Biblical Apologetics: "God of the Old Testament"

- God of the Old Testament Outline
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God of the Old Testament Outline

> 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, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully.
>
> *The God Delusion* - Richard Dawkins p31

Atheists commonly make arguments about "the God of the Old Testament" and contrast Him with "the God of the New Testament." Is there really a contradiction there?

> The Lord is a man of war; the Lord is His name. Pharaoh's chariots and his army He has cast into the sea
>
> (Exodus 15:3)

> Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always in every way.
>
> 2 Thessalonians 3:16

How can God be both a "man of war" and "the Lord of peace?" Are these statements at odds with one another? Are they talking about two different Persons? Two different gods?

Introduction

- This is not a new idea - in the 1st Century, Marcion rose up and claimed Jesus is a separate god sent by the god of Israel, who had created the world, and who was vengeful. Marcion made his own biblical canon, wrote his own gospel, and was excommunicated by the Church in 144 AD.
- "The God of the Old Testament" question usually arises with an example of one of the following:
  - Things done by characters in the Old Testament

- Things God commanded the Israelites to do in the Old Testament
- Things God, Himself, did in the Old Testament
- Things God SAID in the Old Testament (i.e. the Law)

Bad Arguments

Before looking at the categories in depth, we should address some "Bad Answers." When presented with the question of "The God of the Old Testament", Protestants typically provide one of the following two answers:

- None of this stuff ever happened
  - "These are just stories" - "These are for a moral lesson" - etc.
  - This is not an Orthodox Perspective
  - If these things are fiction, and God could have chosen to reveal Himself in any way that He wanted, then that means God chose to reveal Himself with fictional acts of war, etc. That is way worse than the reality!
  - We are getting God's perspective on these real events that happened
  - Definitely, in the time of the Old Testament, there was a lot of war and a lot of evil things... and Israel was a part of that world. So if you remove these specific events from history, you're not removing evil from Israel's history, but you're removing God's perspective on it.

- God didn't change, man just didn't understand him back then [but now we do]
  - "The people at that time were really primitive and we find their primitive understanding of God" - "They thought God wanted them to do this, but it wasn't" - "Now we understand what God really wants"
    - usually Protestants mean 'the enlightenment' or 'the reformation' is what brought us to the understanding of what God really wants
  - This redefines the Scripture from something given by God, to being human speculation about God, which opens up criticism in the New Testament as well (e.g. "St Paul didn't understand women" etc.). Now the Scripture is not authoritative, but I am authoritative over the Scripture
  - This is still not a sufficient answer to the question because it doesn't answer "why" but only answers "what now" (i.e. "we have left this behind)
  - Note: This is not to be confused with the concept that God reveals Himself more and more over time (i.e. milk vs solid food)

Things OT Characters Did

Just because it is in the Scripture does not mean it is approved by God, or a model for good behavior, or encouraged by the Church. The following are some commonly arisen examples that you can research and prepare with.

- Lot's offering of his daughters to the men of Sodom
- The whole book of Judges
  - Levite's Concubine
  - Jephthah's Daughter

See Chapter 5 subsection "The Unfortunate Concubine" in *Floods, Plagues, Wars... and a Loving God?* by Fr Gabriel Wissa.

See Chapter 6 subsection "Lot and His Daughters" and subsection "Jephthah's Daughter" in *God is a Man of War* by Fr Stephen de Young

Things God told Israel to do

The Conquest of the Israelites into Canaan is probably the most common form of the "God of the Old Testament" argument.

- Why did God command the conquering of the Canaanites?
- Were the Canaanites really annihilated by the Israelites? Were they supposed to be?
- Why didn't God give them another chance?
- Why did God single out the Canaanites, a single ethnic group?

See Chapter 31 in *Timeless Truth in Truthless Times* by George Bassilios.

See Chapters 5-6-7-8-9 in *Floods, Plagues, Wars... and a Loving God?* by Fr Gabriel Wissa.

See Lesson 2.9 of ACTS 3023 for a Comprehensive Undertaking of the Canaanite War

Things God Did

The most common items in this category are:

- The Flood in the time of Noah
- The Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah
- The Plagues in the time of Moses (and especially the death of the firstborn)

And the main question in both cases stems down to "where was God's mercy?"

See Chapters 2-3-4 in *Floods, Plagues, Wars... and a Loving God?* by Fr Gabriel Wissa.

See Lesson 2.8 of ACTS 3023 for a Comprehensive Undertaking of the Flood

Things God Said

The last category is related to "problematic" Laws that were instituted by God. In particular:

- Asking Abraham to sacrifice Isaac
- God Forced Women to Marry their Rapists
- Laws Concerning Slaves
- An Eye for an Eye and a Tooth for a Tooth

Typically, someone who makes this argument is not aware of cultural or historical context, and definitely not aware of what the actual Laws concerning women and slaves are in the Scripture.

Resources

- *Timeless Truth in Truthless Times* - George Bassilios
  - The Relevant Chapters are photographed and provided here: https://notes.morcous.com/books/timeless-truth-in-truthless-times-george-bassilios
- *God is a Man of War* - Fr Stephen de Young
- *Floods, Plagues, Wars... and a Loving God?* - Fr Gabriel Wissa
  - https://www.dropbox.com/s/b1clu7stqpi5e7x/Flood%2C%20Plagues%2C%20Wars%20and%20a%20Loving%20God%20-%20Fr%20Gabriel%20Wissa.pdf?dl=0
- ACTS 3023 - Biblical Apologetics
  - Lesson 2.8 - https://www.dropbox.com/s/nbdg4a14951ks0a/Lesson%202.8%20-%20Flood%20-%20Global%20or%20Local.pdf?dl=0
  - Lesson 2.9 - https://www.dropbox.com/s/haa2j92ep4vxcny/Lesson%202.9%20-%20The%20Canaanite%20War%20-%20Moral%20Issues%20in%20the%20OT.pdf?dl=0
  - Lesson 2.10 - https://www.dropbox.com/s/gahyeom0fisda5l/Lesson%202.10%20-%20OT%20Law%20-%20Slavery%2C%20Women%27s%20Rights%20and%20More.pdf?dl=0

An Eye for an Eye and a Tooth for a Tooth

> [23] But if *any* harm follows, then you shall give life for life, [24] eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, [25] burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.
>
> (Exodus 21:23-24)

We read the above commandment from God in the Old Testament, and then the below from the Lord Jesus Christ in the New Testament during the Sermon on the Mount.

> [38] “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ [39] But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. [40] If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have *your* cloak also. [41] And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. [42] Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away.
>
> (Matthew 5:38-42)

Clearly, God has changed his mind, right?

This is yet another example where understanding the cultural and historical context is important. What is the Spirit of the Law in the Old Testament? Did God think and command that the best way to react to something was in an equal and opposite reaction?

Actually, the "eye for an eye" commandment in the Old Testament was an UPGRADE for humankind at the time. In those days, people were not satisfied by simply retaking what was stolen from them, or killing the person who killed their brother. They took their revenge in terribly brutal ways. For example, in the time of Jacob, his daughter Dinah was raped by Shechem the Hivite. In order to obtain revenge for their sister, Simeon and Levi (her brothers) killed all the males of the land including Shechem. They were not satisfied simply killing Shechem, but they exacted a personal act of revenge. Given this context, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth would have been merciful.

Now how do we reconcile this with the Lord's commandment in the New Testament?

If we understand the Spirit of the Law in the Old Testament, we can see that the Spirit of the Law in the New Testament is the same. It has not changed. It is mercy. But mercy in the Old Testament looked a little bit different than mercy in the New Testament - not because God has changed, or the definition of mercy has changed; but because by then God had led His Creation to grow out of its barbaric behavior. The people had grown in righteousness. God gradually teaches His children the way to righteousness.

To be clear, it is not that the people had at first misunderstood or misinterpreted God's commandment, but it's that God was giving His commandment (i.e. mercy) in a way that they could digest.

St Paul calls this "milk and solid food." A parent gives his infant milk, but when the infant grows, he is given solid food. Is it because the parent has changed his mind about what is best for his child? No, but rather it is because the child has grown and is now able to digest solid food. The goal of the parent in both cases is the nutrition and health of their child.

> "I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal." (1 Cor 3:2-3)

> "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child." (Hebrews 5:12-13)

Sources:

- Chapter 5 in *Floods, Plagues, Wars... and a Loving God?* by Fr Gabriel Wissa.
- Lesson 2.10 of ACTS 3023 for a Comprehensive Undertaking of an Eye for an Eye

Accusation: God Forced Women to Marry their Rapists

One common "TikTok" argument is about God "forcing a woman to marry her rapist." This is a mischaracterization, misrepresentation and misinterpretation of Deuteronomy 22:22-29.

The Laws in this section are actually clearly delineated into three distinct sections and the ordering of them makes it easier to understand:

- Adultery
- Rape
- Consensual Pre-Marital Relations

Adultery

> [22] “If a man is found lying with a woman married to a husband, then both of them shall die—the man that lay with the woman, and the woman; so you shall put away the evil from Israel.

Verse 22 re-iterates the general commandment against adultery - if a man is engaging in sexual relations with another man's wife, they should both be put to death. To be clear, both the man and the woman are found guilty.

Rape

> [23] “If a young woman *who is* a virgin is betrothed to a husband, and a man finds her in the city and lies with her, [24] then you shall bring them both out to the gate of that city, and you shall stone them to death with stones, the young woman because she did not cry out in the city, and the man because he humbled his neighbor’s wife; so you shall put away the evil from among you.
>
> [25] “But if a man finds a betrothed young woman in the countryside, and the man forces her and lies with her, then only the man who lay with her shall die. [26] But you shall do nothing to the young woman; *there is* in the young woman no sin *deserving* of death, for just as when a man rises against his neighbor and kills him, even so *is* this matter. [27] For he found her in the countryside, *and* the betrothed young woman cried out, but *there was* no one to save her.

Then, two other cases are put forward. If a man lies with a woman who is betrothed - not married - to another man in the city, this is treated as adultery and incurs the same penalty. However, if it happens outside of the city, the woman is not punished but only the man. Why?

The distinction between the city or countryside hinges on the woman's ability to cry out for help (verse 24, 27). The issue is not even whether or not she cried out for help, but whether she could have been heard if she had. The woman is not interrogated or questioned in any way. This is actually more merciful than our current society's treatment of rape... nowadays, a woman is called to testify publicly and suffer even more public humiliation. But the procedure here outlined by God protects women from further victimization.

If the act occurred in a place where she could not have been heard, she is given the benefit of the doubt and assumed not to be complicit. The man is held guilty and subject to the death penalty. The woman is completely innocent and in the eyes of the Torah, she is still a virgin. Her betrothal is still valid, and she is able to be part of a lawful marriage. Her rape is equated to murder (verse 26) and she is no more guilty than a victim of murder is. She does not need to prove her resistance or rejection. In the case of an accusation where it's her word against his, it is HER word that is to be believed and the man is treated as sexually immoral and executed.

Again, "But you shall do nothing to the young woman; *there is* in the young woman no sin *deserving* of death." The idea that she would be "forced to marry her rapist" as many claim - is preposterous. How can the guilty rapist, who is put to death, later take her as a wife?

Consensual Pre-Marital Relations

> 28 “If a man finds a young woman *who is* a virgin, who is not betrothed, and he seizes her and lies with her, and they are found out, 29 then the man who lay with her shall give to the young woman’s father fifty *shekels* of silver, and she shall be his wife because he has humbled her; he shall not be permitted to divorce her all his days.

The last scenario (v. 28 and 29) deals with a woman who is a virgin and is *not* betrothed. This command serves a different purpose than the ones that preceded it. While the former sought to advance the innocence of betrothed rape victims and prevent their punishment, the latter is aimed at preventing the sexual exploitation of unmarried young women. They are unrelated, as is evidenced by the fact that there is no penalty of death.

What is being described here is not a rape. Verse 28 says that "they are found out" - and does not make a distinction between the guilt of the man or of the woman.

The confusion in modern times comes from the word "seizes her" which is overinterpreted. The Hebrew word means "take" or "acquire" and simply means that a man "takes to himself" an un-betrothed virgin (not by force). The status of women in the ancient world was different than it is today. A woman "belonged" to her father and later on to her husband - not because she was equal

to property, but so that she would be provided for. Women did not pursue careers or have income in those days, so it was necessary that they be provided for.

God's commandments and Law in the Old Testament **protected women** from the objectification that other societies subjected them to. For example, in God's commandments, women could inherit property (e.g. daughters of Zelophehad). In God's commandments, women were not to be blamed or shamed in the case of rape where the woman could not have cried out for help (see above).

One such provision made for women is this one in verses 28 and 29. That if a man took a woman's virginity by mutual consent, he was entitled to marry her, pay her dowry, and provide for her the rest of her life. He was not allowed to ever divorce her.

Dowry

Why pay a dowry if she is not like property? Because the woman has value. In these ancient agrarian societies, a daughter is a valuable part of her family in working the land and helping to provide for its needs. When a new husband took a woman from her father's house, he was depriving the father of someone of real value. He was making life more difficult for her family of origin. The dowry, then, is a way of compensating a father for the loss of his daughter.

What if he hadn't married her? She would never be able to contract a legal marriage because she had lost her virginity. At the death of her father, she would be left without a home and without any means of support. She would be forced to beg or become a harlot. The point of this commandment is justice for the woman. By taking her possibility at a normal future, a man becomes responsible for her future.

Sources:

- Chapter 6 of *God is a Man of War* by Fr Stephen de Young
- Lesson 2.10 of ACTS 3023 for a Comprehensive Undertaking of Women's Rights

Laws Concerning Slaves

Sources:

- Chapter 33 of Timeless Truth in Truthless Times
- Lesson 2.10 of ACTS 3023 for a Comprehensive Undertaking of Slavery