***Jesus fulfils the Old Testament***

*Hebrews 1:1-4*

At school, I studied Shakespeare’s *Henry IV Part One*. (I say ‘studied’; I was in the room when it was taught.) It made no sense to me. Far too many 16th Century speak ye oldie worldie thee’s and thou’s. I heard the sounds, read the sentences, but couldn’t comprehend what was being said, what it was about.

BTW, the King James Version of the Bible was produced around the same time and used similarly ye olde English language. It was the street Bible of its day. Today, for many, the KJV translation seems just as incomprehensible – hence why it’s necessary to keep translating the Bible into the language people actually speak.

Back to Shakespeare. My teacher said, just learn this one quote and quote it for everything:

*“I know you all, and will awhile uphold the unyoked humour of your idleness. Yet herein will I imitate the sun, Who doth permit the base contagious clouds To smother up his beauty from the world”*

Whatever the questions were on the exam paper, I said, the answer was because, *“I know you all, and will awhile uphold...”* I got a B (a 6 or at least a 5 in today’s money) in O’ Level English Literature. My teacher was right; that quote really is the heart of the whole play. It’d be amazing if there was a way to understand the whole of the Bible in one short quote!

I asked ChatGPT to summarise the whole of the Bible; to convey all 750,000 words in just ten. The answer came back: ‘God creates, humanity falls, Jesus saves, Spirit empowers, hope restored’. Then, in just three words: ‘God loves humanity’. If I’d asked for it in just one word, I wonder if the answer would have been ‘God’ or ‘love’?

An expert in the Law asked Jesus to do the same; to summarise the whole of, what we call, the Old Testament. Jesus said it was, ‘Love God, Love others. Love yourself’.

*“’Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and, ‘Love your neighbour as yourself’.” Luke 10:*27

Of all that is contained within the Law, Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18.

That’s NOT how many people view the Old Testament. There are plenty of examples of violence, oppression, racism, homophobia, cruelty, ethnic-cleansing… Here’s just one example:

*“They devoted the city to the Lord and destroyed with the sword every living thing in it – men, women, young and old, cattle, sheep, donkeys.” Joshua 6:21*

And al the camels breathed a sigh of relief. But did you hear, kill the babies, the toddlers, the older children – all of them, everyone of them in the whole city. Is that what we are to do? It’s in the Bible.

And yet, Jesus taught:

*“Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you!” Matthew 5:44*

What’s going on?

Soaps do it. Film franchises do it. And BBC’s *Dr Who* has famously done it fifteen times. They switch actor and expect us to believe it’s still the same character, even though they appear dramatically different. In the same way, some are perplexed by the apparently different portrayals of God in the Old Testament and New Testament. Second Century thinker, Marcion, even believed there were two different Gods: the God of the New Testament was a different God to the one in the Old Testament. I think he was wrong.

How do we square the Old Testament and New Testament circle?

Malachi was clear: *“I the Lord do not change”* (Malachi 3:6), and the writer to the Hebrews declared, *“Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever.”* (Hebrews 13:8.) So, God did not/ has not changed. But *our* understanding of God has.

In the Old Testament, the nearest they got to a pithy definition was: *“Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God is One.” (Deuteronomy 6:4).* At the time, this was totally radical. There IS God. There is only ONE God. This one God wants to be YOUR God – in relationship with us, you!

Later, in his old age, reflecting on all that he had experienced, read, and understood, Apostle John concluded God.. God is,, *God is Love.* (1 John 4:6). That’s it: God IS Love. Everything that God does, says, is, is because *God is Love*. God will not, cannot, do or say anything that contravenes God’s essence of Love. That was nothing new. Jesus said, even the Old Testament was all summed up in love.

Many, shaped by the Old Testament, were like us: they wanted t know, what’s the minimum we can get away with? What’s the lowest pass mark? What’s the minimum times I need to go to church? What’s the minimum I need to give? What’s the minimum I need to love, forgive…? Instead, Jesus was ALL-IN. Jesus said: Don’t just give 10%, give 100%. Don’t just love those who love you, look like you; love everyone – even your enemies. Don’t pray for their destruction (a cornered animal fights back); pray for their well-being.

The Old Testament was the *start* but never intended to be the *end*. It’s a partial, yet incomplete, revelation. It provides vitally important insight into humanity’s growing understanding of God, but it is not the final word. JESUS is the final word.

Jesus wasn’t *changing* the Old Testament; he was *fulfilling* it.

*“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfil them.” Matthew 5:17*

Jesus was NOT saying He had come to fulfil what the Pharisees/ Religious Elite were teaching about the Law. The opposite. Jesus was calling out the Religious Elite – you’ve got it all wrong. You’ve missed the point. You think it’s about keeping the Law, justifying yourself, proving your own righteousness. Defining who’s in by who you exclude. You hypocrites!

*“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but in the inside are full of dead men’s bones and everything unclean.” Matthew 23:27.*

Ouch!

And there’s more!

*“The Pharisees and teachers of the Law asked Jesus, ‘Why don’t your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with ‘unclean hands’?’*

*Jesus replied, ‘Isaiah was right when he prophesised about you hypocrites: These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.’*

*You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men’” Mark 7:5-8*

Jesus frequently said, *“You have heard that it was said.. but I tell you…” For example, “ You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person.” Matthew 5:38-39*

Jesus was calling out the Religious Elite’s distorted ‘take’ of the Law. Challenged by Jesus, the Religious Elite had tried to silence Jesus by accusing him of breaking the law, condoning sin, even blasphemy. Jesus said the Religious Elite were hypocritical pedants who had completely misunderstood what God was like and about.

Jesus said, in Matthew 5:43-46: “*You have heard that it was said*, ‘Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.’ (44) *But I tell you*, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”

Why? *“So that you may be children of your Father in heaven.”* In other words, so that you are aligned with God, because this is God’s Way: always was, is, always will be.

Then, Jesus says*, “God causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and unrighteous.“* Jesus was quoting Deuteronomy 28.

Except, Jesus changed what was written in Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy says, God sends rain (blessings) only to the righteous, and the dustbowl of famine (judgment) to everyone else.

At the time, Deuteronomy was on to something. Ancient Near Eastern ideas thought the *gods* at war with Creation, Deuteronomy said there’s only One God and this One God doesn’t just reject all. Some are blessed. That was a radical step, but it wasn’t the full picture – only Jesus, THE Word of God, had that. So Jesus amended Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy was – still is - Scripture and yet Jesus changed it. Rather than throw out Deuteronomy, we can cherish its truthful, accurate God-inspired portrayal of where humanity had got to in our gradual understanding of God. What does Jesus teach from the outset? You are blessed when you feel spent, rejected, an outcast. Deuteronomy saw in part; Jesus saw in full.

This means the Old Testament only makes sense with Jesus. Even Paul only makes sense through Jesus.

*“In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways. But, in these last days, he has spoken to us by His Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God’s glory, and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.” Hebrews 1:1-3*

The exact representation – exact image used on a coin. Jesus is the real deal, not the fake money of the Religious Elite.

Another word for the Law was *the Way*. Jesus said, *“I am the Way, I am the Trust, and I am the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:*6)

Sabbath was a God-gift – a day to rest, re-charge, have some fun, re-set, as God intended. Miserable ‘glass-half-empty’ religion turned the gift into a waggy finger: You must not work on the Sabbath. Religious pedants set about writing policy and procedures to stay within the law (as they interpreted it). The Talmud defined a Sabbath Walk as being permissible only if it was no more than 914 metres. 913 metres was fine, but woe betide anyone that walked 915 metres. They quoted, “*Anyone who does any work on the Sabbath is to be put to death.”* Exodus 31:15. Whilst the Pharisees and Religious Elite were deciding the permitted length of a Sabbath Walk, Jesus, the Author of Life, THE Word of God, was out walking with his followers living life to the full (John 10:10).

I am NOT saying, don’t read/ don’t accept the Old Testament. Far from it. The Old Testament helps us see how we got to where we are. It helps us see that Jesus was not just some new fad, but rather the fulfilment of God’s agenda all along. So, do understand that the Bible is the unfolding story of God.

Practically, to read the whole of the Bible in one year, only requires 15 minutes a day. If on January 1st you started at Genesis 1 and read it like a book, you would not get to the birth of Jesus until September. No wonder so many give up before February! It’s like trying to read a book backwards. Get into Jesus first *and then read the Old Testament*. Some Christians fail to recognise the Bible isn’t one book, but a library of 39 separate books. This leads them to presume that it’s all the same: that a verse in Leviticus is as complete as a saying of Jesus. After all, they’re both in the Bible, aren’t they? Beware of building a belief or action that’s based solely on something found in the Old Testament. Remember, the Old Testament is the first word, not the last word. If you can’t imagine Jesus doing or saying it, then it’s not the Way, the Truth, or Life. Let Jesus be the final Word.

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