and yet not far enough. It would require not only the eternity of matter, but the eternal progression or existence of human affairs. Whereas all there was at first was God. But here it is: "There was something before there was what we now have, and what we now have will give way to something else, and the real summum bonum or highest good is never found in the human course. God and salvation constitute our only hope.

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QUESTION #200 -- Was the Ethiopian woman that Moses married (Numbers 12:1) a Negro?

ANSWER #200 -- No, she was an Arab, "a Cushite," as the Revised Version gives it, born in the land of Midian. But she was not a "daughter of Abraham" and this gave rise to the disparaging charge made by Aaron and Miriam.

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QUESTION #201 -- God told Adam not to eat of the forbidden fruit: why then is it said that Eve was "deceived"?

ANSWER #201 -- The story does not show that Satan ever approached Adam. Adam simply listened to his wife and did as she suggested. But Eve was approached and "deceived" by the false arguments of the devil. Eve sinned not being fully aware that she was doing so. But Adam sinned knowingly.

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QUESTION #202 -- In Genesis 28:20-22 Jacob seeks to put God under obligations to prosper him before he will keep his vow to acknowledge God as his God, and pay his tithe to the Lord. Do you think Jacob's attitude toward God was right: and would we be justified in taking the same attitude?

ANSWER #202 -- I cannot find it in my heart to be especially hard on Jacob. I think he did quite well, considering the chance he had. In the instance before us he sought a covenant that had two parties -- himself and God, and he knew there would not be much to it if God did not agree to it. I do not think of it as an effort to drive a close bargain, but as an effort to make sure of God's pleasure and support. Yes, I think that is really the way to do it. It sounds heroic to say, "I will serve God always, whether He blesses me or not." But it is more reasonable and scriptural to say, "If God will bless me, I will testify to His blessing, and seek to make His love known to others." And from what I know of prayer and dealing with God, I believe God is pleased to have us come to Him for assurance, and that He will accept our challenge.

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