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GROUP STUDY GUIDE

Answering Atheists Series: The West Wing

TEACHING SUMMARY

This teaching responds to a scene from *The West Wing* that challenges several Torah commandments. It identifies the presentation as a series of straw-man arguments, meaning that a position is misrepresented in a way that makes it appear weaker than it is.

The first issue is Exodus 21:7 and the portrayal of Hebrew servitude. The teaching describes arrangements intended to provide work and material support, emphasizing protections and rights rather than equating them with the abusive slave trade of later history.

The discussion of Sabbath penalties focuses on authority and due process. The teaching says that individuals may not impose the stated penalty themselves. It argues that carrying out such judgments requires a Torah-based government and judicial system providing a fair trial.

The football illustration leads to a distinction between temporary uncleanness and sin. The teaching further distinguishes an animal carcass from processed skin and cites John the Baptist's camel-hair clothing when discussing material derived from an unclean animal.

The final examples concern vineyard seeds and clothing made from wool and linen. The teaching points out that the passages do not prescribe the death penalties attributed to them in the scene. It also explains spiritual lessons about avoiding mixture with the world's ways.

The conclusion emphasizes understanding what the commandments actually say before judging them. The teaching urges attention to context, the relevant distinctions, and the purpose of an instruction rather than accepting a dramatic misrepresentation of its requirements.

SUMMARY POINTS

- A straw-man argument misrepresents the position being challenged.
- The teaching addresses several Torah claims in a television scene.
- Hebrew servitude is discussed in terms of work, provision, and protections.
- The teaching rejects private enforcement of capital penalties.
- A Torah-based judicial process and fair trial are required in its explanation.
- Temporary uncleanness is distinguished from sin.
- A carcass is distinguished from processed animal skin.
- The mixed-seed passage does not attach the alleged capital penalty.
- The clothing command specifically concerns wool and linen.
- The teaching calls for understanding commandments before evaluating a portrayal of them.

FILL-IN-THE-BLANK

Basic

1. The teaching identifies the scene's reasoning as a _____ argument.
2. The command discussed in Exodus 35:2 concerns the _____.
3. The teaching says that temporary uncleanness is not a _____.
4. A person who is unclean is not permitted to enter the _____.
5. The clothing command names wool and _____.
6. The seed command concerns two kinds of seed in a _____.

Challenging

1. The teaching requires a Torah-based judicial system providing a fair _____.
2. John the Baptist wore clothing made from _____ hair.
3. The teaching distinguishes dried skin from an animal _____.
4. The clothing command is quoted from Deuteronomy 22:_____.
5. The mixed-seed command is quoted from Deuteronomy 22:_____.
6. The teaching explains the mixing imagery as a warning against combining Torah with the ways of the _____.

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What makes the scene a straw-man argument according to the teaching?
2. How does the teaching's description of servitude challenge the comparison used in the scene?
3. Why does the teaching distinguish a judicial process from an individual enforcing a penalty?
4. How do the distinctions between sin, uncleanness, and a carcass affect the football example?
5. What errors does the teaching identify in the claims about mixed seeds and clothing?
6. What spiritual lessons does the teaching draw from the two mixing commandments?

ANSWER KEY – GROUP GUIDE

Basic

1. straw-man
2. Sabbath
3. sin
4. temple
5. linen
6. vineyard

Challenging

1. trial
2. camel
3. carcass
4. 11
5. 9
6. world