

Answering Objections against the existence of God

How could God approve the slaughter of innocent children?

Intro: One of the often-presented arguments against God is the suggestion that events commanded by God in the Bible and carried out by His people are not compatible with the Bible's presentation of God. Some have suggested that certain accounts within the Old Testament appear to depict God not as holy, kind, good, and merciful, but instead as unjust, mean, vengeful, and unmerciful. How can God be called "good" in light of such events?

This issue is problematic also sometimes to believers, who respond by denying that all the Bible is the word of God or that there are different pictures of God in the Bible and they are permitted to choose one or the other (the God of love vs. the God of justice or wrath).

So how should we respond to those who point to such commands in Scripture as unworthy of the God we present?

The Moral Perfection of God

The Scriptures affirm that God is morally perfect

He is holy

And one called out to another and said, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory." (Isaiah 6:3)

Just and righteous

Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Thy throne; Lovingkindness and truth go before Thee. (Psalm 89:14)

Good

For the Lord is good; His lovingkindness is everlasting, and His faithfulness to all generations. (Psalm 100:5)

Being a morally perfect entity (Matthew 5:48), all that God does, commands, and approves must of necessity be good.

Turn away my reproach which I dread, for Thine ordinances are good. (Psalm 119:39)

Thou art near, O Lord, and all Thy commandments are truth. (Psalm 119:151)

In view of this, the beginning Bible student may be troubled when he encounters certain divinely directed situations in Old Testament history that involve the death of the innocent. One case in point is:

God's Command to Destroy the Canaanites

When the Israelites were commissioned to take the land of Canaan, the Lord instructed them to smite completely the peoples, and to show no mercy upon them.

"When the Lord your God shall bring you into the land where you are entering to possess it, and shall clear away many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites

and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and stronger than you, and when the Lord your God shall deliver them before you, and you shall defeat them, then you shall utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them and show no favor to them. “Furthermore, you shall not intermarry with them; you shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor shall you take their daughters for your sons. “For they will turn your sons away from following Me to serve other gods; then the anger of the Lord will be kindled against you, and He will quickly destroy you. “But thus you shall do to them: you shall tear down their altars, and smash their sacred pillars, and hew down their Asherim, and burn their graven images with fire. (Deuteronomy 7:1-5)

Accordingly, when Israel invaded Jericho, for example, we are informed:

“And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, both young and old, and ox, and sheep, and ass, with the edge of the sword” (Joshua 6:21).

How does the sincere Bible student come to grips with this seeming breach of the goodness of God?

How Can These Two Things Be Reconciled?

First, it should be noted that the Lord had been very patient with these grossly immoral pagan tribes for a long, long time.

Insight into God’s patience is seen in his promise to Abraham around 1876 BC.

“Then in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete.” (Genesis 15:16)

This expression offers insight into the longsuffering of God. It is as though the sins of those heathen peoples gradually were filling a container; eventually, a point would be reached that God could tolerate no longer. The wicked would have to be destroyed.

Thus, it was not a violation of His goodness; rather it was to preserve it, that He had them destroyed.

The societies of Canaan were extremely corrupt!

Archaeological discoveries, such as those at Ugarit, have revealed the corruptness of the Canaanite nations.

For example, in the Canaanite religion El was the chief god and Baal was his son. These were “gods” who had absolutely no concept of morality.

In a poem known as “The Birth of the Gods,” El is said to have seduced two women, and horrible sexual perversions are associated with his name. He married three of his own sisters—who also were married to Baal. He is represented as practicing vile sex acts and influencing others to do likewise. It is little wonder that the evidence indicates that the Canaanites followed their gods in such abominations.

In the Canaanite religion, homosexuals and prostitutes were employed to raise money for the support of the temples. It is not an exaggeration to say that these pagans elevated sex to the status of a god.

Many scholars believe that there are hints of this sordid background in such Old Testament passages as Deuteronomy 23:18-19—where a prohibition is given against bringing the “hire of a harlot, or the wages of a dog” (a male prostitute; see Harris, et al., 1980, 1:439) into the house of Jehovah.”

“You shall not bring the hire of a harlot or the wages of a dog into the house of the Lord your God for any votive offering, for both of these are an abomination to the Lord your God.

(Deuteronomy 23:18)

The Canaanite religion was a horribly brutal system as well.

For instance, the goddess Anath is pictured as killing humans by the thousands and wading knee-deep in blood. She cut off heads and hands and wore them as ornaments. And in all of this gruesomeness, the Baal-epic says that her liver was swollen with laughter and her joy was great. In this connection it also must be mentioned that the morally depraved Canaanites also sacrificed their own babies to their gods.

Funerary jars have been found with the bodies of young children distorted by suffocation as they struggled for life after having been buried alive as a sacrifice to Canaanite gods. Such young children have been found in the foundation pillars of Canaanite houses, and sometimes religious ceremonies were associated with their sacrifice (Wilson, 1973, p. 85).

Professor Kenneth Kitchen was correct when he remarked that the “Canaanite religion appealed to the bestial and material in human nature” as evinced by the Ugaritic texts and Egyptian texts of Semitic origin.

Thus the destruction of the Canaanites may be seen as a just repayment upon them for the brutality they had inflicted upon others.

The destruction of these wicked people was for the moral preservation of the nation of Israel and the accomplishment of God’s redemptive purpose for the whole world.

When they invaded Canaan, the Hebrews were not to allow their enemies to live:

“that they teach you not to do after all their abominations, which they have done unto their gods; so would ye sin against Jehovah your God”
(Deuteronomy 20:18).

But why was this so important? Among other reasons, it was through the Hebrew nation that the Messiah was to make His appearance! Thus, the salvation of mankind ultimately was at stake. The extermination of the wicked inhabitants of Canaan,

therefore, was an example of moral surgery in order to save the life of the patient (the human race).

God, because of Who He is, has the right to render judgment upon evil at any time.

There is no reason why God's judgments cannot be temporal rather than be postponed to the final judgment.

What if God had chosen to delay all judgment? Can we imagine how evil this world might have become?

But why were children included?

In a world where there is to be freedom of choice, one must be allowed to suffer the consequences of wrong choice making, even when he is not a party to such choices.

Making bad decisions not only affects us, but affects those around us as well. We fall heir to the consequences of evil in others as a part of the price that we pay for our own freedom!

So, children often are victims who suffer because of the evil in their parents.

Second how could the Israelites execute their mission while discriminating between "innocents" and "guilty"? Where is the dividing line between an innocent child and a not so innocent one? Even children may early in life be affected by what they have seen around them and prepared for its practice

However, the question represents a real problem only if it is viewed in terms of the present.

If one sees the matter in terms of eternity, the situation becomes altogether different. Would it not have been infinitely worse, in view of eternity, had these children grown to maturity and adopted the same pagan practices as their parents?

Even this consideration, though, must be seen in the light of the principles mentioned above [i.e.: with respect to the coming of Christ and God's temporal judgment upon sin].

Finally, it might be noted that no one has the right to criticize the moral activity of God unless he can establish and defend some genuine moral standard apart from God—and this no unbeliever can do!

As we pointed out in another lesson about the problem of evil in the world.

No man occupies a platform upon which to judge the actions of God.

"Will the faultfinder contend with the Almighty? Let him who reproves God answer it." (Job 40:2)

Conclusion: We certainly do not know all of God's mind on this important theme (cf. Romans 11:33), but if we study the Old Testament record of the Lord's dealings with these nations, together with the archaeological findings that illustrate the corruption of these people, surely we ought to be able to see that Jehovah's wisdom regarding those events should not be disputed.

Thoughts of this lesson taken from an excellent article by Wayne Jackson on this subject (www.christiancourier.com)