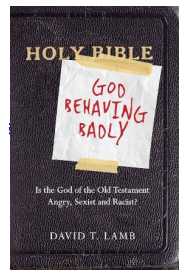


God Behaving Badly – Lesson 3: Is God sexist or affirming?



A quick review

Week 1 - Introduction

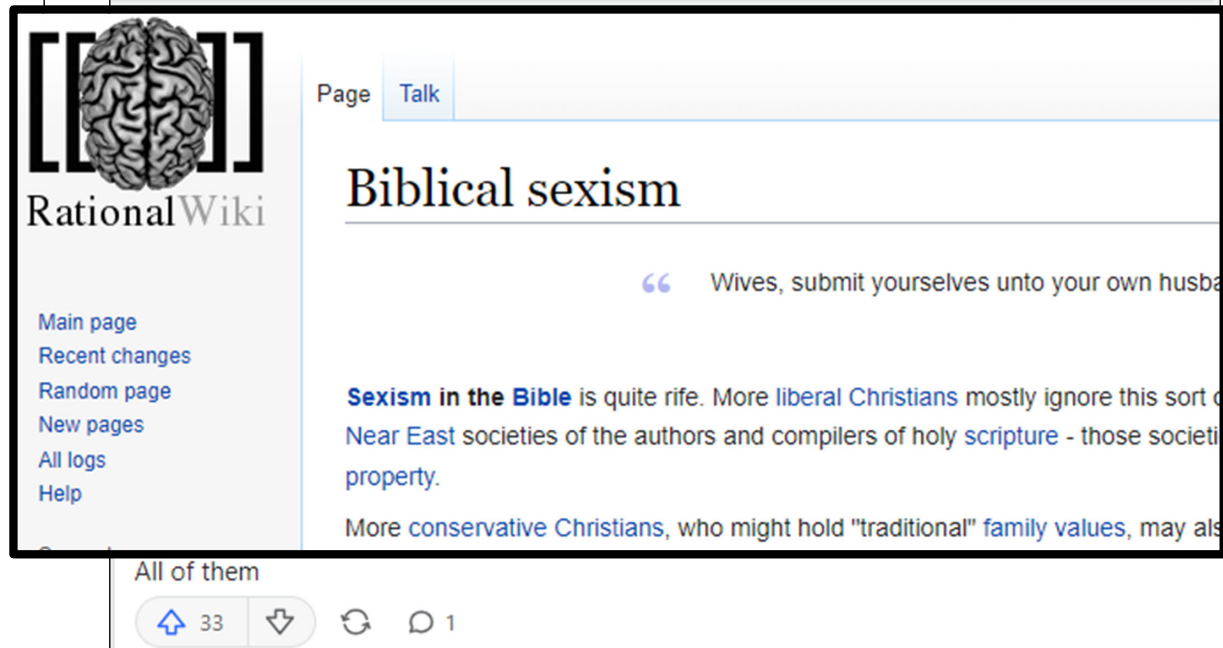
- I shared my reasons for teaching this class.
- We looked at how Jesus and the NT authors viewed the OT.
- We discussed that the Bible was written for us, but it was not written to us.

Week 2 – Is God angry or loving?

- There are many incidents in the OT when God is angry.
- Whenever he is described as being angry, there is always a good reason (injustice, oppression, unfaithfulness).
- God is described as being “slow to anger” and “abounding in love and faithfulness” many more times than he is described as being angry.
- Jesus also got angry.

A quick Google search on sexism in the Bible results in a lot of hits

What are your favorite examples of sexism within the Bible? What are some misogynist Bible passages?



Let's start with a discussion

Why would somebody make the claim that God is sexist?

What is the first thing that comes to mind when you think of Genesis and the first woman?

Let's look at Genesis 1:26-28 – What observations can you make from this passage?

Genesis 1:26-28

²⁶ Then God said, “Let us make **mankind** in our image, in our likeness, so that **they** may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

²⁷ So God created **mankind** in his own image, in the image of God he created **them**;
male and female he created them.

²⁸ God blessed **them** and said to **them**, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

Summary of observations

Observations on Genesis 1:26-28

- Four times the text says that humans (mankind) were made in God's image.
- Women are Godlike (men are too, but most already think this).
- Mankind being made in God's image is unique in the ANE.
- In other creation stories mankind was created to serve the gods – they were not created in their images.

Now let's look at Genesis 2

Gen 2:18 The LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a **helper** suitable for him.”

Can the accusation of sexism be levied against the description of woman as a “helper” for the man?

- If you look at the Hebrew word for helper, “ezer,” it is usually God doing the helping (every time except once in the Pentateuch).
- In Genesis 2, there is no implication of inferiority.
- “Suitable” helper literally means “like opposite him” – there is the connotation of difference as well as similarity. The “helper” is a partner.
- This was a shockingly progressive view of women of the Ancient Near East.

Let's look at Genesis 3:1-7 – Is this passage sexist? What observations can you make?

³ Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘**You** must not eat from any tree in the garden’?”

² The woman said to the serpent, “**We** may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, ³ but God did say, ‘**You** must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and **you** must not touch it, or **you** will die.’”

⁴ “**You** will not certainly die,” the serpent said to the woman. ⁵ “For God knows that when **you** eat from it your eyes will be opened, and **you** will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

⁶ When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, **who was with her**, and he ate it. ⁷ Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

Let's look at Genesis 3:1-7 – Is this passage sexist? What observations can you make?

3 Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals

Observations

- “You” is second person plural – basically “you all.”
- Adam was with her the whole time.
- He says nothing despite the fact that he had heard the command not to eat of the one tree directly from God (Gen. 2:17).
- She at least offers some resistance, but there is no evidence he did.
- This would only be sexist if the woman was portrayed negatively and the man positively.
- Paul blames the man, Rom 5:12 “sin came into the world through one man.”

coverings for themselves.

Is the curse in Genesis 3:14-19 sexist or does it promote sexism? What curses do we see here?

¹⁴ The LORD God said to the serpent,

¹⁵ I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”

¹⁶ To the woman he said,

“I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be contrary to your husband/**Your desire will be for your husband (NIV)**, but he shall rule over you.”

¹⁷ And to Adam he said,

“Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; ¹⁸ thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. ¹⁹ By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

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Observations

- Literally, the curses are applicable only to the first man and the first woman.
 - Most interpreters reasonably assume that the respective curses carry on to future generations of males and females, but this is an interpretive leap.
- This only applies to married women and not to women in general.
- This speaks of submission, but not oppression and biblically, women are not the only ones who need to submit.

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Some more observations on Gen 3

- The man's curse was more severe than the woman's. Her "curse" never actually mentions a curse.
 - Her pain is limited to childbearing, but his pain is "all the days of his life."
 - In Hebrew her curse is 13 words – his is 46 words. There is a correlation between the seriousness of a sin and the length of the judgement.
- The woman receives a promise, but the man receives nothing positive. The woman's seed will eventually overcome the serpent.
- Genesis 3 is not the ideal – Genesis 1 and 2 are.
- To people who think women are to be ruled by men, you should ask how they feel about epidurals and combine harvesters.
- Just as we have worked to reduce the pain of childbirth and to make it easier to harvest crops, we need to work to reconcile men and women and to eliminate sexism.

Let's look at some other Old Testament stories

Lot and his daughters (Gen 18-19) – a summary is shown below:

- God sends two angels to Sodom.
- Lot persuades them to stay at his house.
- The men of the town want to assault (gang rape) them.
- Lot suggests that the men take his two daughters instead.
- Lot's plan is clearly sexist and sends the message that his two daughters are less valuable than the two strangers.

Observation – the narrative does not endorse Lot's behavior

1. The text never affirms what Lot proposes, and he and his family are often held up as negative examples in this section of Genesis.
2. The two angels act in a dramatic way to protect Lot's daughters.
3. The men of the city were punished initially for their attempted rape by being blinded and then by having their city destroyed.

Some people claim the Bible teaches that a woman must marry her rapist

Deut 22:25-29 (ESV) (NIV)

²⁵ “But if in the open country a man meets a young woman who is betrothed, and the man **seizes (rapes)** her and lies with her, **then only the man who lay with her shall die**. ²⁶ But you shall do nothing to the young woman; she has committed no offense punishable by death. For this case is like that of a man attacking and murdering his neighbor, ²⁷ because he met her in the open country, and though the betrothed young woman cried for help there was no one to rescue her.

Quite progressive

²⁸ “If a man meets a virgin who is not betrothed, and **seizes (rapes)** her and lies with her, and they are found, ²⁹ then the man who lay with her shall give to the father of the young woman fifty shekels of silver, and **she shall be his wife**, because he has violated her. He may not divorce her all his days.”

Huh?

Let's make some observations

The word for “seizes” or “rapes” in vs 25 is different than the word in vs 28.

The word “seizes” in vs 25 means “forces” (Blue Letter Bible) but in vs 28 the word used means “seizes” or “takes” and it doesn't necessarily have anything to do with force.

There are a variety of interpretations as to what vs 28 is referring to, including rape, statutory rape, or consensual sex outside of marriage.

The previous verse clearly addresses non-consensual sex, so this may be consensual.

Let's continue discussing this situation

We need to understand their culture. A woman who was not a virgin would be unable to marry, which was the primary way women achieved security in that culture.

This law that appears sexist to us is actually an attempt to correct a problem in the sexist world of the OT. The marriage provided security for the victim. She cannot be divorced.

There is an example of a victimized woman (Tamar) who would rather marry her rapist than be sent away (2 Sam 13:1-20).

OT laws are quite progressive in the ANE. For example, Assyrian law concerning theft had harsher penalties for women than for men.

If God (or the Bible) were sexist there would not be positive portrayals of women, and there are a lot!

- Women are usually portrayed positively in the OT - there are four times as many female “saints” as “sinners.”
- Deborah was a Judge (Judges 4), that is, the political leader of Israel, but as the prophet of God, she was also the spiritual leader.
- In the books of 1 and 2 Samuel, three wise women confronted male leaders:
 1. Abigail risked her life to persuade David not to slaughter the house of Nabal (1 Sam 25).
 2. A wise woman of Abel persuaded Joab to cease his siege of the city (2 Sam 20).
- Ruth (an ancestor of David)
- Esther – selected queen of Persia and risked her life to save her people.

The New Testament presents women very positively

In Jesus’ day, men did not speak to women in public, but Jesus did regularly.

John 4:27 – Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, “What do you want?” or “Why are you talking with her?”

Mary, the sister of Martha, was affirmed by Jesus for acting like a man and sitting at the feet of the rabbi to learn (Lk 10).

The poor widow who gave everything. (Mk 12:43-44)

The woman who anointed him with expensive perfume.

(Mk 14:3-9) vs 9: “Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.”

“What would you say” video



In conclusion, the Bible does not portray God as sexist

Instead of blaming the OT, is it possible that we need to blame sexism on our society and, possibly, the church?

In conclusion, the Bible does not portray God as sexist

Scriptures that critics claim are sexist are usually taken out of their cultural context.

The OT laws and Jesus were progressive in their treatment of women.

We need to remember that their culture was quite different from ours.

Bottom line

In the Bible, God is highly affirming to women, making them in his image and even selecting a woman to be a spiritual and political ruler of Israel.