

# Was God Immoral in the Old Testament?



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Many non-believers and skeptics throw around the accusation that the Christian God cannot be real because of all the genocide He committed in the Old Testament. They accuse God of acting in ways that are evil, selfish, brutal, and unjust when He judges in the Bible. Why did God genocide the Amalekites? Or why would God kill innocent people in the flood? How can a loving God use Babylon and Assyria to judge the Jews? To them, God is an evil, sadistic bully who pushes humans around for no other reason than it pleases Him. But is this caricature of God faithful to the Bible?

## Standard of Morality

The very first point of contention begins with the concern of what moral standard is being used to assess whether God is moral or not. What is the basis for the morality applied to the claims being made? If there is no objective morality within the universe, then nobody has a real rhyme or reason to think any one standard is "better" or "more moral" than another. But what is morality? They are the principles and axioms that are used to discern what is good or bad. Once you claim one standard as better than another, you apply something external and impose it upon another moral standard, but how can this occur when morality is relative? Morality cannot originate with oneself, because another person's morality is "just as valid" or "just as invalid" as any other; the distinction shouldn't matter if there is no real morality (more on this shortly).

If there is a moral law above the human mind, then that implies a law-giver for those laws, able to impose them upon us. Most often, someone will respond with some sort of utilitarian framework of morality, the idea that whatever works to maximize happiness and minimize pain across the board is that which is moral. Then, any standard of morality that rejects an external source of such is by definition a relativistic system of truth, which is unable to produce a single "best" moral framework, because it's just a matter of opinion and not objective. If you rely on unguided processes to produce morality, what reason do you have for trusting that process as a reliable avenue to moral truth? Indeed, you have none! Moreover, there are plenty of behaviors deemed as immoral, but are the result of instinctual behavior, but that doesn't make them moral. Thus, a moral standard

external to humans must exist, and a God is the only explanation causally adequate to produce such an immaterial law.

So if your claim is along the lines of "God is immoral according to my standard", then you have simply forfeited an opportunity for a sound defense, because you've just violated the rules of your own worldview, mainly that no standard is better than another.

## Why Can't God Judge?

Now that we have the relativism issue out of the way, which honestly completely demolishes the "God is a bully" argument from the outset, we can now look to a second point of contention. This focuses on a part of God's nature, the fact that He is just. If God is infinitely just, why can't He judge evil? How come when God permits evil, He is unjust and evil, and then when He judges evil, He is still unjust and evil? This is a form of poisoning the well, because no matter what God does here, just or unjust, he is going to be seen as unjust and evil, and this is a major flaw in logic. The reality is that when God judges evil, He is being just, no more than a judge is when someone who broke the law is punished.

If God is the author of life, then each of us will experience His judgment in death at some point. Thus, it's not so much a matter of if we will die, but when we will die. If the moral law demands perfection, we have all broken it and are thus worthy of death; denying the source of life is choosing death. And if God is sovereign over life, being the creator of it, then He has the ontological right to end any life at any moment in any way that He sees fit, but also remember, if Christianity is true, men don't die, they just change location. Any further issues a person may have are most likely emotional issues. Things that boil down to "I just don't like it" are emotional.

If God exists, He is the standard of moral goodness, and He is both infinitely just and loving. Because He is just, He will judge evil, and because He's loving, He will offer a way back to Him and out of the judgment, or at least a way through it and to Him. Do we all of a sudden not deserve judgment? If I break into someone's house and steal their food and essentials, do I not deserve just legal punishment? Do I deserve freedom simply because punishment is unpleasant? Is the judge who decides my punishment responsible for it? Doesn't the fact that I broke the law imply punishment? It does. If God gave us free will, but also put us under a moral law, then when we break that law, we are worthy of justice

for breaking that law. If you deny the source of life and goodness, then you are deserving of the logical outcome of that choice. Everybody is a sinner; therefore, each of us is worthy of judgment if the standard of God is moral perfection (Romans 3:23). If nobody deserved punishment, then Jesus never would have come.

If God never judged evil, just letting people do whatever they want because they "deserve it", then He would be ignoring evil, which is condoning it. If God is good and just, then He must punish evil, and if He is loving, He must respect free will and permit some evil. But God is not ignoring the evil permitted, for He promises final judgment and restoration (Romans 2:6 and Psalm 9:7-8).

## Morals Above God?

To dig a little deeper into moral relativism, these claims are often made within a relativistic framework of morality. There is no objective morality to rule over an individual's own decided morality, and each person's life experience is the determining factor for what is right and wrong. What if someone's experience leads them to an uncontrollable sex drive? Or a desire for one type of person to die based on bad experiences with one specific person? People's life experiences can lead them to perform acts that are deemed wrong, so morality does not originate in experience since it can be applied to the outcome of those experiences to determine if they are right or wrong. So then, where does morality come from?

## "Morality From Feelings"

Some people claim that what a person feels is right is moral. But, again, what if someone feels good by having sexual interest in animals, or an interest in people of a young age? This is also not a very concrete standard, as it will change from day to day, or maybe hour to hour, depending on someone's mood. It also fails to produce a standard that is "better" than anyone else's. Morality does not originate in people, because it is applied to people's feelings to see what is reasonable, or right and wrong.



## "Morality From Groups"

Okay, maybe morality can't come from people, but maybe if a majority of people agree on a specific moral system, that will make it right and "better". As long as a majority of people agree on a moral standard, that standard is good and moral. Then how do we distinguish who is right between two groups that disagree? What if one group sees children as husbands and wives? Is that wrong? Morality cannot come from groups, because morality can be applied to groups to determine if they are wrong.

## "Morality Comes From the Government"

Many people will jump to the law of the government as what decides what is right and wrong. Far too many people think like this without even noticing, "Well, it must be okay since it's legal". What if a government enacts laws that infringe upon the rights of its citizens? Say to force them to work on construction projects without pay. Morality does not come from human-decided law, since morality is often applied to various laws to determine when a government is being evil.

## "Morality is Whatever Promotes Human Flourishing"

This depends on the definition of flourishing. If flourishing means survival, then many inhumane acts can be done in the name of survival and procreation. If it means as many as being happy as possible, then telling them massive and minor lies is perfectly acceptable. No definition applies to all areas of life.

## "Morality Comes From Instincts and the Animal Kingdom"

Many argue that morality is the product of a blind, natural, and unguided process of evolution. But raping to force population growth and gene preservation also meets the requirements of evolutionary theory, so it too would be good when we take the logic seriously. There are simply too many actions that we see as immoral that would have to be considered moral under this claim; it's a very slippery slope.

## "So, Where is Morality?"

Because morality is applied to human minds and their feelings, groups of individuals, laws passed by governments, and biological temptations, it cannot originate within any of those areas, not even in a relativistic framework. Morality seems to be imposed upon people, with no real material object to attach it to. Thus, objective shared human morality is an immaterial thing, external to us. Therefore, morality, the moral law, is an immaterial thing imposed upon humans, and must originate from a perfect moral law-giver to be what the law demands, the Object of Morality. Because morality is an immaterial mental object, it is reasonable to posit that it originated from a transcendent mind rather than an imminent material object or mind.

To say there are objective moral values is to say they are binding independent of human opinion. To say things are evil despite those who perpetrate them thinking it is good, there is a standard apart from people. So that even though the Nazi's may have believed what they were doing was good, there is a standard external to them that determines the moral value of their actions. So if someone is going to use personally developed morality to judge the object of morality, and assuming an object of morality exists, they simply have no ontological right to claim objectivity over it. There is no morality above God because morality flows from His very nature.

## Context is Important

Morality is very important to understand when we examine the various times in the Old Testament when God judged human beings. Not just God's status to humans, but also the context of the events themselves. A Lifeway Research study found that 53% of Americans had read none or very little of the Bible, and only 11% of those surveyed had read the entire Bible

(<https://research.lifeway.com/2017/07/10/discipling-in-an-age-of-biblical-illiteracy/>). Too many people simply have not read these stories in depth to understand the proper context of what is happening, mainly basing their claims on media hearsay. But today we are going to look at some instances people claim were unjust judgments and genocide.

## The Fall

Some claim that the fall in general was unjust. The tree was a setup, and God designed Adam and Eve to fail. To get these first points out of the way, the Garden of Eden was not a setup; Adam and Eve were not forced into a situation that had a planned outcome no matter what they did. God was also present, so a full exercise of free will was made possible. God was not forcing Adam and Eve to choose either side.

"And the Holy Spirit of prophecy taught us this, telling us by Moses that God spoke thus to the man first created: "Behold, before thy face are Good and evil: choose the good." (Justin Martyr, *The First Apology of Justin*, Chp XLIV, 177, writing around A.D. 155)

So in no way did God design Adam and Eve to sin; they chose to do so out of their own free choice. Also, when God judges people in the Bible, it is never some spontaneous act of rage, but a justified response to evil. God created the world "very good" (Gen 1:31) and created humans to be in perfect relationship with Him and one another, and to care for creation (Gen 1:26-28). But with a free choice, mankind ultimately rejected Him and sought to be good like God on their own, so God separated Himself from them and their dominion, bringing sin into the universe. But God mercifully allows each of us to live our lives, given plenty of time to return to God. Before, it was through Faith in Him and His promise, and now revealed, the death and resurrection of Jesus. If God truly punished all evil all at once, none of us would be left here tomorrow. He gives us a lifetime to get to know Him and prepare ourselves for an eternal relationship with Him, and that's much more merciful than immediate judgment for sin.

God also promises that a descendant of Eve would defeat the serpent, overcome the curse of sin, and restore man to a righteous relationship with Him (Gen 3:15). Born from the woman's seed, which is actually strange because it is the male that produces seed, so how would a woman produce seed without a man? Do you see how Jesus was foretold since the start? The Fall was not some unjust and arbitrary decision from God; it was a just and logical reaction to the first human's decision to discover truth apart from the person of truth, with plenty of mercy and grace thrown in.

## The Flood

Some say that the flood was evil, and that God unjustly genocided innocent humans and their children. Is this an accurate description of what scripture records? Genesis 6:5 tells us that at that point, all human hearts were full of evil continually. Widespread sin had moved to almost all people groups, animals may have turned on one another and humans, and humans probably sacrificed their children to idols (Luke 17:26-29). This evil had become too much for God to permit; with hopes of them coming back to Him, these people were not on a path that would at any time lead to repentance. So God was going to judge them with a flood, but he was merciful in offering people an opportunity of salvation from the coming flood via the Ark. 2 Peter 2:5 also tells us that Noah may have preached about the coming judgment to the people of his day, but obviously nobody outside his family listened. The destruction came as a consequence of widespread rebellion against God.

The flood was not an unprovoked act of childish and selfish rage. It was a just and logical response to the mass evil that was not going to lead humanity to anything "good". He also offered mercy in a way through the flood to start anew. But humanity rejected it, and Noah and his family boarded the Ark. The mass spread of war, killing, and wickedness was ended, and humankind was offered another chance to come to repentance. As for God killing innocent children, we do not know how many people were children at the time of the flood. Noah didn't have children until he was 500, and the wickedness of the culture makes it not surprising if children were sacrificed to their idols. So any parent could have had Noah save their child just in case a flood came, plus parents are responsible for how their children become who they are. In such a wicked culture, children were probably introduced to moral evils early on; thus, it is unlikely any children wanted to listen to Noah anyway, let alone any parent who was so committed to a lifestyle of pleasure in immoral pagan worship practices.

But here is another consideration, scripture tells us that young children are not at an age where they fully understand sin, for example, David's son with Bathsheba was said to have gone to the LORd despite being born already (2 Sam 12:23). So in a sense, wouldn't God be preventing an entire generation from being born into an evil culture that would most likely have ended their lives prematurely? Moreover, genocide is done to



innocent people, and the people of that world were obviously not innocent; they were committing terrible moral evils left and right.

## Sodom and Gomorrah

Too many frame the passage about Sodom and Gomorrah as an anti-homosexual passage, and that it is proof of God being unjust. Despite ignoring sexual immorality as a sin, these people also ignore the other sins these people were guilty of: moral decadence, inhospitality, and many more.. To prove this point, God has a dialogue with Abraham before the destruction. Abraham was pleading that if there were at least ten righteous people, He would spare the citizens and take back His judgment. God did not find ten people, but delivered Abe's nephew and his family. Then Sodom's sins are described with universal terms "both young and old... surrounded the house" (Gen 19:4). The angels sent to Lot and his family were surrounded by the citizens, and the people called for the two angels, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may *know them carnally*" (Gen 19:5 emphasis mine).

These men were so depraved that they demanded the two unknown men be dragged out and be sexually abused by them. Even after the angels struck the men with blindness, they continued to press on the house. But then God provided a way of salvation for Lot's family (Gen 19:15-17) and spared them. 2 Peter 2:6-8 tells us of how Lot was tormented by the evil he witnessed in Sodom every day; thus, evil had permeated the entire culture of Sodom and Gomorrah. As for the Children, we must remember that many ancient nations were massively sexually immoral; there was child sacrifice to the gods when they got pregnant, which implies not many children were present. God would have offered these children salvation by not being born into a terrible culture that would have killed them.

## The Canaanites

The Canaanites were not innocent people, and Leviticus 18 lists their sins, along with other passages: incest, child sacrifice, and bestiality. And God was very patient with them for hundreds of years (Gen 15:16). Over the next few centuries, their sins would reach their peak, and God judged them through the Israelites. But God offered salvation to those who repented, like Rahab (Joshua 6:25), as well as many times scripture records Canaanites still among the Israelite population. So there was no

"genocide" of innocent people; it was a just response to the evil that Canaan had committed, even being offered a place in Israel if they repented.

## The Benjamites

Another claim is that God commanded Israel to kill all of the Benjamites for no reason, but this is untrue. They were defending rapists and murderers in Judges 19 and 20, and despite the warnings, refused to repent (Judges 20:12-13). This led to divine judgment through Israel. We must also keep in mind that they were under a covenant oath and were informed of the conditions of breaking the covenant, and broke it anyway, resulting in what was promised. This was a just and logical response to the evil they committed and the covenant they broke.

## Assyrian and Babylonian Captivities

In 2 Kings 7, Assyria captures Samaria, which was previously owned by the northern kingdom, Israel. After they were conquered by Assyria, it fell under their control, and many people say this was unjust and evil on God's behalf. But God warned Israel about sacrificing their children to pagan idols, which they happily did anyhow, so God judged them accordingly. This is actually evidence of a just God, because contrary to popular talk, Israel was not God's arbitrarily favored and protected nation; no, they received judgment for sin as well. Isaiah 10:15 calls Assyria God's "rod of anger" used to judge Israel, but then immediately after judges Assyria for not attributing their success to the judgment of the LORD, but rather to their might and pagan idols (verses 6:19).

Jeremiah also describes God using Babylon to judge the southern kingdom Judah for the same idolatry sin as the northern kingdom. Jeremiah 21:1-7 informs us that God Himself will judge Judah, and Nebuchadnezzar will capture Jerusalem and carry them away into captivity in their territory. While also offering those who surrender a chance to preserve their lives and return to Jerusalem after so long. God also states that He will also judge Babylon for their iniquity, pride, warfare, violence, and disregard for the temple in Jerusalem (Jeremiah 25:12, 50:29-32, 51:11; Daniel 5:1-4, 22-23). God did not randomly genocide the Jews for being good and righteous, but justly responded to the evil they were committing.

## Ancient Rhetoric

Why did God tell the Israelites that driving out the Canaanites would be slow, but then later tell them to wipe them out using sweeping terms and exaggerated language? Did the Israelites really annihilate these people? These concerns plague the minds of many Christians when they read through the historical records of ancient Israel. As laymen, we often do not realize that ancient people used exaggerated language when recording wars and military campaigns. The authors were following the common rhetoric of their day, just like we do today. If I say my favorite football team slaughtered their opponents Sunday night, did they actually go and execute every opposing player? No, they simply won the game with a large point difference. The language used in the Old Testament reflects the language of the ancient Near East, with strong exaggeration and language reflecting that battles were won. The book of Joshua describes people as being utterly destroyed, just to mention those exact people still alive moments later. Joshua resembles an ancient war record, which it very obviously is. Joshua even mentions that there are still nations living among the Israelites that still needed to be driven out, and the book of Judges lists groups of Jebusites that were not able to be driven out.

But why did God tell them to drive them all out? To make sure that no future idolatry and sacrifice would take place, as God knew that having pagans in the midst would influence the culture to become like them, which is exactly what happens when they fail to do so. Deuteronomy 20 is often cited as being genocide against children and akin to modern-day Jihad in the Middle East.

"You shall save nothing alive that breathes, but shall devote them to complete destruction."

But this same language is also used by Joshua and Jeremiah 25, where the people of Judah are said to be utterly destroyed by God, with cities left in "everlasting desolation", but as the book concludes, this does not literally happen. Thus, the terms utterly destroy and annihilate are simply ancient war hyperbole that was common in war records of the Near East at the time.

## Prescription and Description in the Bible

Another mistake that people make is confusing what passages of scripture are describing an event, and which ones are prescribing a command. Prescriptive texts contain commands, instructions, or principles for someone to obey and follow, whereas descriptive texts describe events, actions, and historical accounts without commanding someone to mimic or follow the example described. Some passages are clearly commands to believers, like the ten commandments, while others are clearly descriptions of what fallen man has done, like Genesis 16:3, obviously not commanding Christians to marry servants. It is extremely important to determine when a passage is being descriptive because passing one as prescriptive can lead to faulty thinking, cost someone their relationship to God, or worse, further darken their already false view of scripture, pushing them farther from the truth.

## Mistaking Every Record as a Prescription From God

Many people simply do not know when a descriptive passage is, well, describing an event. They mistake every record in the Bible as a command from God, but this is not true. The Bible is a book about God dealing with the fallibility of man. In this, man commits many sins, and if the Bible is to contain a faithful record of history, these sins must be recorded. But just because something is recorded, it does not mean it is a command. Thus, the fallibility of man throughout scripture is just humans being human. Now, in the Torah, some laws are strict or seem unnecessary to our modern culture. The Torah represents a *suzerain treaty* and was not used as universal legislative law, but rather a collection of stipulations and instructions on how to think through righteousness and justice. So when the Old Testament records laws on slavery, this is not God affirming and prescribing the slave trade, but rather Him instructing the brutal ancient man on how to practice such a thing humanely. Slaves were to be treated like family, and not harshly, and were released every seven years (more on slave laws in a moment). The slaves in Israel are treated like people, family, like a friendly worker, rather than a disposable piece of property.

We must keep in mind that records of man's sins are not God condoning such.



# What About Slavery?

Some say that the Torah contains laws that justify and promote the ownership of slaves. This view often mistakes the Torah as an absolute law book, and many Christians have fallen under the false impression that it's God's perfect moral law. The Torah is not purposed for absolute law; God even admits this. One issue is that we try to understand the Torah in our modern context. The Torah was not assembled in the West but assembled in the very brutal mindset of the Ancient East. So if we want to understand the Torah, we must understand the ancient world surrounding its creation.

## The Torah is not a Perfect Moral Law

"The current view is that the collection of legal sayings in the ancient Near Eastern documents constitutes expressions of legal wisdom assembled under the king's sponsorship (and attributed to him) to provide evidence of his wisdom and justice... These are not laws that have been enacted, nor necessarily rulings that have actually been given. They are treatises on judicial wisdom." (John H. Walton)

The Mosaic Law is more purposeful in teaching and instructing one on how to understand and reason through judicial wisdom. The laws themselves are more didactic, as they are obviously trying to teach a moral lesson or express the importance of order and justice within a population. There is also no indication that the early Jews understood the Torah as legal legislation. "There is no evidence that any collection of Near Eastern laws functioned as a written law... As far as we can tell, these bodies of laws served educational purposes and gave expression to what was regarded as just in typical cases, but they left considerable latitude to local courts for determining the right in individual suits. They aided local courts without controlling them." (Delbert Hillers)

Other Codes of the time, like the Code of Hammurabi, for example, were not treated like national legislation in their own populace. Ancient civilizations never had any real concept of universal legislation until the Greeks expanded heavily on it by taking these and using them as such. Michael LeFebvre refers to the Middle Eastern cultures as Non-Legislative. (Collections. Codes, and Torah: The Re-Characterization of Israel Written Law, Michael LeFebvre). In the Ancient East, order was seen as more important than justice. So when a king or ruler was presented with

situations, they were settled by issuing decrees that his subjects would then follow. There was no organized system of Laws; rather, it was handled on a one-problem-at-a-time basis. Unlike Western culture, where we care more about Justice than order (E.G., we would sacrifice the order of having a leader if said leader violated justice). John H. Walton puts it this way:

“Legal treatises serve as manuals that are compiled to teach principles to practitioners through paradigms. They instruct by circumscribing the field of knowledge with examples.”

Just as teaching someone Math, you use hypothetical situations that express and display such principles. Even with this, the word Torah does not mean “LAW”; it’s more akin to instruction or teaching. It, in the context of its name, is not a universal moral legislation book, but guidelines on how ancient Israel should live righteously within their already established system. Sadly enough, that established system was brutal and violent. The Torah was God's tool to teach his stubborn children how to be Righteous.

“...Torah is much more than mere law. Even the word itself does not indicate static requirements that govern the whole of human experience... The meaning of Torah, then, is directional teaching or guidance for walking on the path of life.” ( Greg Bahnsen, *Five Views on Law and Gospel*)

Focus on walking the path of life, walking the good path with the good foot is a very Jewish concept that Jesus repeatedly used in the New Testament. We should approach the Torah like we do with Proverbs. For example, when Proverbs 1:9 says “For they shall be an ornament of grace unto thy head, And chains about thy neck,” it does not mean to chain the law to your neck literally. The text speaks about obeying God’s law and obeying your father and mother. The Proverb did not prescribe something but instead used didactic teaching methods. And just as Proverbs is to be understood as a whole, so should the Torah; you cannot understand the laws on slavery if you do not understand the laws on treating strangers and caring for the poor and unprivileged.

## Examples of Non-law Usage

Leviticus 23:22 says you must not reap the edge of your field, and you must leave the edges of your fields unharvested so the poor can be fed (19:9-10). This is not a universal law for all fields at all times. These passages are instructions on how to treat the poor righteously.

Another example is in Exodus 35:2, this passage is about the Sabbath and how anyone who works on it shall be put to death. It also says in the next

verse that you shall kindle no fire in your homes on the Sabbath day. This deems the max possible punishment, and the moral importance of the Sabbath, and describes the concept of Justice. This does not mean that nobody should do anything on the Sabbath; Jesus healed a man on the Sabbath. "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?" (Mark 3:4). Jesus also came to properly interpret the Law, and clarified this for the Pharisees on multiple occasions. The Sabbath was so important to God that to break it is worthy of death, but this doesn't carry the permission to kill any Sabbath Breakers; it lifts the expressed importance so Israel would understand how important the Sabbath was to God. Situations can vary, so understanding the Torah as a whole is stressed to know how to apply the wisdom in real-life situations.

King David committed adultery with Bathsheba, and he was not put to death as the Torah says; he repented of his sin (2 Samuel 12:13). This fits the expectation that the Torah was not treated like absolute Law, but rather instructive wisdom. Jesus even understood that at certain times, the laws should not always be applied. In Matthew 12, Jesus allows his disciples to fetch grain from the fields on the Sabbath, and the Pharisees catch them and claim what they are doing was unlawful (12:2). But Jesus then uses a reference (1 Samuel 21:1-6) to display that even David was permitted to break the Law when he fled from Saul. Jesus seems to understand that the Torah was not prescribing unbreakable Laws that always required capital punishment, but that it provides wisdom and guidance. Jesus then reminded the Pharisees to consider mercy when applying the Torah and that the Torah displays Justice and Holiness.

"Jesus appeals instead to inspired narrative to show how God expected the legal statements to be qualified in practice, a precedent for allowing hunger to override the law... Jesus challenges not merely their interpretation of the Sabbath but their entire method of legal interpretation." (Craig S. Keener)

A Good real-life example is Martial Arts. I was in Martial Arts for about 4, or close to 5 years, when I was in Grade School. I remember my first day, squirming in my gi with the excitement to learn how to beat up my bullies. All of that just to hear the first words from my instructor, "This is not a tool to hurt, nor fight anybody," and having my dreams of being a hitman ninja crushed. Martial Arts is the teaching of willful strength, both physical and mental. You know the best way to take down your enemies, but that enables you to bring out mercy to your opponents and to make peace where violence isn't the best option (seeking peace can be risky, so good self-defense is necessary). You are taught how to think about fighting, how to defend yourself, and when it is best not to engage and show mercy.

## So, Why Laws About Slavery?

Some verses in the Torah seem to be okay with keeping slaves and treating women as 2nd class citizens (Lev 27:3; Num 27:8). But we must remember that the Bible implies the Torah was not a perfect moral Code, but a collection of compromises for Israel. Exo 32:9 has God calling Israel a “stiff-necked people”. Deut 9:13, God calls Israel stubborn, and Nehemiah 9:16 says, “But they and our fathers acted presumptuously and stiffened their neck and did not obey your commandments.” So God was obviously not working with robots that would follow a command perfectly on the first try, He understood they were "brainwashed" by the ancient culture into things like brutal punishment, treatment, and sacrifice. God, like a good parent, was patient with Israel and used reasonable compromises to lead them to righteousness. When was the last time an addict just decided to quit?

We must also keep in mind that our Western society has slightly changed marriage and the value of women to be more equal to men, from seeds planted in culture from the Bible. This is a tough subject, but the ancient world did not discuss women being subordinate to their husbands; this is not caging, like some pro-women movements like to claim. Men and Women were created equal in value but designed to glorify God in different ways, and when paired together, complete the picture. Men are generally physically built for hard labor and are more often calmer and logical, while Women are more generally built for small tasks; they are more emotionally sensitive and thus can display great feats of love and mercy, and are designed to observe and decide rather than track and act. The virtuous women of the Bible love God, obey their God fearing Husbands in righteousness, provide for their family and community, and display a character and nature akin to God's merciful Love for every one of his children. Women are more fit for the needy and tactical tasks like caring for children, time management, office jobs, organization, assistant positions, etc. Of course, there can be outliers and exceptions to this. God says to glorify Him with your gifts, and if your gifts are different than the norm, so be it. But God's glory lies within His will, so the extreme of this is too much freedom without considering consequence; the negative is to confine yourself to your addictions and sin.

When we fulfill our purpose in Jesus, we feel peace that surpasses understanding, and that God sized hole is finally filled, freeing us from



being slaves to our habits and addictions, freeing us to become vessels of Love.

## Israel's Hard Heart, and Evidence of a Treaty

In Matthew 19, the Pharisees come to trick Jesus by asking why Moses allowed them to request certificates for divorce and send their wives away. Jesus replies, "Because of your hardness of heart, Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning, it was not so." and then proceeds to tell them that divorce is still adultery under God's perfect Morality. The Law of Divorce only existed because the Ancients' hearts were already hardened. So God only permitted this for the time being (Deut 24:1). Israel was not at a well enough heart placement to be given more ethical marriage guidelines. This implies that, at the very least, some of the Torah was included because of a compromise between God and Israel. For example, in 1 Samuel 8, Israel comes to Samuel and asks that Israel have a king. God says this is a bad idea, but allows it anyway and gives them a human king. Here, God allowed the covenant to be modified between Israel and Himself, but a change not induced by Himself.

Deuteronomy 15 seems to revise and add upon the laws established in Exodus 21 regarding the treatment of slaves. These conditions add a feature to the law; they are Revisions and not Subversions. God allowed the Torah to be revised if Justice was not being achieved. The Torah was God's tool; it provided Israel with a culturally contextualized wisdom (Matthew 12:1) and a compromising and adaptable covenant, even in ways that God did not originally intend, for just reasons. As well as accepting requests from Israel. The Torah was never intended to establish God's Ideal moral system. The Torah was a temporary guide on how to live properly and represent God in the cultural situation of the Middle East. The Torah provided God's children with a guiding hand on what Holiness looked like, what pleasing a Holy God may look like, and a starting position on trusting and depending solely on Him. No universal moral code, humanity was not ready for such a revelation, nor could we ever work our way to it. The Torah was perfect for where the people were spiritually at the time.

## Why Couldn't God Just Give Them a Perfect Code?

People need time, and often lots of it (from personal experience), to mold their minds into more virtuous thinking. If you expect too much, failure has too much room to desolate, especially from twisted minds. So the Bible suggests that the Ancient societies were so corrupt that a perfect compromise of moral code would be impossible. Israel simply was not ready to represent the perfect life that God shows through Jesus (1 John 3:5). Anyone who raises kids (I feel like this example is so good, and applies to far too much!) knows exactly what this is like. You MUST make compromises with your children in order to redirect their childish disobedience and learn to respect authority and order, so they can learn good manners.

The New Testament never treats the Pharisees' interpretation of the Torah like an absolute ideal law (John 5:39). In Matthew 5:18, Jesus implies that the law will pass after "All is Fulfilled", and we see exactly that.

"After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), 'I thirst.' A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, 'It is finished,' and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit." (John 19:28-30)

"In speaking of a new covenant, He makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away." (Hebrews 8:13)

Paraphrasing N.T. Wright, "The Torah was the way to prepare man for the New Covenant under Jesus Christ. Paul says the purpose of the Torah is to bring to fruition the fact that humanity needed to be saved from our sins through the grace of God." We can see how the Bible clearly does not command Christians to own and trade slaves; better yet, the word slave is better translated as bonded servant, and was often done as a way to pay off a debt. You go and work for them until the debt is paid off, and you will have guaranteed freedom on the jubilee year (Lev 25:10), a concept far divorced from chattel slavery of the 1800s. We must also keep in mind that since both male and female are created in God's image, they both have equal value, and thus no one person can have full ownership over another under ideal moral conditions. To blame the Bible for 18th-century slave owners is like calling Dave Mustaine a terrible guitarist because I can't play *Tornado of Souls* correctly. You don't blame Jesus when people sin; you blame the person who sins for the sin. That's extremely simple and straightforward logic.

## The Context of the Covenant

It is also very crucial to point out that what God was doing in the Old Covenant is different than what He is doing in the New. The Old Covenant was foreshadowing and anticipating the New. As displayed in the many passages about one day when the world is restored by the Messiah, and the Messiah dying for mans sins (Gen 3:15, 12:3, 17:19, 49:10; Num 24:17; Psa 2:2, 16:10-11, 22, 34:20, 41:9, 49:15, 68:18, 69:4 and 21, 102:25-27, 110:1; Isa 7:14, 9:7, 53, 50:6; Micah 5:1-2; Zec 11:12-13, 12:10, 13:7; Dan 9:25; Jer 31:15; Hos 11:1; and many more). When we take a look at the development of Israel as a nation of many different ethnicities under God, not affected by geography, we see progression taking place from the brutal ancient East to a more unified and fair culture progressing towards a New Covenant. Paul Copan says:

"There is a continuity, but the way it's waged is different."

In both the Old and New Testaments, we are reminded of a spiritual battle taking place all around us. For the Old, there was a battle over pagan idolatry, seen in the battles against the Canaanites, judges, and the many kings of Israel. There is an ancient form of spiritual warfare taking place, and in the New Testament, it is emphasized that we are "not wrestling against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers" (Ephesians 6:12). There seems to be a spiritual battle going on that is destructive both spiritually and morally to mankind, and Jesus overcomes these powers. God achieves His plan through His people in the Old Testament, but gradually, because hearts do not change overnight, and cannot be forced to be righteous. All of this comes to fruition in the New Testament, God comes down Himself this time to establish the new Israel, only this time not a single nation to be a "light to the world", but starting the light within that world.

The difference is not two different Gods, but two different Covenants. God works in different ways under the two; the Old was a precursor in preparation for the New, and it sets the complete context for the requirement of the New Covenant. The Old showed mankind that they alone cannot come to God through pious behavior, but through a genuine repentance and relationship to God. The Old paved the path for God to come down in Jesus, and to die for all sin.

## Conclusion

These passages show that God is just in that He will respond to evil with the necessary judgment. Not only does God judge evil, but He also offers each person a lifetime to freely come to repentance, and mankind as a whole, time for a Messiah to come and save them from their own choice. It also shows us that God is patient, giving nations and people plenty of time to think about what they do and recognize their moral sin. We also see that God is forgiving by offering people a way of salvation from judgment and a place within the populace of Israel. Scripture is very clear that God is both Just and Loving. This is displayed fully in the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

Many of these Old Testament events foreshadowed the need for a savior, one not human, and to have faith that God will restore everything, like He repeatedly promises, which came and will ultimately come in the final judgment and restoration of creation. So, in conclusion, God is not a bully; people are simply exerting their *Right to be Wrong*. Amen.