

September 2013

WAS DAWKINS RIGHT ABOUT GOD?

By Brian L. Cunningham

Many of you, I am guessing, have watched the History Channel's 5-week-long series on The Bible. And perhaps the first couple of weeks you saw many images of Israelites going to war with other tribes. It could actually get quite gruesome with all of the violence and bloodshed. This issue of violence and bloodshed has been quite a stumbling block for faith in God for many and raises a lot of questions.

Dr. Paul Copan in his book *Is God a Moral Monster* said, "Unfortunately, many Christians are reluctant to tackle such subjects and the results are fairly predictable. When uniformed Christians are challenged about these texts, they may be rattled in their faith."¹

As creationists, we have made progress in refuting naturalistic evolution in general to bolster faith in our churches and in the public. Evolutionists such as Richard Dawkins and others are responding by adding a new tactic to charge that the Creator God of the Old Testament is an unjust God based on some of the history of His punishing sin. Thus, a new effort and tactic, in addition to espousal of atheistic evolution as fact, is being used by the evolutionists and humanists to cause loss of faith or prevent faith in our Creator God of the Bible. This tactic is being used with general audiences, special emphasis is being given to its use among college students, with whom I work as a college minister.

While visiting a local college campus, I have run into the above challenge more than once. The argument can be summed up like this: (1) Christians condemn genocide, (2) God's command to kill the Canaanites was an act of divine genocide, and (3) therefore, Christians should condemn God for commanding genocide.^{2,3}

The above line of thinking stems from what many people call the "New Atheists" such as Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, and many others. Dawkins said:

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, blood-thirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully. He is a psychotic moral monster.⁴

Hector Avalos stated,

I don't deny that I am a moral relativist...[but] What is tragic is that in the twenty-first century a Copan [i.e. Christian] can still defend genocide and infanticide in any form. It is that sort of frightening biblical moral ethos that makes the New Atheism more attractive all the time.⁵

Sam Harris states that his goal is to

demolish the intellectual and moral pretensions of Christianity in its most committed forms." And that because of this, "Christians have abused, oppressed, enslaved, insulted, tormented, tortured, and killed people in the name of God for centuries..."⁶

This line of thinking really has an effect on people and emboldens them to reject the truth of God's word and accept unbelief. I know; I've been told by people on a number of occasions. The reality is gaps in our understanding will exist. Questions about this will remain unanswered. We may not even be 100% comfortable with everything, but as Copan says, "I believe with patience, humility, and charity, we can navigate these waters with greater skill, arriving at far more satisfactory answers than [the new atheists will] allow."⁷

In attempting to deal with this situation we first have to realize and understand that there really is an objective standard of what is right and what is wrong. And that standard is God Himself. But the popular notion today is that each person decides what's right or wrong. I remember when I was on the North Carolina State University campus this year, I was talking with a college student named Stephan who shared with me he was an atheist. I asked him what his standard for right and wrong was. He told me that society gets together and pretty much decides what's right and wrong. I proceeded to

¹ Copan P (2011) *Is God a Moral Monster*, Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI, 20

² Jones C (2009) Killing the Canaanites: A response to the New Atheism's "divine genocide" claim. <<http://www.equip.org/articles/killing-the-canaanites/>> Accessed 2013 Aug 16

³ Most of my research for this topic has come from Professor Clay Jones, whom I studied under at Biola University. He will be referenced throughout this article. His work, along with Copan's, are monumental in attempting to understand difficult passages of the Old Testament. I personally owe Dr. Jones a great deal for what he has meant to me.

⁴ Dawkins R (2006) *The God Delusion*, Houghton Mifflin Boston, MA, 51

⁵ Avalos H (2010) Yahweh is a moral monster. *The Christian Delusion*, Prometheus Books, Amherst, NY, 232, 234

⁶ Harris S (2008) *Letter to a Christian Nation*, Random House Publishing, New York, NY, xi, 23

⁷ Copan P (2011) 23

ask him if I murdered somebody or stole from someone, everyone pretty much agrees that it was wrong. He said yes...and that I would go to jail. I then asked him since the majority at one point believed slavery was okay in this country, by going against what society had decided would I then be wrong or immoral? Stephan said, "It could have been that only a few power-hungry people decided and not the majority." I then said, "Then, Stephan, would you then be oppressing the minority?"

This was not to poke fun at him or to make him look bad. Rather this was a way to remove a barrier that hopefully will one day bring him to salvation in Christ. At this point it's between him and God. I attempted to reach Stephan after our conversation but to no avail. All we can do is plant the seed and pray that one will open his or her heart to God so that He can give the increase and salvation.

The first point from the above: everyone knows what's right and wrong as the Bible says the law is written on our hearts. The real question is "whose standard do you live by?"

Second, it's possible that our understanding of sin has dwindled such that it somehow makes God's judgments unfair. One of my professors, Dr. Clay Jones, writes,

Most of our problems regarding God's ordering the destruction of the Canaanites comes from the fact that God hates sin, but we do not. If that is the case, it seems that we need to understand the horror of sin, especially our sin, if we are to reconcile what appears to be God's harsh judgment."⁸

John Stott once said at a prayer breakfast,

Human beings are the inventors of hospitals for the care of the sick, universities for the acquisition of wisdom, parliaments for the just rule of the people, and churches for the worship of God. But they are also the inventors of torture chambers, concentration camps and nuclear arsenals.⁹

Consider the prophet Isaiah (53:6) when he said, "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way" or the apostle Paul when he said to the Ephesians (chapter 2:1-3),

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath (NIV).¹⁰

Dr. Jones goes on to say,

⁸ Jones C (2009) We don't hate sin so we don't understand what happened to the Canaanites. *Philosophia Christi* 11(1):53-54

⁹ Winter R (2005) *Perfecting Ourselves to Death: The Pursuit of Excellence and the Perils of Perfectionism*, Intervarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL, 155

¹⁰ All Biblical quotations in this article come from the New International Version.

In Genesis 3 the Lord said in the garden that if Adam and Eve ate of the fruit they would surely die. God didn't say you will die peacefully in your sleep at a ripe old age of natural causes, but that you will surely die. Thus every person begins life under the sentence of death.¹¹

Before we deal with the Canaanites, what you're going to see next are some examples of how deep the sinfulness of human beings really is. Most people would consider these examples inhumane, and I would agree to a certain degree, but it's important to ask who committed these atrocities. Humans did.¹²

Automatically people will immediately think of Adolf Hitler and his wiping out 6 million Jews throughout the Holocaust. Many avenues of torture were used in order to bring about this heinous crime from starvation, mass shootings, gas chambers, hangings, and even allowing infants to die without food and water. Others have committed massive atrocities including genocide, etc. Joseph Stalin was responsible for even more deaths than Hitler. The numbers of his victims are estimated somewhere over 20 million. Around 6 million people from Ukraine were starved to death after Stalin's regime confiscated their food supply. Many of these casualties were children. Millions of his own citizens were casualties as well through execution, labor, camps, etc. The British news outlet, *The Guardian*, reported on the mass amounts of rape that took place as a result of the Red Army invading Germany back in WWII:

Nuns, young girls, old women, pregnant women and mothers who had just given birth were all raped without pity... Estimates of rape victims from the city's two main hospitals ranged from 95,000 to 130,000. One doctor deduced that out of approximately 100,000 women raped in the city, some 10,000 died as a result, mostly from suicide.¹³

A little side note here: It's interesting to note that when Dawkins commented on Stalin's atrocities, he said, "Stalin did extremely evil things in the name of dogmatic and doctrinaire Marxism...he didn't do it in the name of atheism."¹⁴

Two things should be noted here: (1) Let's say Stalin didn't do it in the name of atheism. If that's the case, then what did his atheism have to do with stopping it? If Stalin's atheism didn't cause it or prevent it, then apparently the only conclusion of Dawkins' view of atheism is that it's worthless and useless. (2) Dawkins either lacks in his understanding Marxism or is intellectually dishonest. Marx wrote in 1844 "Communism begins from the outset with atheism." One of his followers, Vladimir Lenin, said, "Atheism in an integral part of Marxism. Marxism is materialism. We must combat religion. This is the ABC of all materialism and consequently of Marxism."¹⁵

¹¹ Jones C (2012 Sep 27) Killing the Canaanites Was Justified Capital Punishment <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6-GsRP48Ilg>> Accessed 2013 Aug 16

¹² Ibid. In this section, Dr. Jones lays out a case for the brutality of humanity.

¹³ Beevor A (2002) They raped every German female from eight to 80, *The Guardian*, <<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2002/may/01/news.features11>> Accessed 2013 Aug 16.

¹⁴ Dawkins R (2006) 315-316

¹⁵ Wurmbrand R (1986) *Marx and Satan*, Living Sacrifice Book Co, Bartlesville, OK, 59

We look at all of these horrific atrocities that have happened in the 20th century alone. Doesn't this provide clarity that human beings carrying out sin to the extremes, completely and defiantly living against our God. If this is the case then what should God's response be to those who possess a willful nature to commit such atrocities?

Yale Scholar, Miroslav Volf, had this to say:

I used to think that wrath was unworthy of God. Isn't God love? Shouldn't divine love be beyond wrath? God is love, and God loves every person and every creature. That's exactly why God is wrathful against some of them. My last resistance to the idea of God's wrath was a casualty of the war in the former Yugoslavia, the region from which I come. According to some estimates, 200,000 people were killed and over 3,000,000 were displaced. My villages and cities were destroyed, my people shelled day in and day out, some of them brutalized beyond imagination, and I could not imagine God not being angry. Or think of Rwanda in the last decade of the past century, where 800,000 people were hacked to death in one hundred days! How did God react to the carnage? By doting on the perpetrators in a grandfatherly fashion? By refusing to condemn the bloodbath but instead affirming the perpetrators' basic goodness? Wasn't God fiercely angry with them? Though I used to complain about the indecency of the idea of God's wrath, I came to think that I would have to rebel against a God who wasn't wrathful at the sight of the world's evil. God isn't wrathful in spite of being love. God is wrathful because God is love.¹⁶

Perhaps this will help clear up some confusion about why God told Israel they had to drive out the Canaanites. It wasn't because Israel was so righteous and holy (Deuteronomy 9:5)¹⁷. Rather, at the heart of the Canaanite people was what was at the heart of those just mentioned who are outside of the work of Christ and His Holy Spirit to seal them.¹⁸ One word: idolatry. In Romans 1:18-21, Paul says,

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the

glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.

Idolatry is what's at the heart of each human being. All of us worship something. It can be money, romance, power, fame, success, etc. Rebecca Pippert points out, "We do not control ourselves. We are controlled by the lord of our lives."¹⁹

Let's look at what controlled the Canaanites. Originally the Canaanites knew about the one true God. But somewhere along the way, they exchanged the glory of the immortal God. Dr. Jones quotes Ulf Oldenburg in his dissertation at the University of Chicago, which states,

God lost the dynamic strength expressed in His name. Most Canaanite texts describe Him as a poor weakling, a coward...the contempt of goddesses. One text depicts God as a drunkard splashing "in his excrement and his urine" after a banquet.²⁰

Dawkins complains that "God's monumental rage whenever his chosen people flirted with a rival god resembles nothing so much as jealousy of the worst kind." In response, Dr. Jones said, "But does anyone think that if Dawkins's wife left him for a gingerbread man of her own baking, and then she began to tell everyone that he liked to play with his excrement, that Dawkins would tolerate the characterization of his feelings as no more than jealousy of the worst kind?"²¹ Hardly not.

And here we have God exchanged for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles. The Canaanites began to worship Baal. Throughout the ages people eventually become focused on what they worship. As a result, people's behavior reflects what they worship. What exactly did Baal do? Baal has relations with his mother Asherah, his sister Anat, and his daughter Pidray.²¹

Next in the Canaanite religion we have temple prostitution. Istar, known as the Queen of Heaven, became the "ultimate woman" among the gods. Istar was a supporter of all types of sexual activity including in wedlock and out of wedlock. Dr. Jones quotes University of Helsinki professor Martti Nissinen who writes, "[Physical relations] with a person whose whole life was devoted to the goddess was tantamount to union with the goddess herself."^{22,23}

The Canaanites also practiced child sacrifice through the worshipping of the god, Molech. Molech was a Canaanite underworld deity with the head of a bull put on top of a human body. The arms of Molech were stretched out where a child would be placed. The child would then roll down the arms into the open belly where a fire would be burning. Consequently, the child would be burned alive.

¹⁶ Miroslav V (2006) *Free of Charge: Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 138-139

¹⁷ Credit to Dr. Jones for pointing out that Israel's righteousness was not God's reason for using them to drive out the Canaanites. Israel would prove just as guilty as the Canaanites, and, as a result, God's divine punishment would come over them. It's so easy to think that our blessings from God depend upon how good we are. Rather it is how good God is.

¹⁸ Jones C (2009) 55

¹⁹ Pippert RM (1999) *Out of the Salt Shaker and Into the World: Evangelism as a Way of Life*. Intervarsity Press, Downers Grove (IL), 52

²⁰ Jones C (2009) 56

²¹ *Ibid.*, 57

²² *Ibid.*, 60

²³ Here Dr. Jones cites a professor from a secular university, not a pro-Christian higher education of learning.

This is why God told Israel to drive out the Canaanites or else they would become like them. And what happened? Jones says:

But the Israelites did not drive the Canaanites out (Judges 1:28) but worshipped other Gods and followed their practices (Judges 3:5-6; 2 Kings 17:7). As a result Israel "did evil" (Judges 10:6; 1 Kings 14:22) and set up "Asherah poles on every high hill and under every spreading tree" (2 Kings 17:10). There were male shrine prostitutes (1 Kings 14:22), the committed acts of "lewdness," adultery and incest (Jeremiah. 5:7; Hosea 4:13-14; Ezekiel 22:10-11; Amos 2:7), and Solomon set up altars for all his foreign wives and even set up an altar to Molech (1 Kings 11:5, 7-8). In the time the Israelites sacrificed their sons and daughters (2 Kings 16:3, 17:17; 2 Chronicles. 28:3, 33:6; Jeremiah. 32:35; Ezekiel 20:26, 31). Instead of repenting when things went badly for Judah, they concluded that it was because they stopped burning incense to "the Queen of Heaven," Inanna/Istar (Jeremiah 44:18).²⁴

In summary, what can we take from all of this? First, we come to see and understand the wickedness of humanity and can see and understand God's justice of reward for goodness and due punishment for sin. Second, we should all be able to understand this new tactic, refute it, and not let this tactic by Dawkins and others deceive us into giving up on God or denying God, our Creator. We see that all of us at least have the potential to carry out wicked sins and that we are all guilty before the throne of God (Romans 3:23). This should give us more of a clarification of why God cannot sit idly by withholding His justice.

Yet, at the same time, God chases after humans because He loves us and desires to have a father-child relationship with us! He is very slow to anger (Psalms 86:15) and wants no one to perish (2 Peter 3:9).²⁵ God has taken all of the sins upon Himself in the form of Jesus Christ on the cross. This includes all of the sins committed by the Canaanites, Hitler, Stalin, and guilty leaders of all our respective countries which space did not permit us to include here; we should be in awe of the wonderful, majestic, marvelous reality that is the glory of God our Creator. All who repent and come to Him rather than reject Him will not only have their sins washed away, but will enjoy peace and joy that lasts forever and ever and ever. Hallelujah. Amen. ☩

COMING EVENTS

Thursday, September 12, 7:00 pm, Providence Baptist Church, 6339 Glenwood Ave., Raleigh, Room 631
Ken Kovarik, chemistry instructor at Wake Christian Academy, will present The Origin of Radiation Based on the Hydroplate Theory.

²⁴ Jones C (2009) 66-67

²⁵ God waited 430 years before bringing destruction on the Canaanites. He truly is slow to anger.