

Why is the Biblical God So Violent?

Rob Barrett, Durham University
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The Philosophical Gods

“I have often observed, Donatus, that many persons hold this opinion, which some philosophers also have maintained, that God is not subject to anger; since the divine nature is either altogether beneficent [Stoics], and that it is inconsistent with His surpassing and excellent power to do injury to any one; or, at any rate, He takes no notice of us at all [Epicureans], so that no advantage comes to us from His goodness, and no evil from His ill-will.” (Lactantius [d. AD 330], *A Treatise on the Anger of God*)

Creation

“In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light.” (Genesis 1:1-3)

Humanity Commissioned

“Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.’ So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it.’” (Genesis 1:26-28)

Cain Kills his Brother Abel

“Cain said to his brother Abel, ‘Let us go out to the field.’ And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him. Then the LORD said to Cain, ‘Where is your brother Abel?’ He said, ‘I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?’ And the LORD said, ‘What have you done? Listen; your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground!’ (Genesis 4:8-10)

“The LORD said to him, ‘...Whoever kills Cain will suffer a sevenfold vengeance.’ And the LORD put a mark on Cain, so that no one who came upon him would kill him.” (Genesis 4:15)

Flood

“The LORD saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. So the LORD said, ‘I will blot out from the earth the human beings I have created—people together with animals and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.’” (Genesis 6:5-7)

Abraham

“Now the LORD said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’” (Genesis 12:1-3)

Moses

“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me.” (Exodus 20:2-3)

Blessing or Curse

“If you will only obey the LORD your God, by diligently observing all his commandments that I am commanding you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth; ... The LORD will make you abound in prosperity...to bless all your undertakings....

“But if you will not obey the LORD your God ... then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you: The LORD will send upon you disaster, panic, and frustration in everything you attempt to do, until you are destroyed and perish quickly, on account of the evil of your deeds, because you have forsaken me.... The LORD will bring a nation from far away, from the end of the earth, to swoop down on you like an eagle.... It shall besiege you in all your towns.... In the desperate straits to which the enemy siege reduces you...even the most refined and gentle of men among you will begrudge food to his own brother, to the wife whom he embraces, and to the last of his remaining children.... Although once you were as numerous as the stars in heaven, you shall be left few in number, because you did not obey the LORD your God. And just as the LORD took delight in making you prosperous and numerous, so the LORD will take delight in bringing you to ruin and destruction....” (Deuteronomy 28:1-68)

Israel Falls

“I surrounded and captured the city of Samaria; 27,290 of the people who dwelled in it I took away as prisoners” (Arnold, *Readings from the Ancient Near East*, 146).

“Ah, Assyria, the rod of my anger—the club in their hands is my fury! Against a godless nation [meaning Israel] I send him, and against the people of my wrath I command him, to take spoil and seize plunder, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets.” (Isaiah 10:5-6)

Judah Falls

“The LORD has done what he purposed, he has carried out his threat; as he ordained long ago, he has demolished without pity; he has made the enemy rejoice over you, and exalted the might of your foes. ... Look, O LORD.... The young and the old are lying on the ground in the streets; my young women and my young men have fallen by the sword; in the day of your anger you have killed them, slaughtering without mercy.” (Lamentations 2:17-21)

Judge Kaufman in Sentencing Julius and Ethel Rosenberg to Death

“I consider your crime worse than murder. Plain deliberate contemplated murder is dwarfed in magnitude by comparison with the crime you have committed. In committing the act of murder, the criminal kills only his victim. ... But in your case, I believe your conduct in putting into the hands of the Russians the A-bomb...has already caused, in my opinion, the Communist aggression in Korea, with the resultant casualties exceeding 50,000 and who knows but that millions more of innocent people may pay the price of your treason. Indeed, by your betrayal you undoubtedly have altered the course of history to the disadvantage of our country.”

God Suffers in Christ

“He humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.” (Philippians 2:8)