

171 Old Testament rules

Another good friend, 'Ian', has been challenging some of my statements. Great! Bring it on. I need to know, please, if – no, **when** – I get things wrong.

Towards the end of a long conversation, Ian asked, "So are you saying the Old Testament is wrong?" I, too glibly, replied "In some places, yes, I am." That was a step too far, so we've booked another coffee next week; here, as I've done so often these past few years, I'll think out my own view more carefully by writing it down.

In Jesus' day, "the Scriptures", as I understand it, meant more or less what we call the Old Testament, and, on the Emmaus road, "[Jesus] explained to them what was said in **all the Scriptures** concerning himself,"^[Luke 24:27] (my bold), so I'd claim:

1) *The Old Testament is absolutely essential reading for Christians.*

But is it "the word of God"? Well, it's not **The** Word of God – that's Jesus, and he is, for me, the ultimate arbiter of what God is like – but I would still say:

2) *The Old Testament is the inspired word of God.*

Given the "difficult bits" in the OT, I think it's totally brilliant the way God seeded (inspired) into those writing all the predictions about "what was said ... concerning himself" – just wonderful!

So, despite those "difficult bits", my view is:

3) *The Old Testament is infallible.*

God planned it; God used (fallible) human authors to write it; and it will not fail (it is infallible) to communicate everything God needs us to know. (Remember, it's all the early church had, and God used it to enable the good news to explode around the known world.)

But I have to ask: is the OT – as some Christians claim – inerrant (contains no errors)? Or could it be that the authors sometimes expressed a mistaken idea of what God is like or of what God wanted them to do? When they wrote that God had told them to kill every man, woman and child, is that **actually** what God said? Ditto for the instruction that if your son is disobedient, the men of town should stone him to death?^{Deut 21:18-21}

Personally, I cannot believe that Jesus would agree to his loving heavenly Father giving instructions like that. If you think differently, we'll have to agree to disagree, but for me:

4) *The Old Testament is totally inspired(!), but it is **not** inerrant.*

OK, so who is going to decide which bits you're going to 'cut out', Paul? Are you setting yourself up as arbiter of which bits of Scripture you accept and which not?!

I would simply say that we each have to decide how we interpret the Scriptures – we do that all the time – but my 'interpretive lens' is the character of Jesus. If something written in the OT is contrary to the character of Jesus, then I would say that the author was mistaken.

Thankfully, God often uses people who make mistakes (e.g. me!) to communicate God's love – and the Old Testament communicates God's love in spades!

Paul Bev. 19.9.21