

Class Objective: To refine our faith and understanding by dismantling misconceptions regarding God, the Bible and the Christian life.

Notes

VI. Twelve misconceptions considered in light of biblical truth

D. Jesus is more loving and compassionate than the God of the Old Testament.

1. “Old Testament scholar Peter Enns asks how to reconcile the New Testament portrayal of Jesus with the God he finds [in the Old Testament]. The Old Testament God told Israel to enter the promised land and exterminate the nations that were living there. They must ‘make no treaty with them and show them no mercy’ (Deut. 7:2). Conversely, Jesus commands his followers to love all their neighbors, including their enemies. Enns concludes, ‘Jesus teaching is a reversal of the Old Testament’s dominant tone of exclusivism. You do not hate your enemies; you love them. You do not kill them; you evangelize them.’ Jesus is far more loving and compassionate than the petulant Jehovah who drowns the world in a flood, slays Egyptian first born sons in their sleep, opens the ground to swallow Korah’s family and incinerates stubborn folks with fire from heaven.” *Wittmer*

a) Other contemporary voices of this view include Brian McLaren, a former pastor and author, who argued that “a god who mandates an intentional supernatural disaster leading to unparalleled genocide is hardly worthy of belief, much less worship. How can you ask your children—or non-church colleagues and neighbors—to honor a deity so uncreative, overreactive, and utterly capricious regarding life?” Professor Eric Seibert argues the Old Testament stories of violence indicate “not everything in the ‘good book’ is either good or good for us. . . . At times the Bible endorses values we should reject, praises acts we must condemn, and portrays God in ways we cannot accept.”

b) Such disparagement of the Old Testament God dates at least as far back as the second century when the heretic theologian, Marcion, denied that Jesus and the Old Testament God were the same deity. This prompted him to eliminate the entire Old Testament from his Bible along with any references to it in the New Testament. As a result he accepted only the Gospel of Luke and some of Paul’s epistles, howbeit with every Old Testament allusion removed.

2. Notwithstanding assurance that God executes righteous acts of judgment, the Old Testament reveals that he does so from a posture of grace, mercy, compassion and forbearance.

a) ⁶The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, ⁷keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.” Exodus 34:6, 7

b) For the word of the LORD is upright,
and all his work is done in faithfulness.
He loves righteousness and justice;
the earth is full of the steadfast love of the LORD. Psalm 33:4, 5

- c) But the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him,
and his righteousness to children's children,
to those who keep his covenant
and remember to do his commandments. Psalm 103:17, 18
- d) “The flood was a sign of God’s patience, who put up with human wickedness” while the ark was being prepared” (1 Peter 3:20). The long-suffering God did not destroy the heathen living in Canaan until their sin had “reached it full measure” (Genesis 15:16). He tolerated years of child sacrifice, even among his own people (2 Kings 16:3; Jeremiah 19:4, 5) [before executing judgment].” *Wittmer*
3. Some observations about accounts of Old Testament violence.
- a) As creator, God has sovereign authority over all creation.
- (1) “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1) “and the sea and all that is in them” (Act 14:15). This means that “The earth is the LORD’s and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein” (Ps. 24:1). As God says, “All the earth is mine” (Ex. 19:5) and “every beast of the forest is mine” (Ps. 50:10). God’s ownership of all means that he is also free to do as he wishes over all things. “Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases” (Ps. 115:3). Within this free sovereignty God “determined allotted periods and the boundaries of [each nation’s] dwelling place” (Acts 17:26). God has Creator rights, and no one can say to him, “What are you doing?” (Job 9:12).
- b) God is not only fully sovereign but wholly just.
- (1) Abraham asks God the same question that we are asking, “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?” (Gen. 18:25). The implied answer is, “By all means!” This is the flip side of Paul’s question in Romans 9:14: “Is there injustice on God’s part?” Paul’s answer: “By no means!” Moses will later proclaim, “The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he” (Deut. 32:4).
- (a) While it is perfectly appropriate to try to understand how God’s ways in a particular instance are just, it is not our place to ask if they are just. The latter assumes that God must conform to our sense of fairness, rightness and justice as though our perceptions are the standard by which he is to be judged.
- (2) God’s removal of the Canaanites was not ethnic cleansing but moral judgment for their compounded wickedness while at the same time removing an evil culture from a position of influence over his people who were to share and reflect his holiness.
- (a) Not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart are you going in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations the Lord your God is driving them out from before you, and that he may confirm the word that the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. Deuteronomy 9:5

(b) ¹⁷ but you shall devote them to complete destruction, the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, as the Lord your God has commanded, ¹⁸ that they may not teach you to do according to all their abominable practices that they have done for their gods, and so you sin against the Lord your God.

Deuteronomy 20:17, 18

- (3) Old Testament law allowed two kinds of warfare: warfare within the promised land (Deut. 20:16-18) and warfare outside the promised land (Deut. 20:10-15).
- (a) The first kind (herem) required total destruction, the second did not. Though it is possible, in the first case, that the repentant were spared (Joshua 2:9; 11:19).
- (b) In the Old Testament, God used nations as the agents of judgment even on Israel (for example the Assyrians and Babylonians).
- (4) Old Testament scholar, Tremper Longman, sees a spiritual continuity between the Old and New Testaments in this conflict between God and evil. He argues that there are five phases of holy war in the Bible.
- (a) First, God fights the flesh-and-blood enemies of Israel.
- (b) Second, God fights against Israel when they disobeyed his command.
- (c) Third, the Bible prophesies that God will come in the future as a warrior.
- (d) Fourth, Jesus Christ fights the spiritual powers and authorities.
- (e) Fifth, in the final battle Jesus will come again as warrior and king.
- (5) The acts of judgment in the Old Testament rather than suggesting a malevolent God, beg the greater question: Why did a righteous and holy God allow any rebellious people to survive?

4. God's ultimate prosecution of justice is inherently an act of love. No deity who disregards justice could be considered good and thus could not merit our adoration or praise. It is God alone who can and does administer perfect judgment.

5. As regards the New Testament it should be noted that the descriptions of divine judgment administered by Jesus are even more severe than that seen in the Old Testament.

a) ²⁷ And he [God] has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. ²⁸ Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice ²⁹ and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment. John 5:28, 29

b) ⁶ . . . God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, ⁷ and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the **Lord Jesus** is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels ⁸ in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. ⁹ They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and

from the glory of his might, ¹⁰ when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed.” 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10

c) ¹¹ Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. . . . ¹⁴ And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. ¹⁵ From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. . . . ¹⁹ And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who was sitting on the horse and against his army. ²⁰ And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had done the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. ²¹ And the rest were slain by the sword that came from the mouth of him who was sitting on the horse, and all the birds were gorged with their flesh. Revelation 19:11, 14, 15, 19-21

d) And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. Revelation 20:15