FLOODS AND THE TRUTH

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If I can't trust you when you are talking about events in New Orleans in 2005, or Houston in 2017, why should I believe what you say about events in Palestine in AD 30?
Category: Observations

This blog post is inspired by some of the reaction to the floods in Houston in the wake of Hurricane Harvey. However, before I get into the post itself, I'd like to say a couple of things.

Firstly, I will touch on American politics, but this is not a political post, so don't reply with politically slanted comments - I'll just delete them. Secondly, I'm not touching on the human suffering that has been caused by the floods and I hope that my post isn't insensitive.

On with the post...

These days, I get a lot of my news from Twitter; it tends to be faster than other news media and will often point me to analytical stuff that I can't find anywhere else. There is also a lot of rubbish, often rather biased and unpleasantly expressed rubbish at that. I tend to block the most egregious offenders and mentally screen out other stuff.

Anyway, when Hurricane Harvey hit Houston, there was a fair bit of criticism of President Trump's reaction to the flooding. That is nothing new, criticising politicians of all stripes is part and parcel of the way that Twitter works. What was intriguing, however, were the large number of responses to these criticisms which read something like (insert your own obscenities and insults for authenticity):

You are complaining about Trump, but I didn't see you tweeting about Obama when he played golf during Katrina and didn't respond for three days.

There are a couple of things to note about these responses. Firstly, Obama wasn't president during when Katrina struck New Orleans and secondly, Twitter wasn't invented till the following year. It would be hard for these tweets to be more untrue, yet they were repeated and passed on as though they were legitimate criticism.

Just in case you think I'm taking political sides, there were large number of people who forwarded a years' old picture of President Obama serving at a soup kitchen and claiming that this was him in Houston this week, comparing him favourably to the incumbent. That was a lie, too.

Meanwhile, as if giving false information about politicians wasn't enough, there was a fair bit of criticism of mega-church pastor Joel Osteen for the response (or lack of it) from his Houston based church. Ed Stetzer gives some background here.

> *You donâ€™t have to appreciate Osteen, but you do need to care about the truth if you are going to post about it.*

My big concern in all of this, is that there are Christians who have been involved in spreading these deceptions, either without checking the facts, or perhaps because the facts were less important to them than their personal agenda. This is worrying. Firstly, the Ten Commandments warn us against bearing false witness - that is lying about other people. When we do this sort of thing, we displease

God, which isn't a good thing to do. Secondly, Christianity is a religion which claims to be based on facts; on a historical event when happened two thousand years ago and a few thousand miles away from here. If that event didn't happen, then there is no basis for the Christian faith. The problem is, if I can't trust you when you are talking about events in New Orleans in 2005, or Houston in 2017, why should I believe what you say about events in Palestine in AD 30? Our reputation as truth tellers should be precious to us and we should guard what we say on social media very carefully.

I am aware that while the world's media have been focussed on Houston, there have been far more extensive and deadly floods in SE Asia. Please take time to inform yourself about this situation, too.Â