

**Putting First Things First (Building our Faith)  
How could a good God approve the slaughter of the innocent?**

**Intro: In my "building faith" series this year, I'm addressing some of the challenges to faith often made by those who do not believe in God.**

In January we looked at the argument that since there is so much suffering in the world, God cannot exist.

In February, we looked at the argument that since miracles contradict science, then God cannot exist.

In March, we looked at the argument that since science affirms that life can be explained by naturalistic causes, belief in God as a creator is unnecessary.

Let's add to that list another common argument against faith.

**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. Unbelievers contend that certain accounts within the Old Testament do not depict God as holy, kind, good, and merciful, but instead as unjust, mean, vengeful, and unmerciful. For example unbelievers have often pointed to God's command to destroy certain peoples such as the Canaanites. Consider this:**

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. (Deut. 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" (Josh. 6:21).*

**Unbelievers ask, "How can Christians defend a God who sanctions such things? How can God be called "good" in light of such events?" Thus, unbelievers argue that since God commanded the destruction of the innocent, then that good God does not exist.**

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

### **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 being (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)*

### **Exonerating God's Goodness and Justice**

***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 were gradually filling a container; eventually, a point would be reached that God could no longer tolerate their existence. The wicked would have to be destroyed.

Thus, God's order to destroy the wicked was not a violation of His goodness; rather it was to preserve it, that He had them destroyed.

***Second, the societies of Canaan were extremely corrupt!***

Archaeological discoveries, such as those at Ugarit, have revealed the corruptness of the Canaanite nations. This week as I explored in the Louvre the artifacts of the ancient Amorite city of Ugarit or Ras Shamra I could see evidence everywhere of rampant idolatry and confirmation of the biblical depiction of Canaanite society.

Photos of Baals and tablets celebrating Baal's victory over Mot (Death) and Yam (Sea).

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.

”The rituals performed in Ugaritic worship involved a great deal of alcohol and sexual promiscuity. Worship at Ugarit was essentially a drunken orgy in which priests and worshippers indulged in excessive drinking and excessive sexuality.”

(Partial quote from [www.theology.edu/ugarit.htm](http://www.theology.edu/ugarit.htm))

In the Canaanite religion, homosexuals and prostitutes were employed to raise money for the support of the temples. Many scholars believe that there are hints of this sordid background in such Old Testament passages as Deuteronomy 23:18-19:

*“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 reference is not to an animal, but to a person who acts like an animal, a male cult prostitute. (Harris, et al., 1980, 1:439)

***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 through them.***

When they invaded Canaan, the Israelites were not to allow their enemies to live for this stated reason:

*“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 world's redeemer 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 what about the innocent children?**

**People may say, "I can see perhaps why the moral corrupt and violent adults might be punished, but why allow the innocent to suffer?"**

**In a world where there is freedom of choice, children also suffer the consequences of wrong choice making by their parents, even when they are 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 are victims who suffer because of the evil in their parents. The blame should be laid at the feet of the disobedient Canaanites who brought such things upon their own offspring, not God.

**Second how could the Israelites execute their mission while discriminating between “innocent” 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.

How would it possible to execute a war in that culture with the surgical precision that would eliminate the death of the innocent? Such was impossible in the violent world of the ANE.

**However, this question represents a real problem only if it is viewed in terms of the present and not eternity.**

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, the concept of morality cannot exist outside the context of God.

Moreover no person occupies a platform upon which to judge the actions of the one who created all things:

*“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.**

**Many of the thoughts of this lesson were taken from an excellent article by Wayne Jackson on this subject ([www.christiancourier.com](http://www.christiancourier.com))**