

Question #2 - How come the God of the Old Testament is so violent and evil?

For many people the God of the Old Testament is simply not worthy of worship. This is a God who is vindictive, jealous, vengeful, murderous and just plain evil. In the Old Testament God commands his people to invade a land occupied by other people and to massacre them all, including children, thus taking over the land.

This God is simply not worthy of our worship.

“The idea that the Bible is a perfect guide to morality is simply astounding, given the contents of the book. Admittedly, God’s counsel to parents is straightforward: whenever children get out of line, we should beat them with a rod (Proverbs 13:24; 20:30, and 23:13-14). If they are shameless enough to talk back to us we should kill them (Exodus 21:15; Leviticus 20:9; Deuteronomy 21:18-21, Mark 7:9-13, and Matthew 15:4-7). We must also stone people to death for heresy, adultery, homosexuality, working on the Sabbath, worshipping graven images, practicing sorcery, and a wide range of other imaginary crimes”

(Sam Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation*, 8).

“Whenever we read the obscene stories, the voluptuous debaucheries, the cruel and torturous executions, the unrelenting vindictiveness, with which more than half the Bible is filled, it would be more consistent that we called it a work of a demon, than the work of God” (Thomas Paine, *The Age of Reason*)

The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully”

(Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*)

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I. Examples of Violent and Evil Scriptures

A. The God of War

1. Deuteronomy 7:1-5 (cf. 20:16-18) – God commands Israel to completely annihilate the people living in the land so that they may live in the land (Josh. 12:7-24 – list of kings defeated)
2. Description of what God commanded Israel do to the foreign nations:
 - a. Exodus 23:23-28 – wipe them out, drive them away
 - b. Psalm 135:10 – God struck down many nations
 - c. Numbers 21:32 – drive them out
 - d. Numbers 33:52 – dispossess
 - e. Deuteronomy 6:9 – thrust out
 - f. Deuteronomy 7:24 – wipe names out
 - g. Deuteronomy 9:3 – subdue and annihilate
3. Joshua 6:21 – destroyed all in the city
4. Joshua 11:1-15 – Joshua leads the people to destroy Hazor completely
5. 1 Samuel 15:1-4 – God commands the destruction of the Amalekites
6. Other verses of Israel fighting in the name of God: Deut. 3:34; Josh. 8:26; 10:40; Jdg. 20:18
7. *This is a sample of verses focusing on God and War in the Old Testament.

B. Other objectionable aspects of the OT God

1. Skeptics also question many other aspects of the Old Testament. Some they see as primitive, for example the food laws (Lev. 11) and cleansing laws (Lev. 13-15); though very few Christians see following these as a part of faith.
 - a. Some OT laws, for example ones regarding sexuality (cf. Lev. 18) are attacked by skeptics as not in line with modern morality and views on sexuality. The question of sexual ethics transcends simply the OT and is outside of the parameters of this outline
 - b. Some skeptics see much evil in the OT that is in no way condoned by God; most of the stories are of what happened and does not mean God approved of it; unfortunately murders and rapes and the like are a part of life, the records of them do not condone them

II. History of Acceptance and Understanding of Context

A. Early Christian Acceptance of the Old Testament

1. Primarily – the Old Testament is a story and Jesus is the climax of that story.
 - a. Something new happened in Jesus, but it fit in with all that had gone before. The Christians had to figure out how their new view of faith and God fit in with the Jewish Scriptures
2. The first Christians were all Jews and accepted the Scriptures and used them: examples are those who wrote the New Testament (Paul, Peter, John, etc.).
3. Marcion (b. 100 AD) completely rejected the Old Testament, believed the law and the prophets made no preparation for Christ, and argued the God of the Old Testament is different from the God of the New Testament
 - a. Marcion's belief and work contributed to the growth of Gnosticism which sees matter as evil and spirit as good: the evil God of the OT created matter but true believers in Jesus will leave matter behind and enter the Spirit world
 - b. Ultimately the Church rejected Marcion's views, as well as the views of others like him. In doing so the Church accepted the OT as inspired by the same God seen in the life of Jesus Christ (For more on Marcion see FF Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, chapter 9 "Marcion")
 - c. *In accepting the OT the Church declared that God had created matter and it was good; those who opposed the OT were Gnostics who saw all matter as evil. This is a key debate to be examined as we look at the formation of the New Testament. A key point to note now is that only the four gospels in the New Testament truly stood in line with historic, OT Judaism
4. Ever since, Christians have accepted the OT

B. Use of the Old Testament to Justify Horrible Evils

1. Emperor Constantine (c. 313) made Christianity the official state religion – prior to this Christianity was opposed to the state and many Christians were executed
 - a. After this Christianity became intertwined with the state and remained so for over millennia
2. The marriage of church and state greatly influenced Biblical interpretation – the Church-State read of God sending his nation to war in the OT and saw this as justification for Crusades against Muslims and Inquisitions against heretics
 - a. *Refer to outline on evil in church history
5. Today in the West the Church is no longer one with the state
6. Christians must be vocal that there is no justification for war in the name of God, for genocide, or for any such evil AND Christians must apologize for past sins

C. Towards a Contextual Understanding of the Old Testament

1. Necessity of a correct view of the Bible
 - a. *What the Bible is Not: It is not a mere rulebook filled with only rules for living*
 - i. Question to ask: When there are rules and laws given in the Bible are they universal (for all times and places) or contextual; do they point to some greater purpose?
 - ii. Skeptics make the mistake of seeing the Bible as only a set of rules that God gives us on how to live; thus some of the commands God gives (such as commanding Israel to kill its enemies) are assumed to be commands Christians might carry out today (since Christians have done so in the past).
 1. They think this way because too often Christians have held the Bible to be this!
 - iii. The Bible does contain laws and does tell us how to live, but it is MORE than just a rule book – it is primarily a story
 - b. *What the Bible Is: It is a Story of God Rebuilding His Relationship with Humans*
 - i. God created and humanity rebelled – after this God is working to bring humanity back into relationship with Him – this is a long process which climaxed in Jesus

- ii. God seeks to bring rebellious humans back into relationship with him - The Kingdom (Community might be a better word for us to understand today) of God in the OT was seen on earth as a nation (Israel) and as a nation there were wars and violence – the Kingdom of God no longer exists in this way on earth –That part of the story is past
 - iii. Jesus introduced the fullness of the Kingdom (Community) of God – it is a Spiritual kingdom focused on justice and love and forgiveness –warfare is spiritual
 - iv. Christians have no justification in using OT stories to justify war today
- 7. The question here is the relation of the Law and Grace or Spirit: Jesus fulfills the Old Testament law (Matt. 5:17-20) and brings the focus onto the Spirit of the Law (Mark 12:28-34); in Christ we are no longer under Law; we are under grace (Gal. 3:1-25; 5:16-25).
- 8. Christians ever since have realized that something new happened in Jesus Christ which means the various laws of the OT are no longer binding (read Acts 15). Perhaps an illustration will help:
 - a. Think of the story of the Bible as the story of people on a voyage to a new land. For a long time they are at sea on a boat (life in the OT) but looking to a day when they land. Finally, they land and begin their trek to settling in the new land. Now in the new land (life in Christ) the boat is a memory. The way of life on the boat is different than life on dry land; the people always have the memory of the boat and it shapes who they are but the new life on land is fuller and better (NT Wright uses this illustration in his book *The Last Word*)
 - b. God commanding war in the OT was a one-time, unrepeatable event

D. Tension in the Old Testament

1. Many people (Christians and non-Christians) see the OT as full of laws and rules where the NT is filled with grace and love...this is a misunderstanding of both
2. Grace in the Old Testament
 - a. Creation – God creating earth and humans is grace – it is an act of love we did not deserve
 - b. Exodus – God rescued his people from slavery in Egypt – they did nothing to deserve it; it was an act of love and grace
 - i. The rules and laws given by God are to be followed because God rescued them: obedience is a human response to the love and grace of God
 - c. God’s Withholding Punishment – God is holy and has the right to punish rebellious humans at any time they deserve it; his people deserved it from the time they left Israel as they rebelled, but God always welcomed them back with grace and love when they returned to him
3. Old Testament has both grace and rules/laws; God is loving and is just (even wrathful) in the Old Testament – God is all these things (loving, just, graceful, commanding) in the NT
4. Tension: There will always be a tension between God’s love and grace and our own expected obedience

III. Examination of the OT: Attempt to Offer an Answer

A. Possible Solutions Christians Take

1. Ignore the texts altogether
2. Spiritualize them – for Christians the application relates to spiritual warfare
3. View them as primitive and sub-Christian – they have nothing to tell us
4. Say it did not really happen; the Jewish writers wrote those stories in retrospect as rhetoric to encourage the people living under contemporary oppression
5. *None of these views are sufficient

**Our answer will consist of various parts taken together cumulatively*

B. Part One: God as Divine Warrior - “The correct question is not, how could a good God command war and destruction? The correct question is, does the viewpoint of the texts on holy war contradict the Biblical understanding of God or is it consistent with the concept of a just and holy, creator God?” (Hall, 4)

*Nine points from “Violence in the Name of the Lord: Israel’s Holy Wars” by Dr. Gary Hall

1. *The Creator God chose to Act in Human History* – in acting through human beings he chose to limit his power and holiness; he acted through sinful people to accomplish his purposes through limited means
2. *God elected Israel and worked through them as a manifestation of the Kingdom of God* – by working through a state (nation) he further limited how he could work
 - a. States come into existence through war and are forced to stay in existence through defensive war; ancient culture was filled with war and for Israel to survive war was a necessary evil
3. *God as a Divine Warrior is a major OT Theme with much depth and nuance*
 - a. God was commander of the armies of Israel (Josh. 5:13-15)
 - b. “God was the covenant God and divine King who promised victory over the enemies (Deut 28:7) and who used various methods to win: miracle (crossing of the Red Sea, Exod 14), cooperation of nature (Josh 10:11, hailstones), the heavenly army (2 Sam 5:24), and even the Israelite troops (but not too many: Gideon, Judg 6-7). In all these instances, except the last, it could be argued that Israel’s army had little to do in the battles but obey God” (Hall, 6)
 - c. “Holy War” is not the best term for it conveys a modern understanding of a war by humans with the goal of making converts – the OT speaks of God going to war, not of Israel warring on God’s behalf – better to call it YHWH War:
 - i. (1) God commanded it (Josh 6, Jericho; Josh 8:8, Ai; and other cities and land, Josh 10:40; 11:12, 15, 20, 23); (2) it had a sacred nature (Josh. 5); (3) YHWH caused fear in the hearts of his enemies (Josh 5:1; 10:1-2) and used nature and miracle to achieve victory; (4) YHWH War was a way for God to express and Israel to experience God’s sole kingship over Israel
 - d. Once Israel was established as a nation the rules for war changed – YHWH gave them rules to follow (Deut. 20) which may be why Israel was seen as too lenient (1 Kgs. 20:31)
4. *Concept of herem (devote, destroy) helps to clarify the issue*
 - a. *herem* is the term used for the complete destruction of other nations – the point was that God desired Israel to be pure so all outside religious influence had to be destroyed and God was passing judgment on the other nations for their own evils (more on *herem* below)
5. *God was willing to apply herem to Israel as well* (Deut. 28:25-6 – if they rebelled God would judge them; see also Jer. 21:5; 25:9; Lam. 2:5)
6. *God as Divine Warrior is a theme that even goes into the future when God will deliver Israel* (Dan. 7:13-14; Zech. 14:3-9)
7. *Texts portraying God as Divine Warrior are not the only ones on war in the OT* – there are also verses telling the people not to trust in weapons of war (Ps. 20:7; Isa. 2:6; 22:8-11; 2 Chron. 20)
8. *God as Divine Warrior is not confined to OT* – in NT we see Jesus as Divine Warrior

9. *NT transforms image of God as Divine Warrior into that of a crucified God*
 - a. “Israel was established by the use of violence, but the new kingdom is established through Jesus Christ when he receives violence. This marks the transformation of the Kingdom into a spiritual reality” (Hall, 18).
 - b. Jesus’ kingdom is not of this world (Jn. 18:36) and his people do not fight with worldly weapons (Eph 6:10-18; 2 Cor 10:3-4; 1 Thes 5:8; 2 Tim 2:3-4).
 - c. Imagery of Jesus as a Warrior seen in verses on his return, especially in Revelation

C. Part Two: God’s Justice in Judgment and Punishment

1. Examples of God’s Judgment
 - a. Sodom and Gomorrah – the cities were on good land (Gen. 13:10-12) and had been saved from attacking armies by Abraham (Gen. 14); yet their evil crimes were against God (Gen. 13:13) and against humans (Gen. 18:20). Years after Abraham saved them and even Lot tried to moralize them (Gen. 19:9) God decided time was up and he destroyed them (Gen. 19:24-29)
 - i. Important Points: They had plenty of access to truth (interactions with Abraham, with Melchizedek right near by, and with Lot), their sins were large and public, they were given a chance to change their ways, the destruction was a judgment, any good people would be spared (Gen. 18:16-33)
 - b. The Flood – this too was a judgment on blatantly evil people (Gen. 6:5-7) in which God spares the innocent (Noah and his family) who surely called on the people to change their ways (2 Pet. 2:5) but eventually time ran out and God passed judgment
 - c. The Amalekite Annihilation (1 Sam. 15)
 - i. When Israel first left Egypt the Amalekites attacked them (Ex. 17:8-16; Deut.25:17-19); because of this unprovoked attack the Amalekites would be punished, though they had a couple hundred years to repent before the actual judgment went into effect. Prior to the annihilation the innocent were told to leave (1 Sam. 15:5-6). This attack did not destroy them completely as they existed in David’s time (1 Sam. 27:8; 30) and even into Hezekiah’s time (1 Chron. 4:43)
 - ii. Point – they had chance to change their ways and the destruction when it finally came was a judgment, though the innocent could be spared
 - d. The people of Nineveh were promised annihilation in judgment of their sins, but they changed their ways and this judgment did not come (Jonah 1:1-2; 3:3-9; 4:10)
 - e. There are Recurrent Themes:
 - i. God is judging the people for their cruelty, evil and violence
 - ii. Prior to judgment the people are warned to change their ways
 - iii. Somebody always escapes (Lot, Noah, Kenites)
 - iv. *Household members share fortune of parents (for good or ill)- more on this below
 - v. *We see all these themes in the destruction of the Canaanites
2. Invasion and Destruction of the Canaanites
 - a. The Canaanites lived in the land God had promised to his people - the destruction of them is very visible and the one most likely misused to justify violence
 - b. Who were the Canaanites? - “The Canaanite peoples were those who occupied the territory for which Israel was destined, from Sidon to Gerar and from the Mediterranean to the Jordan Valley – including Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 10:15-19). The ancestors coexist with these peoples. They are sometimes on good terms with them, sometimes in conflict with them, in the way that happens between peoples. Some are portrayed as more honorable than the ancestors, some less so. In general, their wrongdoing is not yet especially marked (Gen. 15:16), though by the time four generations have passed (Isaac, Jacob, his twelve sons, Moses), it will have filled itself out and Abram’s offspring will take their land” (Goldingay, 227).

- i. Prior to Abraham's time the land of Syria-Palestine flourished – there were many urban centers such as Arad and Ai (2900-2700 BC)
 - ii. Sudden and violent destruction occurred from about 2300-2100 BC – this was due to Egyptian raids and the invasion/migration of Amorites (Canaanites) – urban culture gave way to a return to village and pastoral life (Amorites and Canaanites are closely identified and for our purposes can be used interchangeably)
 - c. *God judged and punished them for their cruelty, violence and evil*
 - i. Their religion was filled with evil practices (Deut. 12:31) such as child sacrifice, incest, bestiality, homosexual practice, and cultic prostitution that went against how God desired his people to live (Lev. 18; 20; Deut. 12:31; 18:10; Ps. 106:38; 1 Kgs. 14:24)
 - 1. They attacked Israel unprovoked (Num. 21:1-3, 21-35)
 - 2. See also Gen. 15:13-21; Dt. 9:4; 18:12; Lev. 18:24-25
 - d. *They had prior contact: access to the truth of who God was (warning)*
 - i. Egypt controlled, or at least had authority, in Canaan from as early as Abraham's time so the people would certainly have known about Israel's victory over Egypt in the Exodus
 - ii. They would also have been exposed to Abraham and Melchizedek and witnessed God's destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah
 - iii. They would have had contact with the descendants of Ishmael, Esau and Lot (the nations of Moab, Edom, and Ammon which Israel could not attack: Deut. 2:4-22) – these nations probably preserved early stories and truths about God
 - iv. This prior contact led to some escaping judgment - Rahab, a prostitute, had heard about the Exodus and Israel's other victories so she helped God's people (Josh. 2)
 - e. *God was removing a culture: they were being judged for their evils after being given much time to change their ways and the innocent did indeed escape. The goal was to remove the nations and culture so that God's people could learn to worship God; though we see later that the temptation to worship foreign idols remained.*
 - i. Not all were destroyed: David had Hittites in the army (2 Sam. 23:39) and was friendly with a Jebusite (2 Sam. 24:18-24)
 - f. *Goal: Creation of a State where God ruled and the people worshipped - "Yahweh's and Israel's participation in war are linked to one basic factor: the creation of a political state. Intrinsic to the existence of a state or a nation, is the protection of its territorial and political integrity. In other words, the state must ensure that it has the capability to protect its borders or engage in aggressive campaigns to increase its resources. The most critical component of such capability is a military force" (Gilbert, Christians and Violence)*
 - i. Once established God gave them rules for war (Deut. 20) and no longer led them to war – YHWH war disappears after Judges – territories outside of their land must be offered peace (20:10-15)
 - g. Canaanites were never fully destroyed – ultimately the Canaanites were absorbed into David's kingdom, especially in the north where Canaanite culture had great influence in the time of Ahab and Jezebel (850 BC; 1 Kgs. 16:29-22:40) (Peoples of the Old Testament World, 180)
- 3. Israel faced the same Judgment from God if they disobeyed (Lev. 18:24-29; 20:22)
 - a. The Israelites were guilty of child sacrifice (Isa. 57:5; 2 Kgs. 17:17); ritual prostitution (Jer. 13:27); cultic prostitution (1 Kgs. 15:12; 22:46; 2 Kgs. 23:7) and widespread social violence (Ezek. 45:9; Isa. 59:6-10) – God judged them and expelled them – they were supposed to obey God and live to avoid being killed (Jer. 38 cf. 21:8)
 - b. *"The distinctive features of official Israelite religion, with its exclusivistic monotheism, were in direct and continuing conflict with the religious views of inclusivistic polytheists of Canaan, and archeology indicates that the monotheistic view did not completely conquer. Israel inherited the material culture of Canaan, along with the language of the Canaanites and their simplified writing system. It was difficult for Israel to resist the attraction of the Canaanite cult and*

worldview, with its emphasis on fertility. Ultimately the majority of the Israelites succumbed to Canaanite influences, despite the warning cries of the prophets of the Lord. Only a remnant survived in exile in Babylon, there to be purged of the fatal attraction that, according to the Bible (2 Kings. 17; 23:4-27), had destroyed their forebears. From that time on Jews did not use idols” (Peoples of the Old Testament World, 180-1)

- c. God used Israel to pass Judgment on evil nations (Israel was not holy – Deut. 9:5)
 - d. God used pagan nations like Assyria and Babylon to later punish Israel
4. Conclusion: The Reality, Necessity and Ending of War from the OT:

“Yhwh’s giving land to Israel involves taking it from other peoples. It is quite possible to imagine Yhwh finding an empty land to give to Abraham, or providentially ensuring that some land would remain empty so that it could be given to Abraham. Indeed, an influential current theory declares that Israel did come into being by moving into empty land, withdrawing into the mountains from the Canaanite lowland. But the dominant First Testament account portrays Yhwh taking a land from its occupants. The story makes the point very strongly by the verbs it uses to describe the process” (Goldingay, 475).

“The First Testament may assume it would be nice if there were no wars and may eventually invite the inference that war gets no one anywhere, but it does not explicitly make the point... War is a pervasive reality in ancient Middle Eastern history, as it is in the history of Europe and America, and the First Testament does not usually talk as if refraining from war might be an option. It does rejoice in the fact that when Israel reaches Canaan, it will reach a place of rest (Josh. 1:13, 15; 21:44; 22:4)... rest from fighting (Josh. 23:1; cf. Deut. 12:9-10; 25:19). It does not view war-making as an ideal state of affairs but it does assume it is a necessary way of reaching stasis. It looks forward to a day when Yhwh will bring war to an end, and twice includes a promise of this, in different versions (Is. 2:2-4; Mic. 4:1-4), though that is no more the First Testament’s last than it is its first word on the subject of war and power” (Goldingay, 480).

D. Part Three: Herem

*Much of this from Goldingay

1. Is a difficult word to define; may mean “devote” or “destroy” – can be seen as the annihilation of the human and animal population of a city, and the surrender to God of its possessions, as an act of devotion
2. Certain things belong to God alone – Ex. 22:20; Lev. 21:18; 27:28-29; Num. 18;14 – the first appearances of this word do not refer to war
3. Numbers 21:1-3 – the first instance of devoting an enemy to God comes at Israel’s initiative; it was only later that God commanded it (Deut. 7:1-5)
 - a. *“If herem starts as a human instinct but Yhwh then affirms it, this makes it parallel to sacrifice in general (Gen. 4) and to the instinct to build the temple (2 Sam. 7). It also fits with all these being practices Israel had in common with other Middle Eastern peoples and with the Greeks. The instinct to devote enemies, like the instinct to sacrifice, acknowledges God’s sovereignty and God’s giving, and God works with these practices as God works, for example, with the acceptance of divorce. God does not simply prohibit it, which will get no one anywhere, but seeks to circumscribe it, control it and even harness it to projects God wishes to prosecute (if Ezra and Nehemiah are right, in connection with divorce)” (Goldingay, 492)*
4. Josh. 6:18-21 – Israel was to destroy everything in Jericho, except Rahab’s family – this destruction meant there were no spoils for the army to take, a usual benefit of victory, and thus in some way reduces the incentive for war
 - a. Things devoted to God are holy (Lev. 27:21, 28-29) so Achan taking idols from Jericho is taking something that was given to God; the thing devoted must be removed (punishment of Achan, see also Josh. 24:14; 2 Chron. 30:14; 33:15)
5. Devoting things is eliminating them so they will not be a negative influence on Israel (Goldingay, 497)
6. God’s Command of *herem* in Deuteronomy 7:1-5
 - a. 7:1-2 says destroy the people but 3-4 says not to intermarry with them and 5 says to destroy their places of worship – if 7:1-2 had been done, 7:3-5 would be pointless

- b. Instruction to destroy the people may be theological while instructions to not intermarry and destroy temples is behavioral – the point: “have nothing to do with the people of the land or their artifacts, specifically their religious artifacts” (Goldingay, 498)
7. Israel did not destroy the people completely: *“They comprised reminders to Israel to keep separate from the religion of other peoples, and to be war of terrible consequences that may follow for individuals, families, communities and whole people if they fail to do so. The herem was always a theological principle rather than a practice. It constituted an assertion that Israel must not allow itself to be led astray by traditional religion of the land. The situation was not that devoting things plays a role in protecting Israel from defilement. Rather, quasi-regulations about devoting things and stories about devoting things play a role in encouraging Israelite wariness of the traditional religion of the land”* (Goldingay, 500).
 - a. Further, the people they were told to destroy in Deuteronomy 7, the Canaanites, Amorites, Hittites, Girgishites, etc., are no longer around when people later read Deuteronomy and Joshua so they could not use the stories as justification to attack others
8. Conclusion – *herem* is a religious practice with the goal of eliminating negative religious influences on Israel – this is in line with God’s goal to create a kingdom where people worship Him
 - a. Israel is to be made holy and purified – *“The most important part of the book of Joshua is the second half which details the parceling out of the land to the Israelite tribes (chapters 13-22). Every family had its portion of land to bear witness to God’s intent for creation. Land and wealth were not to be the possession of a powerful few. This stood in direct opposition to the Canaanite system of city-states which concentrated power in a few, promoted a caste system, and practiced a religion that was used as a tool for oppression”* (Hall, 11)

E. What about the children? – In all these stories it appears children were also slaughtered

1. In the ancient world the community or family was the most important social group; individuals were only important as part of a larger social group
2. Group treated as an individual (1 Sam. 5:1-11) or an individual represents the whole group (Isa. 53); this means an innocent individual as part of a wicked group could suffer with the group (examples in Num. 16; 2 Sam. 21; Gen. 18-19)
3. God would treat a large group well for the benefit of a few individuals (Gen. 18:32; Jer. 5:1; 2 Kgs. 18:18; 19:34; 2 Sam. 6:11ff)
4. Children were judged as part of a sinful group and this may make us uncomfortable
 - a. Do we treat children any better today as millions starve, are aborted and abused?
 - b. God is just so ultimately the innocent children receive grace

Conclusion

- **God is just** – God created humans and is the final and ultimate authority; God has the right to judge anyone and punish anyone for evil (Just God means all get what they deserve)
- **God is VERY just** – God will even punish his “chosen” people; the example of Israel illustrates this (this should cause Christians to examine themselves before criticizing others)
- **God is love and grace** – Threats of punishment will disappear if people repent and turn to God; the offer of love and grace is always there
- **God has a plan** – God chooses to work through humans which means a limitation of his power at time. We might not understand this, but if we believe points 1-3 perhaps we can accept it
- **Our fullest vision of God is seen in Jesus** - God dying on a cross for his creation. Jesus shows us a life of sacrificial love. Further, the community of Jesus followers is not an earthly kingdom that engages in wars (as all earthly kingdoms do) but is a spiritual kingdom that engages in spiritual war.
- **The Bible does not tell us “why” God works like this**, just as it does not tell us “why” God still allows evil to happen; it simply accepts the way life is and shows God working with it

- **The Old Testament stories tell us that God is a Warrior, full of justice and holiness. But these stories cannot be used to justify a nation going to war today:**
 - *“As soon as one asks the question regarding the European conquests, the answer seems clear. There was no justification for claiming that native Americans or Africans were in the position of Canaanites or that European conquerors were in the position of Israelites. Something similar is true about the Crusades and the modern state of Israel. Neither the medieval Muslims nor the modern Palestinians are in the position of the Canaanites”* (Goldingay, 490)
 - *“So why did First Testament Israel tell a story about its ancestors’ speedy conquest of the land under Joshua?... The point about the stories is not to provide warrant for human action but to testify to divine action. They indicate that Yhwh gave Israel the land. This is one significance of herem”* (Goldingay, 491-2)
 - **These stories are of one-time, unrepeatable events**
- A few other points can be drawn from this study:
 - **A world where most nations are secular does not do much better:**
 - *“The development of nations and cultures in the twentieth century based on the secular vision lends support to those who view such a vision as dangerous. The twentieth century, the era of the triumph of the secular state, saw more wars and more slaughter of humans in the name of the state than in all the previous centuries of human history. The estimates vary but one puts the number killed in war in the twentieth century in excess of 100 million. Add to this the 100 million citizens who were killed by communist states. Add also the millions of babies killed in abortions. This slaughter is unprecedented in human history. In light of this, the few hundred or thousand killed by Joshua’s army pale to insignificance”* (Hall, 22)
 - **If we care so much about evil, let us look to Jesus and ask what we can do about evil**
 - *“Does this mean then that Christians should campaign for the reintroduction of the holy war concept into public life? No. Holy war or Yahweh War was one facet in the history of redemption. Yahweh War was crucial to the establishment and survival of Israel as the kingdom of God in the OT. That situation is unrepeatable. Yet the NT understands the Warrior God is still at work and that God’s people are still involved in the cosmic struggle with evil. The weapon given to the Christian to combat this evil is the gospel, the message of the cross. **The message of the crucified God is the means the church is to use to combat evil and introduce peace. In many settings this may seem as foolish as Joshua and Israel marching around Jericho for seven days. But it is the means God has chosen to win the war”*** (Hall, 23)

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