

A Loving God or Cosmic Tyrant?
Understanding the God of the Old Testament and Trusting His Word
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1. Objections to violence

1.1 Preliminary points

- Secular narrative that religion causes violence
- But lots of neutral things such as politics, leadership, science, and thinking are often involved in causing violence
- Violence is committed by supposed followers of many people, and cannot of itself be used to condemn the person followed.
- We often find other cultures strange and should expect to find OT strange

1.2 The biggest objection is God's command to destroy the Canaanites

1.2.1 Our aim is not to answer this objection fully, but to point out many game-changing factors are routinely ignored by skeptics

1.2.2 Christians and atheists have different fundamental beliefs about what is possible within their universe and this leads them to different intuitions about what is right.

1.2.3 Morality is defined by divine command, but God can't just command anything because his commands are constrained by his good character

1.2.4 God's character is revealed as merciful and slow to anger and he has a historical record of delaying punishment.

1.2.5 Skeptics often retell OT stories omitting miraculous aspects of God's activity

1.2.6 Other factors skeptics typically ignore

- The Canaanites were punished for their wickedness, not their race.
 - The sparing of Rahab and the later punishment of Israel show this.
- The Canaanites sacrificed their children
- Israel had a unique position as God's judicial representative
- The command was verified by occurring in the context of miracles
- There was unparalleled restraint in its enactment
- It may have actually resulted in the death of fewer children
- The Bible can't be accused of nationalist bias, since it suggests that God's people became as bad as the previous inhabitants of the land
- Careful readers will be aware that there are numerous factors distinguishing then from now

1.2.7 There are only three valid objections:

- It was immoral *for God* to command the destruction of the Canaanites
- It was immoral *for the Israelites* to obey such a command if it really was given in the way the Bible describes
- There is empirical evidence that the Bible causes people to be violent

2. The question of slavery

2.1 The problem

- 1) Bible translations talk of slaves
- 2) In the OT no objection is made to having slaves
- 3) In NT Christians are not commanded to free their slaves and slaves are told to submit
- 4) Therefore biblical texts approve of slavery
- 5) We know that slavery is wrong
- 6) Therefore biblical texts approve of something that is wrong

2.2 Translation: the rising frequency of 'slave'

- *Slave*: KJV 2x; NKJV 46x; NIV 130x; NRSV 166x; JPS 1917 3x; JPS 1985 135x
- *Sklave/in*: Luther Bibel 1912 0x; Revised Luther Bibel 1984 70x; Elberfelder 1993 161x + *Sklaverei* 4x
- *esclavo* or *esclava*: Reina-Valera 1909 4x; 1960 25x; 1995 65x

2.3 The essence of the OT institution

- Eliezer of Damascus will inherit (Genesis 15:3), children of Bilhah and Zilpah inherit
- Trusted to travel with valuables (Genesis 24); or to have weapons (Genesis 14:14)
- No approved 'selling' of people
- Deuteronomy 23:15–16; Job 31:13–15

2.4 Permissive law / regulation:

Divorce (Matthew 19:8); same principles apply to polygamy and servitude.

2.5 The New Testament

- Christians could not change the legal system
- Slaves who rebelled would be executed
- Limits to emancipation of slaves
 - *Lex Fufia Caninia* (BC 2): only free 2 of 3; half of 4–10; a third of 11–30
 - *Lex Aelia Sentia* (AD 4): slaves under 30 can't be freed without legal procedure
 - Slave manumitted under 30 could never be citizen
- NT teaching on slavery
 - Love others as Christ loved us
 - Brotherhood; kissing
 - Ephesians 6:9; Colossians 4:1; Philemon 15 'no longer as a slave, but above a slave, a beloved brother'
 - Jesus is Lord

3. Sexism and homophobia

- Women <5% of named individuals in Bible: male and female treated differently
- Equality is a vague notion: equality by denying difference vs. justice establishing identity
- Women play pivotal roles in redemptive history
- Christians have a higher view of women than secularists
- Many objections to the Bible depend on sexualist assumptions
- Key terms like 'sex' and 'heterosexual' have assumptions embedded
- Christianity and sexualism disagree in just about everything, not just 'sex'