

Advocating Biblical-style Judaism?

Your question:

Moshe, are you advocating biblical-style Judaism?

My answer:

I am not advocating biblical-style Judaism for today or the near future. My getting back to the basics, as they are laid out in the Five Books of Moses, means a GRADUAL, VERY CAREFUL return to the fundamental ideas and maybe practices, with each generation taking a few steps.

You might be concerned with the apparently harsh justice of the bible. Perhaps it is a religiously-guided government that troubles you, a government that is not very tolerant of moral or spiritual practices judged to be subtle or not-so-subtle threats to society. Maybe you are wondering if I want the temple offerings restarted this year.

There are many areas to examine: morality, justice, government and religious institutions, cohesive faith systems, and so on. In each of these areas progress can be made in the slow return, in spirit if not in action, to the society that was recommended long time ago. It took many centuries to get this far away from biblical Judaism and so we cannot expect to return in a very short time. We are in a whole different world right now. We are not socially or psychologically suited for rapid changes. It would be very harmful for us to so radically alter our lives.

We can start by studying biblical morality and then decide how much our generation can move in that direction. Should morality be completely subjective? Should society repress some destructive practices? For example, is adultery a crime, a crime against individuals and/or society? Let's think about it.

We can do similarly with the biblical concepts of justice. Do they have something to teach us? I do believe that in many ways they are superior to current practices (see future articles). Is twenty-first century leniency the highest form of justice?

What exactly were the temple offerings? Let's try to understand their actual nature and purpose? Many people imagine these "offerings" (a better translation than "sacrifices") were the wanton, total waste of animals. That is not what we had in Judaism. They were gifts from an agrarian people for the maintenance of the Temple and its staff. (see future article). The donations were no more a "sacrifice" than your charity dollars are today. We just need to see what aspects of the offerings can be put into practice today.

Again, the important thing is to be guided by the Five Books and to make societal progress by wisely implementing as much of the recommendations as is reasonable in our lifetime.

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