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Mega-pastor Accused of 'Heresy' for Attack on Old Testament

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*Baptist-seminary president rips Andy Stanley for discounting
Hebrew Scriptures*



Pastor Andy Stanley

Mega-pastor Andy Stanley caught a lot of theological flak back in May for telling his congregation it was time for them to “unhitch” from the Old Testament.

This weekend, however, Albert Mohler, president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, hit back hard by comparing Stanley’s continuing controversial comments on the matter with an ancient heresy.

Writing in Salem Communications’ ChristianHeadlines.com, Mohler alluded to error of Marcion, who claimed the God of the Old Testament was not the same as the God of the New Testament. For his part, Stanley recently suggested they were the same God but “he was doing two different things.”

“We are looking here at the ancient heresy of Marcion, who argued that the Old Testament must be repudiated by the church,” wrote Mohler.

“Marcion, who lived about the years 85-160, taught that the Old Testament revealed a Creator deity who is not even the same God who sent Jesus. Unsurprisingly, he also held to a heretical Christology. The Old Testament deity was repugnant to Marcion, who

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argued that Christianity just make a clean break from Judaism. The Old Testament, he taught, reveals a vindictive law-giving Creator deity who bears no resemblance to the merciful redeeming God revealed in Jesus Christ. As Irenaeus, one of the most significant church fathers argued, ‘Marcion himself divides God in two, saying that one is good, the other judicial, and in so doing takes God away from both.’”

He continues: “Marcion was embarrassed by the Old Testament, and so are many modern people. Andy Stanley, at the very least, seems to fear that embarrassment in others, even if he does not identify with it himself.”

It’s rare for American evangelical titans to clash publicly over basic theological doctrine. But that’s what’s happening here.

It all started months ago when Stanley, delivering a sermon to his flock of mega-churches in suburban Atlanta where some 32,000 followers listen attentively every Sunday, suggested the Christian faith must be “unhitched” from the Old Testament. He claimed that “Peter, James, Paul elected to unhitch the Christian faith from their Jewish scriptures, and my friends, we must as well.”

There was shock, wonder, bewilderment expressed by many in the church. Later, in answer to the ensuing controversy, Stanley, the son of Pastor Charles Stanley, told Relevant magazine, “Well, I never suggested we ‘unhitch’ from a passage of Scripture or a specific biblical imperative. ... Again, I was preaching through Acts 15 where Peter, James, and Paul recommended the first-century church unhitch (my word, I’m open to an alternative) the law of Moses from the Gospel being preached to the gentiles in Antioch.”

In Acts 15, a controversy arose over whether circumcision was a requirement for salvation and whether new gentile believers would be required to observe the law of Moses. In Acts 15:19-21, the Apostle James, thought to be the brother of Jesus and the head of the church in Jerusalem, offered: “Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood. For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day.”

“Far from suggesting new gentile believers would be exempt from all of the law of Moses, this decision, accepted by all the apostles, provided some baseline laws the gentiles would be required to keep, while they attended synagogues every week and were given a chance to learn the rest over time,” explains Joseph Farah, author of the new book [“The Gospel in Every Book of the Old Testament”](#) and [“The Restitution of All Things: Israel,](#)

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[Christians and the End of the Age,](#)” which takes its title from the Book of Acts. “The only Scriptures that existed at this time were the Hebrew Scriptures, which were consistently and constantly cited by the apostles as the living, breathing Word of God.”

But what put Mohler over the edge were recent comments by Stanley in a podcast in which he said he had outgrown his simple childhood belief about the Bible and that references in the New Testament to “Scripture” “did not mean the Bible.”

“This is something I’m trying desperately to help people understand, and every time I try to explain it I get misunderstood, so here I go again,” said Stanley. “There was no ‘The Bible’ until the fourth century. When we think about the Bible we think about a book that contains the Jewish Scripture and the Christian writings, and such a thing did not exist until after Christianity became legal and scholars could come out of the shadows and actually put such a thing together. So, in the early church no one ever said in the early church, ‘the Bible says, the Bible teaches, the Bible says the Bible teaches,’ because there was no ‘The Bible.’ But the point of your question, there was Scripture but every time we see the phrase ‘the Scripture’ or ‘Scripture’ in the New Testament, as you know we have to stop and ask the question, what was this particular group of people referring to because there was no ‘The Bible’ and there was no book that contained all the Jewish Scripture because it was contained in synagogues and as you know virtually no one could read and write.”

To which Mohler responds: “Well, wait just a minute. It is true that Jesus and the apostles did not have the Old Testament and the New Testament bound together in a book (codex) form. It is, of course, also plainly true that the New Testament did not exist until it was given, book by book, by the Holy Spirit to the church in the first century. But it is not true that references to ‘the Scriptures’ or ‘the Scripture’ by Jesus and the apostles are any mystery to us. They are plainly referring to what we know as the Old Testament. There are references to ‘Moses and the Prophets’ (Luke 16:29) and to the ‘Law and the Prophets’ (Luke 16:16), but faithful Jews in the first century would emphatically have known exactly what the Scriptures are.”

Mohler also cites John 5:46-47: “Jesus rebuked those who did not believe in him with these words: “If you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?”

“Similarly, the apostles made their arguments for the gospel of Christ with reference to the Old Testament and its testimony to Christ and the saving purpose of God,” continued Mohler in a 2,700-word rebuttal to Stanley. “At no point in the New Testament is the Old Testament dismissed. Rather, as Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount: ‘Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but

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to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:17-19)

Mohler adds: “The pattern is promise and fulfillment, not rejection and repudiation. This is true even in the case of Acts 15, with the apostles citing the authority of Amos 9:11-12 and even citing the binding authority of Genesis 9:4 on the Gentile believers. Again, the pattern is promise and fulfillment. Andy Stanley argues that the Old Testament should not be cited as ‘the go-to source regarding any behavior in the church,’ but the moral law of the Old Testament remains honored by the church and repeated (even intensified) in the New Testament. Peter, James, and Paul did not ‘unhitch the Christian faith from their Jewish Scriptures,’ nor can we.”

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There was more from Stanley’s remarks on the recent podcast that set off Mohler.

“I’m convinced that we make a better case for Jesus if we leave the Old Testament or the old covenant out of the argument,” said Stanley.

To which Mohler responded: “We can make a better case for Jesus than the case Jesus made for himself?”

“To be clear, Andy Stanley does not endorse the full heresy of Marcionism, which was universally condemned by the early church,” said Mohler. “He actually appears to aim for the heresy of Marcionism, and his hearers are certainly aimed in that direction. He clearly says that God is the same God in both testaments, but says that he reveals himself in two completely different ways. Just like Marcion, he argues that the church must ‘unhitch’ from the Old Testament. He actually says: ‘I am convinced for the sake of this generation and the next generation, we have to rethink our apologetic as Christians, and the less we depend on the Old Testament to prop up our New Testament faith the better because of where we are in [the] culture.’”

Mohler responded: “The church cannot ‘unhitch’ from the Old Testament without unhitching from the Gospel Jesus preached. Speaking of the Old Testament Scriptures, Jesus said ‘it is they that bear witness about me.’ (John 5:39).

Mohler also raised the whiff of anti-Semitism in Stanley’s use of the term “Jewish Scriptures” for the Old Testament, a point raised first by Farah who points out that all of

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the Scriptures – Old Testament and New – were written by Jews, all pointing to a Jewish Messiah, Jesus.

“What Stanley seems to be aiming for in this crusade of his is a book-burning form of replacement theology beyond anything even remotely suggested by replacement theology proponents of the past – literally ditching, not just unhitching – the original Hebrew Scriptures,” said Farah.

More to the point, Stanley insists the entire Bible needs to be de-emphasized as the cornerstone of the Christian faith. As far back as 2016, he said: “If the Bible is the foundation of your faith, here’s the problem: it’s all or nothing. Christianity becomes a fragile house of cards religion.”

“But another key question is whether one can be a faithful Christian while denying the truthfulness of Scripture,” says Mohler. “Jesus himself makes the point that without the Old Testament as the Word of God, we really do not know who he is. Then what does it mean to be a Christian? As we sing, Jesus Christ is the church’s one foundation, but we cannot know him apart from the Bible.”

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