



ANSWERING THE **TOUGH QUESTIONS** ABOUT CHRISTIANITY

HOW CAN YOU
BELIEVE IN THE GOD OF
THE OLD TESTAMENT?

LESSON #
9

THE LESSON AT A GLANCE

You may have heard people say that the God of the Old Testament seems to be a God of wrath, but the God of the New Testament is described as a God of love. You may struggle with these same thoughts. We will explore how to explain to those around us that God uses the Bible to reveal all His perfect characteristics, including love, grace, mercy, patience, kindness, justice, and wrath. We can help unbelievers and new Christians understand how the Bible reveals that God's character is identical in the Old and New Testaments.

THINK ABOUT THIS

*Richard Dawkins, a well-known contemporary critic of Christianity, states in his book *The God Delusion*,*

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.¹

-Richard Dawkins

How would you reply to Richard?

TODAY'S SCRIPTURES

EXODUS 34:6-7 (*All Scripture CSB unless otherwise noted*)

THE MAIN IDEA

God, as described in the New Testament, is the same God of the Old Testament.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

Is God good?

SCRIPTURE IN CONTEXT

Exodus 34:6-7. After Moses came down from Mount Sinai and found the people worshipping a golden calf, he broke the first two tablets inscribed with the Ten Commandments. In Exodus 34, he returns to the mount with two new tablets so the Lord can "write on them the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke" (Exodus 34:1b). In verses 6 and 7, the Lord speaks to Moses about Himself.

⁶ *The Lord passed in front of him and proclaimed: The Lord—the Lord is a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in faithful love and truth, ⁷ maintaining faithful love to a thousand generations, forgiving iniquity, rebellion, and sin. But he will not leave the guilty unpunished, bringing the consequences of the fathers' iniquity on the children and grandchildren to the third and fourth generation.*



START HERE

Skeptics and critics of Christianity cite several examples in the Old Testament where God causes the total annihilation of people groups (including children) as reasons to reject the God of the Bible (see Dawkins's quote above). These include the Flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, the plagues in Egypt, the conquest of Canaan, the treatment of the Benjamites in Judges, and the defeat of the Amalekites by Saul in 1 Samuel.

CONVERSATION EXAMPLE

A new Christian has started reading through the Bible, beginning with the Old Testament. He tells you he is struggling with the verses where God orders His people to annihilate other groups, including women and children.

This lesson provides discussion topics to help him see that the God of the Old and New Testament has the same characteristics of love, patience, forgiveness, judgment, and wrath.

ADDING CLARITY

Another quote from atheist Richard Dawkins is as follows,

In a universe of electrons and selfish genes, blind physical forces and genetic replication, some people are going to get hurt, other people are going to get lucky, and you **won't** find any rhyme or reason in it, nor any justice. The universe that we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at the bottom, no design, no purpose, **no evil, no good**, nothing but pitiless indifference.¹

Thus, Dawkins admits, as should all people who reject God, that without a "Moral Law Giver," there is no objective criteria for determining whether any action is good or evil.

Since people who reject God no longer have a basis to declare some behaviors good and others evil, then they have no criteria to judge the actions of God in the Old Testament. Suppose they claim that we-because we believe the Bible is true-should use God's criteria for good and evil found in the Bible to judge His actions. In that case, their accusation fails



because the Bible states that everything God does is in accordance with His will and thus is, by definition, good.

However, some Christians have nagging doubts about how to address these Old Testament situations considering the teachings of the New Testament as they study the Bible and/or disciple less mature Christians (e.g., their children). We will explore ways to show how the God of the Old and New Testament is unchanging.

REVIEW AND DISCUSS

1. THE GOD OF THE BIBLE IS UNCHANGING.

The Bible describes God as unchanging (or immutable):

- **God's Character is Unchanging**

The psalmist sings, *"For the Lord is good, and his faithful love endures forever; his faithfulness, through all generations"* (Ps 100:5). He also observes, *"Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and your instruction is true"* (Ps 119:142).

James declares, *"Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, who does not change like shifting shadows"* (Jas 1:17).

The writer of Hebrews says, *"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever"* (Heb 13:8).

In the Book of Jonah, we are given an example in the Old Testament of God's great love, mercy, and grace for the people of Nineveh when He unilaterally sends Jonah to warn them, and they all respond to the message of God and choose to repent. Similarly, we see the wrath of God in the New Testament where His judgments are described in the Book of Revelation. We tread on dangerous ground if we delude ourselves into thinking the God of the New Testament has "gone soft" on sin.

- **God's Will is Unchanging**

In Numbers 23:19, Balaam tells Balak, the king of Moab, *"God is not a man, that he might lie, or a son of man, that he might change his mind. Does he speak and not act, or promise and not fulfill?"*

In 1 Samuel 15, the prophet Samuel informs Saul, the king of Israel, that Saul will no longer be king because of his disobedience. He tells Saul this decision is not negotiable because



"...the Eternal One of Israel does not lie or change his mind, for he is not man who changes his mind" (1 Sam 15:29b).

- **God's Promises are Unchanging**

"You will show loyalty to Jacob and faithful love to Abraham, as you swore to our fathers from days long ago." (Mic 7:20)

"Because I, the Lord, have not changed, you descendants of Jacob have not been destroyed." (Mal 3:6)

Arthur Pink has written,

. . . God is immutable [unchanging] in His attributes. Whatever the attributes of God were before the universe was called into existence, they are precisely the same now and will remain so forever. Necessarily so, for they are the very perfections, the essential qualities of His being. Semper idem (always the same) is written across every one of them. His power is unabated, His wisdom undiminished, His holiness unsullied. The attributes of God can no more change than [His] deity can cease to be.²

DISCUSS

How does God's unchanging nature assure you as a follower of Christ? (Possible answers: He tells me he will never leave or forsake me; I know that he will be with me through the "valley of the shadow of death"; I know that my sins are forgiven through the death of Jesus on the cross, etc.)

2. THE ACTS OF GOD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT REVEAL HIS LONGSUFFERING AND HIS DESIRE FOR OUR SALVATION.

Bodie Hodge notes that in all the Old Testament accounts listed below, God is longsuffering and provides a way of "salvation."³

² Arthur W. Pink, *Gleanings in the Godhead* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975), 35-6.

³ Hodge, B. (n.d.). Isn't the God of the Old Testament Harsh, Brutal, and Downright Evil? Answers in Genesis. Retrieved November 30, 2024, from <https://answersingenesis.org/who-is-god/isnt-the-god-of-the-old-testament-harsh-brutal-and-downright-evil/>.



Account	How were the people found guilty?	Longsuffering	Way of Salvation
Flood	God declared them totally corrupt (Gen. 6:5, 11-12)	God gives 120 years for repentance after He decides to "hit the reset button," including the years it took Noah and his family to build the ark (Gen. 6:3)	The ark (Gen. 7:13-16)
Sodom and Gomorrah	"Sin is extremely serious" (Gen. 18:20); sexual immorality (Gen. 19:4-9)"Sin is extremely serious" (Gen. 18:20); sexual immorality (Gen. 19:4-9)	God's willingness to delay judgment if at least 10 righteous people were found (Gen. 18:23-32)	Angels saved Lot and his family (Gen. 19:10-22)
Plagues on Egypt	Harsh treatment of Israelites (Ex. 1:8-16, 22; 5:6-19)	God gave Pharaoh 10 opportunities to obey Him. (Ex. 7-12)	Sacrifice of the Passover Lamb (Ex. 12); defeat of Egyptians at the Red Sea (Ex. 14:15-31)
Conquest of Canaan	All nations practiced forms of iniquity (Lev. 18:3-25)	God gave inhabitants of Canaan over 400 years to repent (Gen. 15:16) while Israelites endured Egyptian slavery	Rahab in Jericho (Josh. 2:8-31; Josh. 6:22-23)
The Benjamites	Sexual immorality (Jdg. 19:22-28); tribe defended the immorality (Jdg. 20:12-14)	Other Israeli tribes gave Benjamites a chance to hand over the guilty (Jdg. 20:13)	None chose to obey God [although 600 were spared to maintain the tribe of Benjamin] (Jdg. 20: 47; 21:6-7)



The Amalekites	One of the Canaanite tribes that opposed Israel during the Exodus (1 Sam. 15:2); immorality; (Lev. 18:3-25)	God waited for their repentance during the years between the Canaanite conquest and His command to judge them	Saul warned the Kenites to get away because of their kindness toward Israel (1 Sam. 15:6)
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DISCUSS

How can we communicate a sense of urgency to our lost friends and neighbors about the dire consequences of rejecting His "way of salvation"? (Possible answers: God's patience can have an endpoint; time is limited to accept Christ; no one is assured a tomorrow, etc.)

3. THE ACTS OF GOD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT SHOW THE SERIOUSNESS OF SIN

Many people claim that God overreacts when He administers punishment for sin in the Old Testament. In other words, they judge that the people's actions "weren't that bad" and didn't warrant the punishment they received. Some people prefer a God that is less black and white; one that is more "tolerant" of their sinful choices.

The lesson from these historical accounts of God's judgment of people groups because of their sin is that God takes sin very seriously. Because of His perfect holiness, righteousness, and justice, He cannot "wink" at sin.

From the very beginning, the wages of sin have been death (Rom 6:23a). The first example was the death of the animals necessary to clothe Adam and Eve after the Fall and the entry of sin into the world. The mass executions of the wicked in the Flood and the conquest of Canaan reveal to us that God holds humanity accountable for our actions.

The death of the Passover Lamb and the subsequent Jewish sacrificial system were intended to graphically remind people of sin's consequence and foreshadow the ultimate sacrifice, Jesus. When God Himself died on the cross to pay the penalty of sin, not only was His righteous wrath of sin on display, but also the vastness of His love, grace, and mercy for us.

Considering God's affection for us and His desire to have an eternal relationship and fellowship with us, how can we reject His request that we believe He is telling us the truth about the sufficiency of His gift? (Jn 3:16)



DISCUSS

How does God's abhorrence of your sin impact your daily life? (Possible answers: Thanksgiving for His mercy through Christ; praise to Him for the grace He shows by crediting Christ's righteousness to my account, etc.)

GOSPEL FOCUS

Many people today question God's character by asking, "How can a loving God send people to eternal torment?" A different way to pose the question is, "How could a just and fair God force people to endure an eternity in His presence when their lifestyle showed they wanted nothing to do with Him, despite His warnings about what eternity separated from Him is like?"

In the New Testament, we see the same longsuffering and way of salvation from God as in the Old Testament. Like the examples above, Romans 3:23 states, *"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,"* meaning everyone stands before God guilty. Similarly, God is longsuffering as shown in 2 Peter 3:9: *"The Lord does not delay his promise, as some understand delay, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance."* Lastly, God provides the "way of salvation,"

*This is the message of faith that we proclaim: ⁹If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰One believes with the heart, resulting in righteousness, and one confesses with the mouth, resulting in salvation. ¹¹For the Scripture says, **Everyone who believes on him will not be put to shame,**¹² since there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, because the same Lord of all richly blesses all who call on him. ¹³For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. (Rom 10:8b-13)*

DISCUSS

When an atheist is asked what they ultimately want the world to look like, they often dream of a world at peace with no evil, grief, pain, sickness, or death; a world where everyone loves each other and everyone is cared for. How can we show them that God has the same desire? (Possible answers: God has already laid out a plan to achieve such a world; He delays implementing the plan so the lost can take the first step toward living their dream by receiving Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord, etc.)

REFLECT ON THE LESSON



The God of the Old Testament and New Testament is one and the same. He hates sin. He punishes sin in drastic ways, ultimately taking the sins of the world on Himself by dying on a cruel cross as the atoning sacrifice for the whole world (1 Jn 2:2).

DISCUSS

How should our understanding of God's revulsion for the sin of unbelievers around us and the threat of God's wrath they face change how we interact with them? (Possible answers: Motivate us to share the gospel with them; build relationships with others as a bridge to spiritual conversations, etc.)

RESPOND

Considering the love God has shown for us through His Son Jesus so we can avoid His righteous wrath for our sins, how can we "bury" such an awesome treasure through our inaction and give it back to our Master with no return at the end? Instead, we should desire to be "good and faithful" servants by investing this treasure He has entrusted to us by sharing it with others (Matt 25:14-27). This good news in us should be "...like seed sown on good ground [that] hear the word, welcome it, and produce fruit thirty, sixty, and a hundred times what was sown" (Mk 4:20).

APPLY

Ask the Holy Spirit to give you the words to speak to the people you meet who have serious questions about God's character as described in the Old Testament.

LOOKING TO NEXT WEEK...

IS CHRISTIANITY GOOD?