

DID GOD CONDONE MURDER IN THE OLD TESTAMENT?

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Some people have made the charge that God condoned murder in the Old Testament. Is this true, or is there a reasonable explanation of some events in the Old Testament without God being guilty of condoning murder?

Definitions of Terms

In order to answer this question it is important that we recognize that we need to define the relevant terms in the question. Webster defines the word: “Condone” as: “to pardon or overlook voluntarily; esp: to treat as if trivial, harmless or of no importance” (Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 10th ed.)

Webster defines the word: “Murder” as: “the crime of unlawfully killing a person esp. with malice aforethought” (Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 10th ed.) Since we sometimes find definitions in the English dictionary that do not conform to Bible definitions, we need to determine if this definition is in accordance with the biblical definition. There are three different words translated: “Murder” in the KJV. These words are found in: Ps. 10:8, 94:6, Jer. 7:9, Hos. 6:9, Mt. 19:18, Mk. 15:7, Lk. 23:19, 25, and Rom. 1:29.

What about the prohibition in Ex. 20:13: “Thou shalt not kill.”? Does this verse prohibit: all killing, some killing, or no killing? Logically, this exhausts all the possibilities. Clearly some form of killing is being prohibited, therefore it must be wrong to say that it does not prohibit any form of killing of humans. This leaves us with two options: Either this verse prohibits all killing or it prohibits some killing (but not all killing). In order to understand the meaning of the word translated: “kill” we need to see how it is used in other passages where God explains this commandment. Most commentators claim that the Hebrew word translated: “kill” means to commit murder. It is so translated in the: NKJV, NASB, NRSV, ESV, and NIV translations and other translations.

Just what was included in the commandment of Ex. 20:13? The commandment is quite generic, but it is partially explained in some following Scriptures. First, it included premeditated killing with malice (Ex. 21:12-14). Second, it included negligence (Ex. 21:29, Deut. 22:8, etc.).

What was not included in the commandment of Ex. 20:13? First, it did not include capital punishment for murder or some other crimes. We know this is true because God commanded that murderers be put to death (Gen. 9:5-6, Ex. 21:12, Lev. 20:10, etc.). Second, it did not include at least some people that were killed in warfare. We know this is true because God commanded that some people be killed in warfare (Josh. 6:17, 1 Sam. 15:3, etc.). Third, it did not include accidental killing of another person (Deut. 4:42, 19:4-6, Josh. 20:5, etc.).

Murder included shedding innocent blood (Ex. 23:7, Deut. 19:9-13, 27:25, etc.). Murder included malice (Ex. 21:14, Deut. 19:4-6, Josh. 20:5, etc.).

Our Society is Upside Down

One of the problems with Israel in the Old Testament was that they made good and evil upside down. Isaiah wrote: “20 Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!” Our society has tried to justify killing the innocent (abortion and euthanasia), but has opposed killing the guilty (opposed capital punishment).

Condoning Killing Innocent Persons

The most difficult question relating to this matter is what about killing young people when Israel took the land of Canaan? It is clear that persons below the age of accountability are not guilty of sin. It is also clear that it is wrong to punish one person for what another person has done (Deut. 24:16, 2 Kgs. 14:6, etc.). This question will be discussed more thoroughly in the following article.

WAS JEHOVAH WICKED TO KILL BABIES?

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Introduction

Jehovah killed all living people, except those on the ark, in the great flood (Genesis 6-9). Jehovah ordered the killing of babies (1 Sam. 15:3). These facts cannot be denied without impeaching the Bible. Does this fact prove that the God of the Bible is unjust? Surely this is one of the strongest arguments that the atheist can lodge against the God of the Bible. The argument that: "Jehovah is wicked to kill babies" has at least three flaws.

The First Flaw in This Argument

The first flaw in this argument is that the atheist must assume there is no fundamental difference between a human baby and a cockroach. They will call an exterminator to kill all the cockroaches (young and old alike). This author asked an atheistic biology professor the following question: "Which would be the greater wrong; to kill a human baby or to kill a baby bald eagle?" He said it would be a greater wrong to kill the eagle, since they are in danger of becoming extinct. This illustrates the atheistic view of human life. The atheist must view human beings as merely animals, neither better nor worse than a cockroach or a mouse. The civil government requires that restaurant owners eradicate cockroaches. It is known that they are responsible for the spread of several diseases among human beings. Because they spread disease, it is not considered wrong to kill the baby cockroaches.

The Second Flaw in This Argument

The second flaw in this argument is that atheism cannot logically assert that any action is immoral. The atheist has no higher power to appeal to as the standard for right and wrong (good and evil). He has no objective standard to which he can appeal to condemn any action. He is therefore guilty of the fallacy of: "Special pleading" to condemn the God of the Bible for an action he cannot say is wrong.

If the atheist responds to this argument by saying that Christianity claims that such actions are wrong he tacitly admits that his system cannot condemn this action. He leaves himself open to the argument that atheism is responsible for much of the evil in the world. If atheism is responsible for much of the evil in the world then atheism is evil.

The Third Flaw in This Argument

The Third flaw in this argument is that the only ones who have the right to condemn God are those who were killed. The persons who were killed could be divided into two groups: (a) those who were over the age of accountability and (b) those who were under the age of accountability. The ones over the age of accountability were guilty of sin (Rom. 3:23). Therefore, God was just to take their lives. Their very thoughts were wicked (Gen. 6:5). God had delayed the destruction of the Amalekites because their iniquity was not yet full (Gen.

15:16 and Lev. 18:24-28). It was full in 1 Sam. 15:3. Certainly this group cannot accuse God of injustice. The ones under the age of accountability could not be said to deserve to die. After those of this group died they would be in a place of bliss (Lk. 16:22). God had, and still has, the power to resurrect them (Jn. 5:28-29). If they desired to leave that state of total bliss and return to this vale of tears God could have done it. They would certainly have sinned (Rom. 3:23) and forever lost paradise. If they would have been raised by their wicked parents they would most likely have become wicked. The early Christians viewed death in the proper light. Paul desired to die and go to be with the Lord (Phil. 1:21-24). The early Christians prayed: "Maranatha" (come Lord Jesus-1 Cor. 16:22). Solomon says that the day of death is better than the day of birth (Ecc. 7:1). This can be said of one who is not lost (Rev. 14:13). Those who died under the age of accountability will not rise up and condemn God in the Day of Judgment for providing them with eternal bliss.

The Fourth Flaw in This Argument

This argument assumes that babies were killed in the flood of Genesis 6-9. The Scriptures state that God "closed up all the wombs" of women (Gen. 20:18). It is certainly possible that He also did this during the period before the flood. If God prevented women from having children for several years before the flood, there would not be any children killed in the flood. It is of note that neither: Shem, Ham, nor Japheth had children before the flood. This still leaves the problem of 1 Sam. 15:3.

The Christian View of Death

To think of death as good is a "Hard saying" to the atheist because he is carnally minded. To the atheist, death is the end of everything. He dies as one who has no hope (1 Thess. 4:13). If one had only two options: (a) to die now and be assured of heaven or (b) to live several years and have almost a zero probability of heaven and in addition suffer the horror of hell, he would certainly choose the first option. The Lord has the power to grant them these two options, and we cannot say that he did not do this. The children of both the Amalekites and pre-flood mankind would most certainly have been raised to be wicked, as were their parents. Those of Genesis 6-9 and 1 Sam. 15:3 were in an even better position than these two options. They could experience paradise and then God could give them these options: (a) stay in paradise or (b) return to earth. Samuel was bothered to have to leave paradise (1 Sam. 28:15) even if for a brief period. This author is not asserting that the Lord gave these persons these options. The atheist must agree that this answers the charge that God is unjust. God may have treated them fairly in another way, but He did what was right (Gen. 18:25).

Do Humans Have the Right to Kill Babies?

One response by atheists to the arguments of this treatise is to claim this implies that others can kill babies without being guilty of wrong-doing. The comparison between a human and God is flawed because God can know the future and man cannot. When the iniquity of the Amorites was full they were so corrupt they would not raise their children to be anything but wicked. Only God can know this. The destruction of the young of some races was not

commanded (Num. 31:17-20).

The Canaanites Were Infected With Disease

The Cannanites were certainly infected with some kinds of diseases (Ex. 15:26, Deut. 7:15, 28:58-61, etc.). Miscarriages seemed to be a problem with the Canaanites (Ex. 23:23-26). Some miscarriages are linked with venereal diseases, such as gonorrhea. It is possible the Canaanites (who engaged in all sorts of sexual sins - heterosexual fornication, sodomy, and bestiality) were infected with diseases such as AIDS, gonorrhea, syphilis, PIV, chlamydia, etc. It is also possible that there exist (or existed) venereal diseases that would make AIDS seem mild during that time and they were wiped out by the actions of the children of Israel.

In Num. 31:17-20, 35, etc. the children of Israel were allowed to keep the young girls who had not known a man and allow them to live. However, they were commanded to kill all the other women and the men. Is it possible that these people were infected with venereal disease? Virgins would not be infected with venereal diseases.

Conclusion

This whole line of reasoning appeals to ignorance and is fallacious. This brief treatise demonstrates that, logically, God has other options open to Him. There may be other options available to God of which we are unaware. A finite being should be careful about limiting an infinite Being.