



In Defense of the God of Israel

Proclaiming the Virtues of Our God

By: Tim Kelley

Headline: Isis kills 35 of its own members in attempt to root out spies and moles within its ranks . . .

Headline: Israel's King David hangs seven of former King Saul's grandchildren in an attempt to stop a plague brought on by the former king's treatment of the Gibeonites . . .

Headline: Isis captures Yazidi Christian women as "wives" for their soldiers . . .

Headline: David, the young Hebrew shepherd who slew the Philistine giant continues his attacks on the Philistines by slaying 100 men just to collect their foreskins as the bride price for the King's daughter

Headline: Boko Haram kills more than two dozen captive Nigerian soldiers in the name of Islamic State-West Africa Province

Headline: Israel's new leader, Joshua, the son of Nun, executes 5 Canaanite kings as he attempts to establish an Israelite stronghold in Canaan.

Headline: President Harry Truman authorizes the use of atomic weapons in an attempt to avoid 100's of thousands of deaths if allied soldiers are required to attack the Japanese mainland.

Headline: Moses, the leader of the advancing Israelite army, gives the command to completely annihilate the Amorite people after they refuse his request to pass through their country.

The world is filled with violence, and it would seem that the scriptures are as well. The web site "Skeptics Annotated Bible" ¹ lists 237 instances in scripture that the host/writer considers to be acts of violence or cruelty committed by, or on behalf of God. They include the death of Egypt's firstborn, spanking a child if he needs correction, and even the concept of plucking out your own eye if it causes you to sin. If you're wanting to portray the God of Israel as a merciful-less cut-throat killer, this is the web site for you!

The site's list of 237 is actually a subset of another list that includes 1321 perceived acts of violence the author had found in the Bible up to this point (June 2016). Many, if not most, are prophetic in nature. Others have to do with the various aspects of sacrifice, and in both cases, there are a number of repeats of the same offense made in a previous biblical passage. In the author's blog ², he admits that this larger list includes actions that most people do not consider to be violent or cruel and thus were not included in the smaller list. It's interesting to note that his list does not include God's instructions pertaining to what should be done to a person who commits murder, so I presume he's OK with the death penalty for murder.

If we take his list of 237 perceived acts of cruelty and spread them out over the roughly 4,100 years of Biblical history, we have a perceived act of violence happening less than once every 17 years. That's not very often, especially when you consider the hundreds of murders, rapes, and other acts of violence that take place any given week in the so-called "civilized" cultures of today.

Though it appears that the writer's motivation is to simply discredit God, his web site does point out the fact that there is a lot of violence in the scripture. When you consider that much of that violence was carried out by people like Samson, Joshua, and King David - men who are considered to be "servants of God" or in one case "a man after God's own heart, it's easy to see how a skeptic could assume that God's heart is set toward violence as well.

¹ <http://skepticsannotatedbible.com/cruelty/short.html>

² <http://dwindlinginunbelief.blogspot.com/2007/10/go-up-thou-bald-head.html>

Unfortunately, this is not the only web site that promotes this view of God. As our nation becomes more and more un-Godly, more and more of these sites become available, and they are just a search engine away from anyone who has doubts about the scriptures or about God himself. What's also unfortunate is that there are only a few sites that offer good information that could counter the skeptic's claims.

What are we to do? How do we answer those who attack our God? Maybe a better question might be "should we attempt to answer those attacks". Some say no, and they base their opinion on the story of Gideon.

The Bible's book of Judges in tells of a time when after 40 years of peace, Israel once again turned against God, and as a result, God allowed Israel to fall into the hands of the Midianites. For seven years the Midianites enslaved the Israelites in their own country. The people hid in caves and mountains, and if they dared plant a field for food, they would have to hide it to keep the Midianites from eating it. When Israel cried out for deliverance, God raised up Gideon to deliver them.

The story of Gideon takes place during the wheat harvest - the time of year that corresponds to Shavuot. As God was preparing Gideon to take on the Midianites, He had him take care of some "housekeeping" beforehand. Here's the story -

^{NKJ} **Judges 6:11** ¹¹ Now the Angel of the LORD came and sat under the terebinth tree which was in Ophrah, which *belonged* to Joash the Abiezrite, while his son Gideon threshed wheat in the winepress, in order to hide *it* from the Midianites.

In the narrative, Gideon is threshing wheat in a winepress so as to not be noticed by the Midianites. God meets with Gideon and tells him what He wants him to do. As we know, Gideon had his doubts and thus asked God for a sign so he could be sure it was really God who was talking with him. After the sign was given, God told Gideon to tear down the alter of Baal and cut down the wood Asharah located next to his father's house - both of which were being used by the Israelites to worship Baal. The next night, Gideon and ten of his friends did just that. They destroyed the altar and the Asharah, then hid in Gideon's father's house. The next morning, the people of the city saw that the alter of Baal and the Asharah were both gone and they soon determined that Gideon was the culprit. They told Joash, Gideon's father, to deliver him to them so he could be put to death for what he had done to Baal, and Joash answered -

^{ESV} **Judges 6:31** . . . "Will you contend for Baal? Or will you save him? Whoever contends for him shall be put to death by morning. If he is a god, let him contend for himself, because his altar has been broken down."

Joash was stating that if Baal is truly a god, he doesn't need his followers to fight for him because he should be able to fight for himself. He also implied that those who might wish to fight for Baal might suffer the same fate as the prophets of Baal in Elijah's day.

People today take Joash's response to state that God's people do not need to take up for God because God can take care of himself. In other words, God does not need us to save Him; He does not need us to fight His battles – and I would have to agree. God is big enough to take care of Himself. But does YHWH - the God of all Israel - want His people to defend His holy name? The answer to that is a resounding "YES".

Approximately 3400 years ago on the day that the Bible calles "Shavuot" (the Feast of Weeks), our ancestors were standing at the base of Mount Sinai waiting to hear from the one who had just rescued them from 270 years of Egyptian slavery . . . slavery that came by the very people who had invited them in to their country just a few years earlier. But Egypt was now in shambles; her army decimated. and the Israelites were waiting to see what was next. So before God began to speak, Moses passed on God's instructions to the Israelite people. Speaking on behalf of God, Moses said (quoting from the Septuagint)

-

^{LXE} **Exodus 19:5-6** And now if ye will indeed hear my voice, and keep my covenant, ye shall be to me a peculiar people above all nations; for the whole earth is mine. And ye shall be to me a royal priesthood and a holy nation: these words shall thou speak to the children of Israel.

As we know, Israel accepted this calling. They agreed to fulfill the role of priests - a multi-faceted job that includes teaching the people about God and His ways. But according to the apostle Peter, they accepted another role as well. Peter, in his letter the exiles scattered throughout the known world said -

^{NKJ} **1 Peter 2:9** But you *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

Did you notice what Peter added? He added that we (as were they) are called to proclaim the praises of the one who called us out of darkness. The English Standard Version states it this way -

^{ESV} **1 Peter 2:9** But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

This rendition states that we are to proclaim the “excellencies” of the one who called us out of darkness. The Greek word that’s translated “excellencies” is “arête” (Strong’s 703). It is a word that means “a virtuous course of thought, feeling and action, moral goodness” . In other words, it is our job - our calling - to proclaim that our god - YHVH, the Holy One of Israel, is a virtuous and moral god. He is not what is being proclaimed today by the religion of Islam, by atheist, and to some degree, by today’s Christians.

So for the rest of this message, I want to show that we can proclaim the excellencies of our God. We can thwart the arguments of those who want to discredit him, and we can do it by relying on three basic Biblical truths -

1. God is a God of laws and justice
2. God is using wisdom to build His kingdom
3. God has a plan for the salvation of all mankind

Law and Justice

The sense of justice is an innate part of the human psyche. Even young children are able to recognize injustice. As an example, five year old Suzie and four year old Billy are in the back seat of the car playing. Suzie pesters Billy, and Billy hits Suzie to get her to stop. Suzie cries out “Billy hit me!”, and then mom turns to Billy and tells him to sit on his hands til they get home. Suzie now knows how to pull mom’s strings and Billy cries inside because justice wasn’t served.

The February 20, 2012 edition of Time Magazine (online edition) has an article called “Even Babies Can Recognize What’s Fair”³. In the article, the author, Maia Szalavitz, writes -

“Kids have a keen sense of fairness, a characteristic that research increasingly shows is an innate part of human morality. Indeed, the latest study, published in *Psychological Science*, finds that even babies are disturbed by displays of injustice — and even when it doesn’t apply to them.”

The desire for justice, and more importantly - equal justice - is built into us by God. Thus the God of Israel made it a part of the Hebrew culture to write laws designed to ensure justice and that justice is applied equally. Thus you have laws that in some people’s opinion, appear to be violent. For example, the following law appears on the Skeptic’s Annotated Bibles “long” list of examples of Biblical violence -

³ <http://healthland.time.com/2012/02/20/even-babies-can-recognize-whats-fair/>

^{ESV} **Exodus 21:29** . . . if the ox has been accustomed to gore in the past, and its owner has been warned but has not kept it in, and it kills a man or a woman, the ox shall be stoned, and its owner also shall be put to death.

The skeptic may look at this as violence, but God is simply telling the people that they must act responsibly toward their neighbor by keeping an animal that they know to be dangerous, confined. If they knowingly fail to do so, there will be consequences, and those consequences are designed to insure there is justice. We all understand that because we've been raised in a society that still (to some degree) teaches personal responsibility. Our society expects us to make sure our vehicles are properly maintained before putting them on the road and that we don't drive while intoxicated or use cell phones in school zones. And even though many state legislatures put themselves above God and make laws prohibiting it, if one of our loved ones is killed by a drunk driver, we would expect that driver to be put to death.

By the way, it just so happens that the "ox goring the human" example did not make it to the Skeptic's "short" list. Obviously, even they agree that in every society there needs to be a standard of personal responsibility, and therefore this is not an example of Biblical violence and cruelty. With this example, we can counter about half of the atheists views about YHVH and violence.

Many other alleged acts of violence and cruelty by the hand of God have to do with those laws designed to maintain peace between individuals. These laws would include (but are not limited to) practically all laws having to do with marriage, adultery, and divorce. For example -

^{NKJ} **Deuteronomy 22:22** " 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.

Civilization requires a certain amount of respect for each other and each other's property. Ask just about anyone whose house has been broken in to what they felt when they discovered this invasion of their home. They would likely answer that they felt "violated". Such is the same when promiscuity enters a marriage. God's laws pertaining to marriage are for the purpose of avoiding such feelings.

Today's "progressive" and "enlightened" society may believe that death for a person who commits adultery is extreme, but for those who are victims of adultery, the hurt felt - even if it is just for a fleeting moment - makes them wish the other person were dead.

Though many of God's laws, and consequently His alleged acts of violence against mankind, have to do with man's relationships with man, the majority of examples of God's "cruelty" have to do with idolatry and other acts that dishonor the covenant. This is where the author of the Skeptic's Annotated Bible really shows his ignorance in regards to what God is doing with mankind. Here's a good example -

^{ESV} **Exodus 31:14** You shall keep the Sabbath, because it is holy for you. Everyone who profanes it shall be put to death. Whoever does any work on it, that soul shall be cut off from among his people.

For those of us who believe in the God of Israel, our relationship with God is likened to a marriage, and the weekly Sabbath is the sign of that marriage relationship⁴. It's sort of a wedding ring that we can look at to remind us of our covenant relationship with God. Thus to dishonor the Sabbath is like taking off your wedding ring and flushing it down the toilet. Likewise, idolatry is like committing adultery. Since we are made in the image of God and since God has breathed His spirit of life into each of us, it's only natural to conclude that just as we would be hurt if our mate were to invite another person into the marriage, God would be hurt as well. But infidelity is not the only reason for God's laws pertaining to idolatry, and that leads to our next point . . .

⁴ Exodus 20:20

God is Using Wisdom in Building His Kingdom

God's kingdom is being built on the foundation that there is only one God who can save and nourish His people. Though Israel very likely cried out to all the gods they worshipped while captive in Egypt⁵, none of them reached out to deliver her except for YHVH. Thus, in the Hittite culture of the day, God had every right to take them as His own, even enslaving them if it were His desire. But that was not His desire. His hope was to have a relationship with them where He would provide for and protect them, and they would serve and honor Him. Together, they would become the Kingdom of God. But that was not all.

God wanted to expand the kingdom to where it would encompass all nations and peoples, but knowing that a conquered people are not necessarily a loyal people, He wisely chose to use blessings through obedience instead of the scourge of war to achieve His goal. His plan is that the nations will want to abandon their pagan cultures and become like the Hebrew people when they witness the blessings that come as a result of obedience to His ways.

God's 'ways' are defined by His Torah – the Law of God. Every kingdom has to have laws. Without laws, kingdoms and nations cease to exist. Like what was mentioned earlier, some of God's laws govern man's interaction between man. Others govern man's interaction with the King. Taken together, they become a way of life that would lead to peace, prosperity, and happiness. Moses said it like this:

^{NKJ} **Deuteronomy 4:5-8** ⁵ "Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should act according to *them* in the land which you go to possess. ⁶ "Therefore be careful to observe *them*; for this *is* your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, 'Surely this great nation *is* a wise and understanding people.' ⁷ "For what great nation *is there* that has God so near to it, as the LORD our God *is* to us, for whatever *reason* we may call upon Him? ⁸ "And what great nation *is there* that has *such* statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law (Hebrew "torah") which I set before you this day?"

But in addition to the laws mentioned above, God had to include laws that would deal with subversion - acts committed against the kingdom. Many of those laws pertain to idolatry. A kingdom can have only one king, and idolatry introduces a rival king into the Kingdom. Therefore, idolatry is considered an act of subversion or treason, and just as it was in America a hundred years ago, it is punishable by death. But since most Bible skeptics don't recognize its kingdom aspect, they consider God's punishment for treason to be the antics of a cruel and bloodthirsty god. Thus this verse is listed on the Skeptics Annotated Bible's list of Cruelty in the Bible -

^{NKJ} **Exodus 22:20** " He who sacrifices to *any* god, except to the LORD only, he shall be utterly destroyed.

God knew how quickly idolatry could spread through the camp of Israel. He knew how it would influence the people and how quickly the culture could change if it was allowed to persist, thus He wanted it stamped out before it got started, thus He said -

^{ESV} **Deuteronomy 13:6-9** "If your brother . . . your son or your daughter or the wife . . . or your friend . . . entices you secretly, saying, 'Let us go and serve other gods, . . . ⁷ some of the gods of the peoples who are around you, whether near you or far off . . . ⁸ you shall not yield to him or listen to him, nor shall your eye pity him, nor shall you spare him, nor shall you conceal him. ⁹ But you shall kill him. Your hand shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people.

To God, idolatry is the same as treason, mutiny, or any other rebellion against the sovereignty of God and the security of the nation. It can spread through the kingdom quickly, and ultimately destroy it. Thus it

⁵ Joshua 24:15

was everyone's responsibility to watch for it and extinguish it. Other acts of rebellion were quickly dealt with as well - the golden calf incident, Korah's rebellion, and even the man picking up sticks on the Sabbath - all of which are considered cruelty by Biblical skeptics.

God was not the only one who had to deal with treason. King David killed the seven grandsons of Saul⁶, because of Saul's rebellion against God when He broke the covenant Israel had made with the Gibeonites and thus brought a shame on the God of Israel. Even the death of David's first son by Bathsheba⁷ was for the purpose of preserving the kingdom.

Unfortunately, Bible skeptics don't see the background of what God is doing. They don't see the depravity of the Canaanite people who were sacrificing their own children to pagan gods. They won't admit that when evil spreads, it affects everyone - the innocent and the guilty alike. Instead, they lay charges against a God they don't know and accuse Him of being a cowardly, bloodthirsty villain.

God Has a Plan

Thankfully for us, as well as for the skeptic, God has a plan. His plan is centered around His desire for universal peace and justice, for YHVH is a god of peace. But peace comes at a price. Before peace comes, you must rid yourselves of the enemies of peace, establish a just and righteous law, and have a people who are willing to walk in that law. The scripture says -

^{ESV} **Psalm 119:165** Great peace have those who love your law; nothing can make them stumble.

God's plan for all mankind is found in the festivals. As we continue to study and observe the festivals, tying them to Biblical prophecies as we learn more about them, we find that God has not forsaken anyone and that all mankind will one day have the opportunity to learn of God's ways, observe them, reap the benefits of them, and become a part of the Kingdom of God.

God's plan commenced on Passover about 3400 years ago when He redeemed the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob from Egyptian slavery and began to fulfill the covenant he had made with them. He brought them to Mount Sinai and made a covenant with them that if they would walk in His ways, He would make them His special people. Except for brief moments during their 3500 year history, the Hebrew people have refused to follow and honor God and were - and continue to be - scattered throughout the nations.

We, some 2700 years after our forefathers were exiled, are now gathering together at various places throughout the world, to be a part of the restoration of that covenant promise. Our job is to be witnesses to the greatness and moral virtues of God. Through our witness, others may see the truth about the God of Israel. And as we continue the cycle through the fall festival season, we may have the opportunity to show others that God is not a blood thirsty God, but He is a God of justice. He's not a cruel God, but he is a God who vehemently protects His kingdom, and thankfully for the skeptic, he is not a god who repays evil for evil, but is instead a God who is full of mercy and compassion, and who -

. . . takes no pleasure in the death of the ungodly, but would rather he turn from his ways and live.

Ezekiel 18:23 (paraphrased)

This is what we work for. This is why we defend the God of Israel.

Shalom

⁶ 2 Samuel 21:1-9

⁷ 2 Samuel 12:14