Fort Bend Christian Academy

A Bifurcation Myth:

God of the Old Testament and God of the New Testament

A Thesis submitted to the Teacher and Students of the Advanced Apologetics Class

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Table of Contents

Introduction

"So God said to Noah, "I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth."[1]

These are intense words from a God who is "the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin."[2]

Churches do not often—if at all—preach or even talk about the God of wrath that is found in the Old Testament, and passages of the Israelite Conquest or the violence within Israel are often left unspoken and undealt with in the pews. To many, these events seem to conflict with the God they believe: a God of love, one who is willing to forgive if anyone turns to Him and repents. The New Testament, then, seems to hold much more authority for Christians than the Old Testament does, despite the fact that both books make up the Bible, which Christians hold to be the ultimate authority in their lives. Thus, there appears to be a bifurcation of God Himself: that is, Christians perceive Him as more wrathful and less merciful in the Old Testament but the opposite in the New Testament, saying that He is more merciful and less wrathful. However, a proper reading of the New Testament brings one to Paul's letter in Hebrews, specifically Hebrews 13:8: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever."[3] James calls God "the Father of heavenly lights, who *does not change* like shifting shadows,"[4] and Malachi records the words of the Lord Himself: "I the Lord do not change."[5] It seems, then,

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[1] Genesis 6:13

[2] Exodus 34:6-7a

[3] Though it appears that it is Jesus who is unchanging, one must remember that there is also no bifurcation of God the Father and Jesus the Son: they are one and the same, and so, therefore, God must also be unchanging.

[4] James 1:18

[5] Malachi 3:6

that to claim otherwise is to reject the truth of Scripture; moreover, there are grave implications that come with the idea of a "changing" God: if God can change, He becomes unpredictable, and no one will ever know if He shall one day decide to pardon all sinners or another day wipe out an entire nation. Furthermore, if God can change, it becomes completely impossible to know or begin to understand who the Creator is. *But one will never know the full extent of who God is*, one may argue, and he would be right. However, one can begin to understand the nature of an unchanging God; he can never begin to understand who a changing God is. Worse, a God who is changing is a God who cannot be trusted; the churches teach that God is faithful: how can one be so sure of this if God changes?

I resolved, therefore, that God cannot change, and this led to the present question to be answered herein: what is to be made of this apparent difference between God in the Old Testament and God in the New Testament?

This thesis, therefore, requires not just the examination of God's wrath in the Old Testament but also the search for His mercy; likewise, God's forgiveness and mercy in the New Testament is examined while the pages of this section of the Bible are scrutinized for evidence of His burning wrath. Ultimately, the goal is to prove to the reader that there is no "apparent difference" between God in the Old Testament and in the New. His is the same, and in order for Him to be the same, the extent of His wrath and mercy has to be equal in both the Old and New Testament.

Historical Context

Sin and Wrath in the Old Testament

The Old Testament is riddled with violence, whether it is God destroying pagan cities such as Sodom and Gomorrah or pagan nations overcoming God's people, Israel. In his book, *Cross Vision,* Gregory A. Boyd claims, "With the exception of its violent portraits, the Bible *always* describes God's judgement in terms of divine abandonment."[6] Abandonment, he argues, is the worst form of judgement, for "the greatest blessing God can give people is His presence."[7] God in the Old Testament is often depicted as one watching over and protecting His people; therefore, whenever the Israelites sin and fall into captivity, "they assumed this could only mean that God was no longer with them. …[W]hether or not they understood why it happened, the prevailing assumption was that God has 'hidden His face' in response to their sin."[8] This, however, presents the question: how does God's presence—more specifically, absence of it—serve as punishment for sin? According to Terence E. Fretheim, "The biblical language for judgement…refers to the *effects*, not [to] a penalty or punishment that God pronounces."[9] Words such as wickedness, sin, trespass, and corruption have the same Hebrew root as words that describe the destructive effects of sin, such as disaster, trouble, and destruction. Furthermore, the Hebrew phrase *šlm Pi*, though translated as "retaliate" or pay back, should be, according to Klaus Koch, understood as "bringing to completion."[10] Therefore, "sinners receive the punishment for their sin when their sin is allowed to be brought to completion…[as captured by

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[6] Gregory A. Boyd, *Cross Vision: How the Crucifixion of Jesus Makes Sense of Old Testament Violence* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2017), 149.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Boyd*, Cross Vision*, 151.

[9] Terence E. Fretheim, *Creation Untamed: (Theological Explorations for the Church Catholic): The Bible, God, and Natural Disasters* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2010), 49.

[10] Klaus Koch, *Doctrine of Retribution* (2010), 60-64.

the book of James]: 'Each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has been conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full grown, gives birth to death' (Jas 1.14-15)."[11] According to Boyd, then, violent depictions of God are *indirect*, God-breathed (i.e. divinely-inspired) revelations.

Boyd then examines the self-punishing nature of sin by showing, for example, in Psalm 7:12-13 that though the Psalmist depicts God by using Ancient Near East (ANE) war imagery (e.g. "sharpen His sword," "bend and string his bow"), verses fourteen through sixteen seemingly put down this portrait of a violent God, saying, "Whoever is pregnant with evil conceives trouble and gives birth to disillusionment. Whoever digs a hole and scoops it out falls into the pit they have made. The trouble they cause recoils on them; their violence comes down on their own heads." This type of violence, according to Boyd, is the natural, self-destructive consequences of people's sin against God.[12] Boyd also points out the Aikido dimension of the judgement spelled out in the above Psalmic passage, saying, "Violent people eventually find their violence ricocheting back on their heads. …This same concept is reflected in the passages that teach us that 'the wicked are brought down by their own wickedness' [as seen in Proverbs 11:5, for example],"[13] thus also describing sin as inherently self-destructive. In Isaiah 33:14, the prophet asks the question, "Who [of the sinners in Zion] can dwell with the consuming fire?" With broader context, however, Boyd says that it is made clear that the origin of this "consuming fire" is the inside of the sinners themselves: "You conceive chaff, you give birth to straw; your

[11] Boyd, *Cross Vision*, 151.
[12] Ibid., 153.
[13] Boyd, *Cross Vision*, 153.

breath is a fire that consumes you. The people will be burned to ashes; like cut thornbushes they will be set ablaze."[14]

Although the Old Testament's many accounts of *ḥērem*[15] reveal the Israelites as the primary members involved, "sometimes Yahweh himself…is presented as the agent of the Canaanites' future destruction; at other times, the latter are said to be destined to be driven out rather than annihilated."[16] The commands to the Israelites in the early canonical texts, according to Hosfreiter, were simply to destroy the Canaanite altars and refrain from treaties and marriages with the Canaanites. It is the book of Leviticus that "widens the moral discourse concerning the taking of the land, accusing the Canaanites of a number of sins for which the land is said to have vomited them out."[17] In fact, the first *ḥērem* narrative (in the order of the canon) "presents *ḥērem* not as something God commands, but as something the distressed Israelites promise Yahweh in exchange for his aid in battle," as seen in Numbers 21:

> "When the Canaanite king of Arad, who lived in the Negev, heard that Israel was coming along the road to Atharim, he attacked the Israelites and captured some of them. Then Israel made this vow to the Lord: 'If you will deliver these people into our hands, we will totally destroy their cities.' The Lord listened to Israel's plea and gave the Canaanites over to them. They completely destroyed them and their towns; so the place was named Hormah."

According to Hofreiter, other texts in Deuteronomy report *ḥērem* without a relationship to Yahweh's command (Deuteronomy 2:31-35), *ḥērem* with Yahweh's command (Deuteronomy 3:1-7), and *ḥērem* in the form of divine commandments, or laws (e.g. Deuteronomy 7:4-16). Other Old Testament *ḥērem* texts report the actual conquest of Canaan, the (e.g. Joshua 6:17-21),

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[14] Isaiah 33:11-12

[15] For now, it shall suffice to define *ḥērem* as total destruction and/or devotion to God.

[16] Christian Hofreiter, *Making Sense of Old Testament Genocide* (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 4. See: Exodus 23:23,28; 34:11

[17] Ibid. See: Lev 18:1-30.

lay the rules of warfare and distinguish "the treatment of towns outside the promised land from those within" (Deuteronomy 20.16-17), and even "the annihilation of an apostate, idolatrous Israelite town" (Deuteronomy 13.12-16).[18]

In response to the prospect of the biblical Conquest, the Christian Crusades, Islamic *jihad,* or any genocides of the previous century being justified, Eugene H. Merrill[19] expresses an opinion as to why only the last of these is justified: "If no case could be made for Yahweh war without Israel's participation in Old Testament times, surely none can be made today whether done in the name of Christ, Allah, or any other authority."[20] Essentially, there are two conditions that make the Canaanite genocide specifically justified for Israel: 1) God commands it, and 2) Israel is the appointed agent. Since these conditions have not been recreated since then, Merrill argues, no one is justified to commit such an act. Evidence of this thought continuing beyond the Israelite Conquest can be found in 2 Samuel 4, the killing and mutilation of Rechab and Baanah, who are, according to Olyan, captains of the raider's of Saul's son [Eshbaal[21]]. The two captains stab and kill Eshbaal before proceeding to cut off his head, which they bring before David, who is in Hebron. Rather than reward them for eliminating a potential heir to Saul's throne (thus allowing David to rightfully become king), David orders his men to kill Rechab and Baanah, cut off their hands and feet, and bury Eshbaal's head in Abner's tomb, located in Hebron. Though these men commit acts of violence for a good cause—the promoting of David, the new God-appointed king, to the throne—David has them executed for killing "an innocent

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[18] Hofreiter, *Making Sense of Old Testament Genocide*, 6.

[19] Merrill's essay from *Four Views on God and the Canaanite Genocide: Show Them No Mercy* will be fully discussed in the section, "The Canaanite Genocide."

[20] C.S. Cowles, et al., *Show Them No Mercy: Four Views on God and the Canaanite Genocide* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2003), 85.

[21] Eshbaal is not identified in this chapter but—according to Olyan—in later texts. See footnote 5 in his book.

man in his own house and on his own bed" (2 Samuel 4.11). As shown here and earlier (where David ordered the death of yet another man for claiming to have murdered Saul for him), David is ardently against bringing harm upon the Lord's anointed and his family. Having received no command from God to harm them, David refrains from taking advantage of opportunities where Saul or his offspring are vulnerable. While the first action here "is deemed an assassination, …the second violent act [virtually identical in nature to the first violent act] is a case of ritual violence."[22] David does not simply have the brothers killed; he also orders their hands and feet to be cut off. In his book, Olyan presents a table of instances in the Old Testament of violence that involved the mutilation of various extremities—including but not limited to: the head (both the literal head and "palms of hands"), hands, and feet—and/or the hanging of bodies, either alive, dead, or undetermined.[23] These methods of punishment are all symbolic in nature, with their message varying depending on what is mutilated or how one is hung; for example, the head is of significant symbolic value, and so to decapitate someone is to deprive him/her of his/her power and status.

In regards to genocide, Olyan acknowledges multiple definitions of it, including a definition from the United Nations, part of which is that "mass killing is not necessary for actions to be genocidal if these actions attempt to eliminate a group by other means, for example, by not allowing members of the group to reproduce."[24] Many scholars, he claims, are in some form of agreement with this definition, for they hold broad definitions such as Henry

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[22] Olyan, SaFul M. *Ritual Violence in the Hebrew Bible: New Perspectives*. (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 11.

[23] Ibid., 14-17. These pages contain the exhaustive list of mutilations and hangings not mentioned fully here.

[24] Olyan, *Ritual Violence in the Hebrew Bible*, 29.

Huttenbach's: "genocide is any act that puts the very existence of a group into jeopardy."[25] Olyan also notes that "while many people seem to be under the impression that genocides must involve killing every or nearly every member of a group, no scholar of genocide thinks this, and for obvious reasons. If this were a criterion, then not even the Holocaust would be considered a genocide."[26]

Eric Seibert suggests two types of violence in the Old Testament: positive and negative. Positive violence, which Seibert calls "virtuous:"

> "is portrayed as being appropriate, justified, and perhaps even praiseworthy. It is sanctioned and sometimes celebrated in text. Those who engage in ["virtuous" violence] are understood to be acting in ways that are congruent with God's intentions. "Wrongful" violence, on the other hand, is violence that is portrayed negatively and disapproved of in text. Wrongful violence includes violent acts the text portrays as being inappropriate, unjustified, and condemnable…[U]nsanctioned and unacceptable, …those who engage in such behavior do so without divine approval."[27]

So, while God punishes Cain for murdering Abel, He does not punish David for his mutilation of Rechab and Baanah; though Israel often engaged in violence against the Promised Land's inhabitants, they suffered severe consequences whenever they acted without God's command or guidance, as shown in Deuteronomy 14:36-45. Clearly, according to Seibert, "what renders an act of violence as good or bad in the Old Testament often has less to do with the kind of violence involved and more to do with who does it, to whom, and why."[28] Even in a society where women are limited in respect to their liberties, Jael—a woman—is praised for engaging in "virtuous" ritual violence—in this case, the murder of Sisera, commander of the Canaanite king

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[25] Jones, *Genocide,* 17.

[26] Olyan, *Ritual Violence in the Hebrew Bible*, 29.

[27] Eric A. Seibert, *The Violence of Scripture: Overcoming the Scripture's Legacy* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2012), 28.

[28] Seibert, *The Violence of Scripture*, 28.

Jabin's army (Judges 4-5). Ultimately, however, God is given praise for the complete victory, which culminates in the destruction of King Jabin.

The Old Testament also consists of many examples of violence where it seems like God Himself is the propagator, for example, the Flood,[29] the Ten Plagues, and the destruction of Sodom Gomorrah. In the case of the Ten Plagues—which result in the liberation of the Israelites—Moses and Miriam's song in Exodus 15 praises God's violence. In other instances, there is destruction not of a group of people, but of an individual, for example, "the execution of Er and Onan (Genesis 38:7-10), the incineration of Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10:1-2)…and the elimination of Uzzah (2 Samuel 6:6-7)."[30]

In addition to this "divine violence" is what Seibert calls "divinely *sanctioned* violence." Examples of this latter form of violence include the Old Testament laws that punish kidnapping, cursing of one's parents, adultery, and more with death.[31] The most extreme and evident form of divinely sanctioned violence, however, is the call for genocide, the Conquest[32] being the most notorious example. Deuteronomy 20 suggests that it truly is God who commanded this genocide, and that "Israel's indiscriminate slaughter of Canaanite men, women, and children represent 'virtuous' acts of obedience to God."[33] There is also, however, divinely sanctioned violence against the Israelites themselves, mainly for idol worship. For example, because the Israelites engage in sexual intercourse and worship of false gods with the Moabites,

"The Lord said to Moses, 'Take all the leaders of these people, kill them and expose them in broad daylight before the Lord, so that the Lord's fierce anger may turn away from Israel.' So

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[29] A historical review of the flood will come in a later section.
[30] Ibid., 34.
[31] Seibert, *The Violence of Scripture*, 34.
[32] The history of the Conquest will be properly examined in the next section.
[33] Ibid., 35.

Moses said to Israel's judges, 'Each of you must put to death those of your people who have yoked themselves to the Baal of Peor.'"[34] The morality of violence in the Old Testament, then, depends largely on God's commanding of it and if it is punishment for an injustice.

The Canaanite Genocide

Scholars have attempted with great difficulty to unify God's wrath with His mercy, for while God's fiery wrath is obvious in the Old Testament, it is only with considerable difficulty that one can find God's grace and mercy in this section of the Bible. During Jesus' ministry on earth, He forgave both the woman caught in adultery and the lame man lowered into the crowded house; there is no one He refused to heal that came before Him. However, one reads of a seemingly different God in the Old Testament, one that ordered the genocide of multiple nations, including the Canaanites, and for centuries many scholars have struggled with interpreting and/or justifying God's wrathful genocide against the nations dwelling in the Promised Land prior to Israel's entry. The various views on this destruction of lives and property include the following, discussed in their entirety in *God and Canaanite Genocide: Show Them No Mercy*.

C.S. Cowles

C.S. Cowles argues that God's wrath and love are "radically discontinuous" with each other. This, he says, does not mean that God "changed," so to speak; it simply means that the Bible is, in reality, a progressive revelation of who God is. Jesus, therefore, was and is the epitome of God's character, arriving on earth to establish His new covenant with His people. While on earth, He calls for peace, not war, and this is why His hometown of Nazareth rejects

[34] Numbers 25:4-5

Him. They want a violent uprooting of the Roman Empire; Jesus establishes a peaceful covenant with His people; it was not is holy warriors who are called sons of God; it is the peacemakers, according to Matthew 5:9. As Israel enters the Promised Land, initiating the Conquest, God's people are tasked with eliminating all the pagan nations in the land…or are they? Cowles suggests that perhaps God's command is misinterpreted or that Moses actually issues the commands while Israel, recognizing Moses' authority, obeys them. If so, then Moses' basis for his commands can be traced back to the Noahic curse on Canaan in Genesis 9, where Noah becomes drunk and exposes himself. Ham sees him and goes to tell his brothers, but it is his brothers who show their father his due respect and clothe him. Consequently, Noah blesses Shem and Japheth but curses Ham's son, Canaan. If such is the case—that, in reality, the commands came from Moses, a mere human, and not God—then the Canaanite genocide can be viewed as a warning, as if someone said, "This is what happens when you misinterpret God's words." Cowles uses Israel's inconsistency in carrying out the commands as evidence for his radical discontinuity, stating that the commands "kept changing."[35] The original command, found in Deuteronomy 20:16, is fully obeyed at the Battle of Jericho, but, following the battle against Ai's defenders, however, only the people are destroyed; the animals and plunder are kept for personal gain, and so in Joshua 8:24-27 one sees that the taking possession of livestock and plunder is now commanded by the Lord. Cowles argues that the discontinuity, then, is obvious, for in Deuteronomy, he claims, the command was to destroy essentially everything, but some time later one observes that the command calls for the destruction of only the people and excludes the livestock and plunder. Furthermore, despite disobeying God's "clear command to

[35] Cowles, et al., *God and the Canaanite Genocide*, 40.

'wipe out all [Canaanite] inhabitants,'" Joshua is not rebuked for his failure to adhere to this command. It is not likely that God kept changing His mind about His command; rather, this suggests that Joshua's *perception* of God's commands kept changing over time.[36] Ultimately, Cowles renders the Old Testament insignificant, calling it the old covenant, and establishes the New Testament, being the new covenant, as having the ultimate authority.

Edward R. Wierenga,[37] however, presents a different case for the genocidal commands, presenting his own version of the divine command theory. In its essence, "According to the divine command theory, God is a moral authority, in the sense note merely that he is a reliable source of information about moral matters but that he determines morality. …The moral status of actions depends on God."[38] Defining obligation, permissibility, and wrongness as basic moral properties, he connects them, saying that if an action is permissible, it is obligatory in the case that it is not permissible to not do it; an action is wrong if it is not permissible to do it. Therefore, according to Wierenga, an "omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good being never commands an action that he also forbids." However, many of God's explicit commands fail to align with this theory, but Wierenga solves this issue by distinguishing God's explicit and implicit commands, quoting Richard Mouw, who says, "'We will miss some of the "commands" found in the Bible if we attend only to sentences which are grammatically imperative.'"[39] From this reasoning, Wierenga concludes, "We can continue to interpret the divine command theory as

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[36] Cowles, et al., *God and the Canaanite Genocide*, 40.

[37] Wierenga is not an author in *God and the Canaanite Genocide*, but the following discussion is directly related to Cowles argument.

[38] Edward R. Wierenga, *The Nature of God: An Inquiry into Divine Attributes* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2003), 215.

[39] Richard Mouw, "Biblical Revelation and Medical Decisions," *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* (1979), 371.

basing morality on God's commands, provided that we understand God's commands not as commandments but as statements of his revealed will."[40]

Eugene H. Merrill

Eugene H. Merrill presents a case for what he calls moderate discontinuity. He opposes Cowles in saying that the commands were not simply Moses' but rather wholly God's, therefore creating for himself the task of distinguishing "holy war" (also referred to as "Yahweh war") from regular warfare. Merrill defines Yahweh war according to the following characteristics (which may be present in groups but not necessarily all at once): a trumpet call, consecration of the men, offering of sacrifices, an oracle of God, giving over of the nations to Israel by Yahweh, Yahweh's leading the way, designation of the battle(s) as Yahweh war, a "fear not" formula, the enemy's loss of courage, a war cry, divine terror, *ḥērem* (the total destruction or devotion of property to God), and a return to their tents (according to 1 Samuel 4:10).[41] Merrill suggests that the purpose of Yahweh war was "deicide rather than homicide," for if Israel went off into idolatry, she would "effectively become paganized."[42] This destruction inherently results in the destruction of people's lives because "Yahweh war is war in defense of unique demands on [God's] people. To worship other gods is an act of high treason, one deserving of death (Deuteronomy. 13:15). By extension, those who induce God's people to such disloyalty are also worthy of death."[43] Explaining—through the nature of Yahweh and Israel's relationship—the importance and roles of people, places, and things in Yahweh war, he quotes von Waldow,

[40] In the quote on page 218 of Wierenga's book, Robert Adams speaks of God's absolute and revealed will. In short, His absolute will is what brings pleasure to Him; His revealed will is what He tells His people to do.

[41] Cowles, et al., *God and the Canaanite Genocide*, 69.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Cowles, et al., *God and the Canaanite Genocide,* 78.

saying "The remedy for the Fall and for human sinfulness included the calling out of a people through whom all the nations…would be blessed."[44] It is in Egypt, Merrill says, that God assumes the role of warrior, "first demonstrating his glory and power to Pharaoh, and when that fails…to achieve the desired ends, he [implemented] by force the deliverance of his…people."[45] Not only, however, is God's glory and power demonstrated to Pharaoh, it is also demonstrated to Israel and the nations she encounters in the Promised Land, thus elevating Yahweh's status in the eyes of both His people and the Land's inhabitants. Because of the divine ordination of Yahweh war, a conflict—which Merrill calls a *Leitmotif*—with God as the Protagonist, Merrill concludes that Israel's acts of violence were justified, and, therefore, "If no case could be made for Yahweh war without Israel's participation in Old Testament times, surely none can be made today whether done in the name of Christ, Allah, or any other authority."[46] Merrill summarizes the reasons for the extreme measure of Yahweh's war as the following: 1) the hardness of heart of the victims, 2) the protection of Israel, 3) eradication of idolatry, and 4) the education of Israel and other nations. How does one's heart become hard? Merrill answers that only God is capable of knowing when an individual's heart becomes hard. He also notes that it is not God who hardens an individual's heart, but rather, through multiple decisions against the will of God, one hardens his/her heart against God.[47] Merrill defines protection as protection from Canaanite paganism; therefore, Yahweh had to eradicate idolatry. Through all of this, Merrill states that Israel and all the other nations see who God is, what He is capable of doing, and what makes him happy or unhappy. In the New Testament, Merrill observes, there are indeed references to

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[44] H. Eberhard von Waldow, "The Concept of War in the Old Testament," *HBT* 6 (1984), 46.
[45] Cowles, et al., *God and the Canaanite Genocide*, 76.
[46] Ibid., 85.
[47] Cowles, et al., *God and the Canaanite Genocide*, 76, 86.

military conflict, for instance, when the disciples ask Jesus about His prophesied destruction of Herod's temple and heard of events that must occur before the end. None of these references, however, utilize Yahweh war-terms and neither do any of the letters, despite their war imagery,[48] so Merrill uses this to conclude that Old Testament war "has no place in the age of the church—at least, no legitimate place."[49] The apocalypse, though, is symbolic of Old Testament Yahweh war in the sense that 1) it is initiated by God, 2) carried out by Him, and 3) results in His victory. Rather than war, then, Merrill argues that a careful reading of the New Testament impresses Pacifism, though he also notes that Jesus does not ever condemn warfare but instead recognizes its inevitability, both for humans and for God, the latter using it to achieve His eschatological purposes;[50] therefore, Old Testament warfare is discontinuous with New Testament pacifism. Merrill also addresses the Canaanite genocide's morality, arguing that although genocide is morally atrocious, God sanctioned the genocide that occurs in the Old Testament. The issue, then, is not whether the act is good or bad, but rather who performs the act and under what circumstances. Here, Merrill is seen to agree with Wierenga on his divine command theory: the morality of genocide in the Old Testament depended on God's command. Therefore, since Yahweh war's parameters cannot be recreated today, there is no justification for modern genocide. Merrill concedes that Islamic *jihad* has parallels with Yahweh holy war, but he notes that the Qur'an contradicts itself on warfare, sometimes advocating "a pacifist position in the face of controversy (Sura 15:94-95); [other times permitting] defensive war…; [and] still others [advocating] sanction wars of preemption or aggression (Sura 2:191, 217)."[51] Maintaining

[48] Ibid., 89.
[49] Longman, "The Divine Warrior," 292-302.
[50] Cowles, et al., *God and the Canaanite Genocide*, 89-91.
[51] Cowles, et al., *God and the Canaanite Genocide*, 93.

that the nature of God is impenetrable (and genocide appearing to be in contradiction to that nature), Merrill concludes, "The moral and ethical dilemma of Yahweh war must remain without satisfying rational explanation. …all that can be said is that if God is all the Bible says he is, all that he does must be good—and that includes his authorization of genocide."[52]

The Flood

The Flood is the first account in the Bible of a mass—really a global—annihilation of God's creation by God Himself, but accounts of a great flood exist in the vast majority of Ancient Near Eastern cultures. One of the earliest forms of the Mesopotamian version of the flood story (to be discussed later in this section) is the Old Babylonian version from the seventeenth century. This version serves as the climax of a larger work, where man—created to relieve the gods of their work on the earth—increases in number and noise to the point of disturbing the chief god Enlil's sleep. To "quiet" them, Enlil sends a "plague, then drought, next a famine, and finally a flood to eliminate humanity."[53] Atrahasis is warned of the flood and instructed to build an ark of wood, reeds, and pitch. The flood lasts for seven days and nights, and Atrahasis, having survived, sacrifices to the gods while a new societal order is established, this time with restraints on human reproduction. Tablet 11 of the Gilgamesh epic is the first discovery of a cuneiform account of the flood. Here, the "flood hero"[54] is Utnapishtim; he is warned of a flood and builds an ark. The flood comes for "six days and seven nights, after which the ark lands on Mt Nimush. After seven days Utnapishtime releases a dove, which returns, then a swallow which also returns, and finally a raven, which disappears."[55] He then sacrifices on the

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[52] Cowles, et al., *God and the Canaanite Genocide*, 94.
[53] John Day, *From Creation to Babel: Studies in Genesis 1-11* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 101.
[54] That is, the flood's survivor.
[55] Day, *From Creation to Babel*, 100.

mountain and is made immortal. The Egyptians have their own flood story, although, according to Theodor Gaster, it draws no parallels with the account found in Scripture. The Greeks tell a flood story of Deucalion, the son of Prometheus in Greek mythology, but this account appears much later and draws parallels from the Mesopotamian account. In the Mesopotamian account, the "flood hero" is Xisouthros; he is warned by Kronos that a flood is to come on 15 Daisios and that he needs to build a boat "five stades long and two stades wide, and embark on it with kin and closest friends."[56] Xisouthros sends out three birds on three different occasions; the bird returns on the first two occasions but does not on the third. Upon disembarking (in the Korduaian mountains of Armenia, where the ark landed), Xisouthros offers a sacrifice and continues life with his wife and daughters.

In light of all these accounts, what is unique about the Mesopotamian tradition, and how does one trace the origin of the biblical tradition's story related to it? According to Day, "Palestine is not an area particularly prone to floods but rather to excessive dryness, so the [flood] story must have originated elsewhere in the ancient Near East, and furthermore, it is the flood story from Mesopotamia—an area very much subject to floods—which is overwhelmingly the closest in content to the biblical account."[57] There are, then, two potential versions that could have influenced the Bible's account: the Gilgamesh of Atrahasis epic. However, it is important to note that there are two accounts of the flood in Genesis, each different in some details but the same in essence. One is the Jahwist, or Yahwist, account, often abbreviated (and in this thesis will be abbreviated) as J, and the Priest account.[58] The J flood story, the deity is named Yahweh,

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[56] Day, *From Creation to Babel*, 100.

[57] Day, *From Creation to Babel*, 99.

[58] These names/abbreviations come from the documentary hypothesis, also known as the JEDP model. The hypothesis is that multiple authors wrote various sections of the Pentateuch—in contrast to the traditional Mosaic authorship view—and that these authors used varying language, which is used to differentiate them. According to

and the flood itself comes from rain for forty days and nights. Moses sends out a dove three times, and upon disembarking from the ark, sacrificed to the Lord, who then promised to never again destroy the earth with a flood. The P tradition is much more detailed: Moses is given an age—six hundred years—and the dimensions of the ark are provided as part of God's commands. The floodwaters rise for one hundred fifty days, but the earth does not dry for a year and ten days. Moses sends out a raven before disembarking from the ark with his family on Mount Ararat, where he receives a blessing from God, the promise not to destroy the earth again by flood, along with regulations and commands to multiply.[59]

Though they vary in certain aspects, the J and P versions of the flood story not only resemble the Mesopotamian flood tradition but have also transformed some of its fundamental theologies. The biblical tradition tells a story with one deity and so forth "monotheize" the Mesopotamian tradition, which involved multiple gods. Biblical authors also "ethicize" the story: while Enlil desires to destroy humanity because they disturb his sleep, the J and P accounts both attribute the flood to humanity's sin."[60] In other Ancient Near East flood stories, the deities express a certain degree of sympathy for those that the flood consumes, for example, in the form of speeches from Enki/Ea (the same deity).[61] Another aspect that makes the Biblical tradition

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answeringgensis.com, "**J** documents were written [about 900-850 B.C.] by one or more authors who preferred to use the Hebrew name *Jahweh* (Jehovah) to refer to God. **P** stands for Priest and identifies the texts in Leviticus and elsewhere in the Pentateuch that were written by a priest or priests during the exile in Babylon after 586 B.C." There are two other types of texts, **E** for texts that refer to God as Elohim, and **D** for Deuteronomy. The work of these four groups of writers was finally compiled as the Pentateuch around 400 B.C.

[59] Day, *From Creation to Babel*, 102-103.

[60] Ibid., 111.

[61] The name used depends on what tradition the flood story comes from. For example, on tablet 11 of the Gilgamesh, the deity is called "Ea," while he is given the name "Enki" in an earlier version of the Mesopotamic flood story found in the Atrhasis epic.

unique is that, unlike all other Mesopotamian versions of the story,[62] Noah, the flood hero, wisas not immortalized, undoubtedly a deliberate effort that the biblical authors make.

This thesis will be focusing on the following aspects of the Flood: 1) God's direct action against His people, and 2) the purpose of His wrath, and 3) what it says about Him.

Definition and Characteristics of "Holy War"

A reading of the Old Testament in its original Hebrew language reveals the wide usage of the word *ḥērem*, especially in the books of Deuteronomy and Joshua. *Herem* (root *hrm*), or *cḥērem* (Hebrew: חרם, *ḥērem*), as used in the Tanakh, means to 'devote' or 'destroy.' Which definition is applied depends on "other terms and…synonyms and/or antonyms with which it is associated."[63] Deuteronomy 20:1-20, often referred to as Israel's "Manual of War," provides the commands and encouragement the nation of Israel need as they enter the Promised Land and begin the Conquest. According to Merrill:

> the passage "is divided into two parts: (1) instructions about 'ordinary' war (Deut. 20:1-15) and (2) instructions about Yahweh war (20:16-20)." Among these parts are "(1) the injunction not to fear because of God's presence (20:1,3-4); (2) the involvement of cultic personnel[64] (20:2); (3) the assurance that Yahweh is the warrior (20:4); (4) the certainty of the outcome (20:13); (5) the slaughter of all the men (in the case of ordinary war, 20:13) or of all others as well (in the case of Yahweh war, 20:16-17); (6) the taking of plunder (in ordinary war, 20:14); and (7) the reason for the total destruction (in Yahweh war, 20:18), that is, to preclude Israel's adoption of pagan ways."[65]

Twentieth-century German scholar Gerhard von Rad notes thirteen characteristics of Yahweh war from observing various Old Testament passages. These include: 1) the blowing of a trumpet as an announcement of the holy war, naming of the army as Yahweh's people,

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[62] I.e. the Sumerian, Atrahasis, Gilgamesh, and Berossus accounts.
[63] Cowles, et al., *God and the Canaanite Genocide*, 70.
[64] Specifically, the Levites, who led all of Israel's religious traditions and rituals.
[65] Cowles, et al., *God and the Canaanite Genocide*, 70.

sanctification of the participants, sacrifice of an offering and/or consultation of Yahweh, announcement of victory by Yahweh (e.g. "God delivers them into your hands," as found in Deut. 21:10), announcement that Yahweh goes out before the army, claiming of the war as Yahweh's and the enemy also as Yahweh's (in contrast to the war being the Israelites and the enemy being Israel's enemy), encouragement not to fear for the enemy will lose courage, fear of Yahweh among the enemy troops (as promised by Yahweh for encouragement), war-shout, intervention of Yahweh, practice of *ḥērem,* and the dismissal of troops with, "To your tents, O Israel" (found in 2 Samuel 20:1; 1 Kings 12:16, 22:36).[66] Two of the most notable aspects of Yahweh are its command for *ḥērem/ḥrm*[67] and the fact that war is only successful if Yahweh has commanded it and declared His presence before the Israelite army. In fact, Numbers 14: 36-45 tells of a story where Israel engages in war without a command from God to do so. The result is found in the final verse: "the Amalekites and the Canaanites who lived in that hill country came down and attacked them and beat them down all the way to Hormah." Much of Yahweh war is synergistic[68] in nature; that is, Yahweh commands His people to wage war and then fights alongside them to encourage and give them victory. However, there are instances in the Bible where Yahweh wages war against a nation without the participation of Israel, thus making Yahweh war more monergistic in nature. Regardless, one thing is certain: the dependence of Yahweh's presence in each of Israel's battles.

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[66] Gerhard von Rad, *Der heilige Krieg im alten Israel,* 4th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecth, 1965).

[67] Both of these spellings are found, but to avoid confusion this thesis will use *ḥērem.*

[68] Synergism and monergism in Christian theology relate more to the conversion experience. Syngergism is the view that salvation comes to an individual from cooperation between divine grace and human freedom. Monergism is the opposing view that God works through the Holy Spirit to bring salvation to an individual through spiritual regeneration, regardless of the individual's cooperation. In *God and the Canaanite Genocide,* Gard uses synergism in the sense that God and fought *with* Israel (and, thus, Israel was required to take the initial action). He uses monergism in the sense that God fought *for* Israel, thus no action was required on Israel's part.

Maimonides introduces new vocabulary regarding war in "Laws of Kings and Their Wars" to describe further qualifications of the challenge these violent passages in the Torah present. In chapter five, section one, he says:

> "A king should not wage other wars before a *milchemet mitzvah*. What is considered as *milchemet mitzvah*? The war against the seven nations who occupied *Eretz Yisrael*, the war against Amalek, and a war fought to assist Israel from an enemy which attacks them. Afterwards, he may wage a milchemet hareshut, i.e. a war fought with other nations in order to expand the borders of Israel or magnify its greatness and reputation."[69]

Mitzvah by itself is a commandment, but it is also understood as a good deed; coupled with *milchemet*, it becomes *Milchemet* (or *milhemet*) *mitzvah,* which "is usually translated as 'obligatory war.'"[70] However, Jewish context uses both definitions of *mitzvah*, indicating that "it is not only a *mitzvah,* a commandment to wage this war [i.e. the Conquest], but it is also a *mitzvah*, a good deed to do so."[71] In regards to Yahweh war commands, Maimonides states, like Olyan, that there are both "positive" and "negative" commands[72] and that: "It is a positive commandment to annihilate the seven nations who dwelled in *Eretz Yisrael*[73] as Deuteronomy 20:17 states: 'You shall utterly destroy them.' [However,] Anyone who chances upon one of them and does not kill him violates a negative commandment as [Deuteronomy 20:16] states: 'Do not allow a soul to live.'"[74] Deuteronomy 20:10-11, however, presents a different perspective on the Israelites' *milchemt mitzvah*: "When you march up to attack a city, make its people an offer of peace. If they accept and open their gates, all the people in it shall be

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[69] Maimonides, *Laws of Kings and Their Wars,* 5.1. Translated by Eliyahu Touger.

[70] Katell Berthelot, et al., *The Gift of the Land and the Fate of the Canaanites in Jewish Thought* (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 155.

[71] Ibid., 155-156.

[72] Positive and negative describe the imperative nature of the command. For example, a positive command may use "You shall" or other phrasing, while a negative command may begin "You shall not."

[73] Another name for the land that Israel was to occupy, more commonly known as the Promised Land.

[74] Maimonides, *Laws of Kings and Their Wars*, 5.4.

subject to forced labor and shall work for you." It is important to note here that although this command to offer peace first is given, it does not apply to the Canaanite nations[75] because God directly commands complete *ḥērem* of these people. As for the other nations dwelling in the land, then, it appears that war against them is neither the first nor the preferred option but, rather, "an unfortunate consequence of idolatrous intransigence."[76] While Berthelot states that this verse means that "Peace must be offered to the Canaanites and Amalekites before going to war against them,"[77] this negates God's commands in Deuteronomy 7:1-3, where He says:

> "When the Lord your God brings you into the land you are entering to possess and drives out before you many nations—the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites, seven nations larger and stronger than you—and when the Lord your God has delivered them over to you and you have defeated them, then you must destroy them totally. Make no treaty with them, and show them no mercy."

These nations are to receive no mercy while the others are to receive an offer of peace, making war for this latter group conditional based on their acceptance of the treaty. These commands will be further examined and evaluated later in this thesis.

Mercy and Judgement in the New Testament

To many, the New Testament appears to be a complete 180-degree turn from the Old Testament's chaotic violence, death, and destruction. Support for Christian pacifism, for example, is often drawn from the New Testament—particularly Jesus' statements and responses to violence—though just war theorists also use parts of the New Testament to back their claims. For example, both Pacifists and just war theorists use Matthew 26:51-54, where Jesus rebukes

[75] That is, Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites
[76] Katell Berthelot, et al., *The Gift of the Land and the Fate of the Canaanites in Jewish Thought*, 156.
[77] Ibid., 157.

Peter after he cuts of a servant's ear during Jesus' arrest in the garden of Gethsemane, as evidence for their positions.

A simple reading of the New Testament reveals that the New Testament is not completely void of violence and destruction. Merrill in his essay notes that, according to Jesus speaking to His disciples, "the [prophesied] fall of the temple in A.D. 70 would be only typical of the traumatic and utter ruin the world could expect at the end…[I]ndicators…are famines and earthquakes…the rise of false prophets…signs and wonders such as the darkening of the sun…the appearance of angels blowing trumpets…a great tribulation…the abomination that brings desolation (Matt. 21:15; Mark 13:14), and the sign of the 'Son of Man.'"[78] There is also severe violence against the early Church, better known as persecution. Shelley Matthews and E. Leigh Gibson observe that Paul "shared with many Jews of the first century intense eschatological expectations and…how deeply these expectations shaped his thoughts and actions."[79] Matthews and Gibson see Paul as having a violent character, originating from his background as a devout persecutor of early Church followers of the Way and seen in the two following passages from Paul's writing that exemplify his use of violent language. For example, "Paul's opponents within the Jesus movement receive repeated warnings of imminent destruction,"[80] as shown in Philippians 1:28 and 2 Corinthians 2:8. Using passages such as these, Matthews and Gibson deduce that, "God is a violent actor, inflicting his wrath on the unrighteous [and] Paul is no exception in this respect."[81] Not only did Paul warn the unrighteous of violence against them, he warned but also commended the righteous' receiving of violence, for "violence

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[78] Cowles, et al., *God and the Canaanite Genocide*, 89.

[79] Shelley Matthews and E. Leigh Gibson, *Violence in the New Testament* (New York City, New York: T & T Clark International, 2005), 16.

[80] Ibid., 17.

[81] Matthews and Gibson, *Violence in the New Testament*, 17.

and suffering serve as markers of authentic apostleship."[82] In *Coping With Violence in the New Testament*, de Villiers and van Henten examine the violence of the Parable of the Tenants, where messenger after messenger that the master (i.e., God) sent is killed by the evil tenants and, as a result, "He [the master] will kill the tenants and give the vineyard to others. This parable, therefore, seems to suggest that violence was an accepted social norm of the day to resolve conflict…moreover, [that] Jesus endorsed such resolution of conflict."[83] In Luke, however, more of what happens after Jesus finishes the parable is revealed: the people are shocked, but Jesus simply replies with Psalm 118:22 and a "Midrash-like interpretation with an overt violent implication (see Luke 20:18)."[84] According to de Villiers and van Henten, Kloppenberg, having compared the Parable of the Tenants in the Bible to that in the *Gospel of Thomas* (specifically saying 65), concludes that the latter book's version of the Parable is closest in similarity to the rhetoric of "the earliest Jesus movement and perhaps to the discourse of the historical Jesus."[85] Van Eck's social-scientific analysis of the Parable as found in the *Gospel of Thomas* reveals that the Parable is very much a reflection of the Mediterranean world at that time. For example:

> "The relationship between owner and tenants…is understood as a patron-client relationship, [so] the intensity of the inequality and difference in social status and power between usurer and tenants is highlighted, and one becomes aware of the potential conflict embedded in this relationship. It also becomes clear that what is at stake in the parable is also the protection of one's honour, the pivotal social value in the first-century Mediterranean world."[86]

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[82] Ibid., 18.

[83] Pieter G.R. de Villiers and Jan Willem van Henten, *Coping with Violence In the New Testament* (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2012), 101.

[84] Malina. *The Social Gospel of Jesus,* 40.

[85] Kloppenberg. *The Tenants in the Vineyard,* 352.

[86] De Villiers and van Henten, *Coping with Violence in the New Testament*, 124.

According to this analysis, "the owner of the vineyard most probably was an honourable man…whose honour had to be protected… After the rejection of his second slave, the owner, realizing what was at stake, decides to pull out all the stops by sending his son."[87] The owner eventually sends his son because the normal strategy against ignorant tenants is to confront them with messengers of increasing social status, his son having the highest social status next to the owner himself. This, then, is an appeal to the social difference between the owner and his tenants, an appeal that is met with violence and the death of his son, and so "the parable thus has an ironic turn: exactly that which the owner thought would solve his problem…leads to his demise and the loss of status."[88] Jesus does not, then, condone violence in this Parable, but rather criticizes indirect overt violence and its ineffectiveness to subdue subjects and preserve honor.

Divine abandonment, according to Boyd, is even more evident in the New Testament, for whenever and wherever Jesus is rejected by people, He simply goes away and left—that is, He *abandoned* them. For those who choose not to follow Him, He accepts their decision; "in Jesus' prophecy about the Temple becoming 'desolate,' cited in…[Matthew 23.37.38]…he uses [the word] *erēmos*, [which] describes a place that has been vacated[, thus] stating that 'the divine presence has left the temple in Jerusalem.'[89]"[90] In Romans, Paul speaks of this same abandoning judgement, saying of those "who suppress the truth by their wickedness…[so] God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts" (Romans 1.18, 24). Boyd answers three questions

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[87] Ibid.

[88] De Villiers and van Henten, *Coping with Violence in the New Testament*, 125.

[89] M. Johnson-DeBauffe. "The Blood Required of This Generation Interpreting Communal Blame in a Colonial Context," *Violence in the New Testament*, e.d. S. Matthews and E. Leigh Gibson (New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 22-34 (25).

[90] Boyd, *Cross Vision*,155.

regarding Divine Aikido, the last one being if such judgement is the implied reason for why nations today lose wars or experience severe damage from natural disasters—that is, is the abandonment of the world by God the cause for destruction—to which Boyd answers "an equivocal and adamant, *No!*" His reasoning: "The only reason we know that Babylon's attack on Jerusalem was the result of God turning his people over to the destructive consequences of their sin is because we are told this in Scripture." Moreover, "Jesus explicitly *rebuked* people who claimed to discern the hand of God behind disasters that came upon various groups (Luke 13:1-5) as well as afflictions…upon individuals (John 9:1-3)."[91] What, then, can be considered the cause of suffering as punishment? Boyd answers that because God grants free will to both humans and angelic agents, they are capable of having either a positive or negative influence, with no intervention by God to prevent consequential harm.[92]

Revelation

In Merrill's essay on "Moderate Discontinuity" in *God and the Canaanite Genocide: Show Them No Mercy*, he claims that the Apocalypse of Revelation describes an Old Testament-type Yahweh war that will be waged in the final days of earth. This assertion is in agreement with one popular belief—that revelation is a description of literal events that are to happen sometime in the unknown future—but may be in disagreement with another—that John's Jewish Apocalypse is figurative; the events described will not literally come to pass. If Revelation is indeed a prophecy of literal events to come, then Merrill is definitely right in saying that there will once again be Yahweh war, this time waged purely by Yahweh's army. On

[91] Boyd, *Cross Vision*, 159. Note: for John 9:1-3, see Boyd's *God at War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1997), 231-36, where he argues that John 9:1-3, in contrast to standard interpretations, is not teaching that God caused the man's blindness.

[92] Ibid., 159-60

the other hand, taking Revelation in the figurative sense could mean that since the described events are not literal, there are no New Testament accounts of Old Testament Yahweh war; however, this does not have to be the case for the figurative school of thought. It could also be that Yahweh war will happen once more, but purely in the spiritual realm; ultimately, neither the figurative nor the literal viewpoints of Revelation are obliged to reject this latter proposition.

One thing is certain, though: Revelation is written with an apocalyptic literary style. Apocalypse comes from the Greek, *apokaluptō*, meaning to reveal or disclose, and so "apocalyptic literature, generally, recounts on experience the writer allegedly had with a heavenly being or in the heavenly realm."[93] This then, presents the question as to whether John truly had a visionary experience (i.e., with a heavenly being/being in the heavenly realm) and wrote about it, or was simply using apocalyptic literature to convey a message? Tyndale's commentary on Revelation provides support for the first suggestion by comparing multiple accounts of genuine visionary experiences from figures in Christian history, including Paul, Julian of Norwich, Hildegard of Bingen, Teresa of Avila, and St. John of the Cross. These individuals all shared the following in their visionary experience: 1) the vision came unexpectedly and without any manipulation of sorts (i.e., none of those figures were under an influence prior to the experience); 2) as part of the experience they were transported into an altered state of conscious (this happens *during* the experience, not *before*, hence there is no manipulation prior to); and 3) the visionary has difficulty in attempting to convey his/her experience to others in a "normal sphere of consciousness" (that is to say their experience was, quite literally, indescribable).[94] The introduction to Revelation gives no indication of John

[93] M. Robert Mulholland, Jr., et al., *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary: James, 1-2 Peter, Jude, Revelation.* Vol. 18. 18 vols. (Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2011), 410.

[94] Ibid., 410-411.

expecting a visionary experience when he "heard behind [him] a loud voice like a trumpet" (Rev. 1.10); it is explicitly stated in the same verse that he was "in the Spirit," and, throughout the book, he was taken up into heaven (4.12) and transported in the spirit (17.3, 21.10). As noted earlier, Revelation is overflowing with figurative language, though this feature does not necessarily make Revelation "figurative." His use of imagery can be understood as his incapability of expressing accurately what he heard and saw into human words. For example, he referred to the Lord's voice as "*like* a trumpet," or "*like* the sound of rushing waters." The Lord's voice was not these things but, to John, was *like* them, and so John employed figurative language to best demonstrate what it was like, though the events which he described may very well be real and, therefore, destined to come to pass. However, it is still plausible that John's revelation is purely symbolic of the end times in the same way that the sheet of animals in Paul's vision on the roof (found in Acts 10) was symbolic of the Gentiles, who Jews like Paul considered to be unclean.

Perhaps more along the lines of the figurative interpretation of Revelation are the characters that John employed in his apocalypse: Jezebel, Balaam, and the Nicolaitans. Jezebel is used to represent idolatry and opposition to true prophets; Balaam is from Babylonia and, therefore, is the representation of both Rome and people who are "duped by Satan" and leading people astray from religious heritage through sexual immorality; and the Nicolaitans are accused of eating food that is offered to idols, thus, according to Jewish custom, making them unclean.[95]

[95] John W. Marshall, *Parables of War: Reading John's Jewish Apocalypse* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2001), 127-130. John's issue here, however, is not that those he calls the Nicolaitans eat unclean food. Rather, according to Marshall, eating such food "is a synecdoche for the more general matter of participation in foreign cults. The associated mention in both verses [(Rev 2:14 and 2:20)] of committing sexual immorality, a common metaphor used to censure participation in foreign cults, further indicates that this is the issue."

This image portrays the possibility that John is simply using allegory to write against spiritual enemies and portray their fantastic destruction.

Despite these differing viewpoints on the literalness or figurativeness of the Revelation of John, what is more important to understand is the message that is being conveyed in this final book of the Bible. Thus, one must begin with the book's purpose, which is to "hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near" (Rev 1:3); that is, those who hear must remember and be mindful of these words so that they may be ready for the time, which is said to be near. As for what exactly "the time" is, J. B. Smith sheds provides an analysis of this phrase in his commentary:

> "The Greek word *kairos* denotes a season or period, and not merely a point in time. In other words, *kairos* has a durative, not a punctiliar, sense[, as] seen in such expressions as 'the time of harvest'… and 'the sufferings of this present time.' The definite article *the* points to a particular 'time' mentioned before, with which the reader is supposed to be familiar. …It will be seen later that the time here alluded to begins with the events of chapter 6 and continues on through chapter 19."[96]

Therefore, "the time" is a reference to the events in the book, and the book was made for the reader and hearers to be ready for the time that is coming, a time that is described in the book so that readers can recognize when the time has finally come.

Furthermore, Smith says, "the chief purpose [of prophetic literature] appears to be to inspire encouragement and hope in the faithful and warn the way ward and wicked with a view to repentance and amendment of life."[97] The history of Revelation's authorship supports this statement: Revelation was written circa 96 AD, a time where Christians and the Church continued to be persecuted severely. In light of this, Revelation is indeed a book of

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[96] J. B. Smith, *A Revelation of Jesus Christ: A Commentary on the Book of Revelation.* Edited by J. Otis Yoder. (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2004), 37.

[97] Ibid., 15.

encouragement, especially for the persecuted and faithful, and a warning of judgement, especially for the persecutors and the unfaithful. Additionally, Smith writes, regarding prophetic literature, "[P]resent conditions [as listed in prophetic literature] have a vital relationship to the far-off event."[98] There must, therefore, be significance in the first mention of a word or phrase and the final mention of that word or phrase in prophetic literature, as seen in Revelation where multiple events—the arrival and deception of the beat, the mark of the beast, and the seven woes, for example—are all a part of the cumulative ending of the book and, essentially, the world as humans know it.

Considering all the above discussion, the question to be answered in this thesis is not as to whether the events are to literally happen or not, but rather the implications of this apparent war in the New Testament: is it a spiritual or physical war? Is there even a war?

A Brief History of "Holy Wars" and Genocides

One significant "holy war" to mention in this thesis is the Christian Crusades of the twelfth and thirteenth century. Invading Seljuk Turks had wrestled a considerable amount of territory out of the grasp of the Byzantine empire, and after years of civil war, general Alexius Commensus captured the Byzantine throne in 1081 (Muslim armies had already seized Christian Jerusalem, Egypt, North Africa, and Spain—essentially, all of the Christian Middle East west of the Euphrates River. The thought was that "if Islam were not destroyed at its source…one of its inevitably renewed attacks would ultimately succeed, and all Christendom would fall,"[99] and so, in 1095, Alexius appealed Pope Urban II, "asking for mercenary troops from the West [that is,

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[98] J. B. Smith, *A Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 15.

[99] Ross Amy, et al. *The Glorious Disaster, A.D. 1100 o 1300, The Crusades: blood valor, iniquity, reason, faith.* Edited by Ted Byfield. Vol. 7. (Emonton, Alberta: The Society to Explore And Record Christian History, 2008), 12.

Western Europe] to help confront the Turkish threat." In November of that same year, "the Pope called on Western Christians to take up arms to aid the Byzantines and recapture the Holy Land from Muslim control"[100] in a speech where he claimed:

> "the Muslims were 'laying waste to the kingdom of God. …It was time, he declared, for Christendom to respond. The courageous knights of Europe must…begin to save their souls by restoring Jerusalem and the Holy Sepulchre to Christendom. … '*Deus le vult!'* ("God wills it!")… 'Let is be your battle cry when you go against the enemy… And whosoever shall make his vow to go shall wear the sign of the cross on his head of breast.' And he promised absolution and remission of sins to any who died en route or in battle."[101]

The Crusades had begun.

An investigation of these wars will reveal the reasoning and justification behind them, which can then be compared to the reasoning and justification for Yahweh war in order to highlight any potential differences that make one more justified than the other.

According to Christoph T. Maier:

> "From the twelfth century onwards, sermons concerning the crusades were preached on many different occasions. In the thirteenth century alone, crusades were fought against Muslims in Spain, Africa, the Holy Land and Apulia, the Mongols, non-Christian peoples in the Baltic, heretics in Languedoc, Germany, Italy and the Balkans, Orthodox Christians in Greece and the Hohenstaufen rulers and their supporters in Italy and Germany."[102]

He goes on to explain that sermons were the method of announcement for these crusades: propagandists were the preachers, and they recruited men, collected money for the wars, and commissioned crusaders for battle. They did not follow these men into battle, though: "clergy accompanying the crusade armies regularly preached sermons in order to sustain the participants'

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[100] Editors, History.com. *Crusades.* September 27, 2019. https://www.history.com/topics/middle-ages/crusades (accessed November 27, 2019).

[101] Amy, et al. *The Glorious Disaster,* 13-14.

[102] Christoph T. Maier, *Crusade Propaganda and Ideology: Model Sermons for the Preaching of the Cross* (New York, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 3.

enthusiasm or to give them courage on the eve of a battle or in moments of crisis." Sermons were even preached on the homefront "in the context of penitentiary processions and prayers in support of crusaders in the field."[103]

So, then, it remains to be answered: what were these sermons about? or, more specifically, what made these sermons so compelling that armies were willing to slaughter scores of people? Maier says that these sermons are few and far between: not many are found in the surviving sermon collections of the middle ages because these collections were "arranged by liturgical dates to suit the requirements of clerics who had to preach regularly on Sundays and feastdays…[C]rusade sermons did not belong to specific liturgical dates."[104] Collections that do have crusade sermons are sermons by individual preachers and the *ad status* sermon collections, which are model sermons geared toward specific social groups. The *ad status* collections include the work of multiple authors, including Honorius of Autun and Alain of Lille, but there are five authors who actually created model sermons for preaching "to 'those who are or will become crusaders'": James of Vitry, Gilbert of Tournai, Humbert of Romans, Bertrand de la Tour, and Eudes of Châteauroux."[105] The reason model sermons are being examined is because model sermons contain the bare essentials of the message of a sermon for a specific social group. Now, one may ask, why were "model sermons created?" to which Maier answers:

> "In order to achieve the establishment of regular preaching throughout Christendom, it was necessary to educate and train a sufficient number of preachers. One of the principal means of doing so was the systematic production and dissemination of preaching aids for…instruction…and as reference material… Throughout the thirteenth century, more and more preaching aids appeared… In many ways the most useful of these preaching aids were the collections of…model sermons. …These systematic collections of model

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[103] Ibid.

[104] Christoph T. Maier, *Preaching the Crusades: Mendicant Friars and the Cross in the Thirteenth Century* (Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Though 28; Cambridge, 1994 and 1998), 4.

[105] Maier, *Crusade Propaganda and Ideology*, 4.

> sermons to different social groups reflected the concern of the reformists to tailor moral theology to various different kinds of people and to all aspects of human behavior."[106]

This, then, begins to explain a significant driving force behind the Crusades: sermons preached to every social class—from lords and nobles to serfs and peasants—about their duty for Christ in this time of war. Maier classifies these crusade model sermons into three categories: "the 'extended model sermon' (James of Vitry), the 'simple model sermon' (Gilbert of Tournai, Eudes of Châteauroux), and the 'abridged model sermon' (Humbert of Romans, Bertrand de la Tour)."[107] As the name suggests, James' extended model sermons were much longer than the other two types of sermons; his models included a protheme[108] (the other two did not) and utilized multiple *exempla*.[109] The simple model sermon was much more direct, allowing for a near step-by-step following of the model to preach a sermon with biblical passages, themes, and arguments in detail. The abridged model sermons were the shortest models, abridged versions of the simple model sermons that provided a list of themes and a rough outline to develop on how to develop them.

Much of a sermon in its entirety was built of its theme, a pattern found in the model sermons of the five authors mentioned earlier. For example, "James of Vitry's first model sermon starts off with a protheme on Isaiah 62: 1…This first part explains…why it is necessary to preach the cross and suggests that the materials presented in the model might be used against 'those who despise the word of God' (James I, 2-4)." Later on, James "provided specific material for addressing 'those who do not care about the Holy Land', 'the lazy and slack', 'those

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[106] Ibid., 6-7.

[107] Maier, *Crusade Propaganda and Ideology,* 32.

[108] That is, the introduction of the theme, followed by a prayer.

[109] An *exemplum* is a moral anecdote of any length and realistic of parabolic structure that is use to illustrate a point.

who do not want to avenge the Lord's honour…" The principal theme here is "the signing with the cross," and James of Vitry clearly uses this theme to rebuke those who are "slow coming to the aid of the Holy Land."[110]

One of the most significant figures in the first crusade was a man known as Peter the Hermit, a powerful recruiter who was "an itinerant monk born somewhere near Amiens, France [who] ate neither bread nor meat… Most significantly, he was an impassioned and riveting preacher who believed that Christians must at all costs rescue the Holy Land."[111] He likely was one of the first recruiters, for he began gaining mass following as early as a month after the Pope's decision to call for aid. His success was in his appeal, one that was "apocalyptic, populist, and visionary, in contrast to the more theological message of Pope Urban and his bishops, who talked church authority and penance. Peter promised forgiveness. Many of the poorest believed he would lead them to the New Jerusalem and an earthly paradise of milk and honey."[112]

Amy and the other writers of *The Glorious Disaster* present and answer the question:

> "Why did they do it? For most, rich and poor, it required notable sacrifice. …For a few land-poor knights like Bohemond of Taranto and Baldwin of Boulogne…it might mean material gain. But to every one of them it offered a share in the noblest cause they could imagine and an unparalleled adventure. Besides…there was the papal promise. For three years they need not fear the judgment of God. Their sins would be forgiven. This was not, in fact, what [Pope] Urban had promised, but it is plainly the way many men took it."[113]

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[110] Maier, *Crusade Propaganda and Ideology,* 32.

[111] Ross Amy, et al. *The Glorious Disaster, A.D. 1100 o 1300, The Crusades: blood valor, iniquity, reason, faith.* Edited by Ted Byfield. Vol. 7. (Emonton, Alberta: The Society to Explore And Record Christian History, 2008), 16.

[112] Amy, et al. *A Glorious Disaster*, 16.

[113] Ibid., 15.

What Urban had actually decreed was the same full remission from canonical penalties to sin that pilgrims to Jerusalem gained, not the complete pardon of sin that many men believed they would receive for their sacrifice. Where did this discrepancy occur? According to Hubert Jedin:

> "the preaching of the crusade, now getting under way and increasingly eluding the supervision of the Church, probably disregarded the moderate decree of the council and held out to the crusaders the prospect of a 'plenary indulgence,' that is, the remission of all penalties for sin that were to be expected from God either in this life or the next…[I]n this connection there may well have been mention…of forgiveness of sins."

So, ultimately, the people made the sacrifice to fight in hopes of this total forgiveness that was preached by Peter the Hermit and undoubtedly a common theme in the model sermons discussed above; the justification the Pope provided for this war was the reclamation of the Holy Land.

Now, as for genocide, it clearly is not an event confined only to the Old Testament; the Holocaust is a well-known event in history. Raphael Lemkin, a Polish-Jewish lawyer, is responsible for the word genocide, deriving it from "*genos*, the Greek word for race or tribe, with the Latin suffix *cide* ('to kill')"[114] to describe Nazi crimes against European Jews during World War II.

The Holocaust is often recalled and referenced as one of the greatest atrocities in history, but there are other violent and destructive events that occurred following the Holocaust, for example, the Bosnian genocide. The government of Bosnia-Herzegovina declared independence from Yugoslavia in April of 1992 before proceeding to perpetrate crimes against Bosniak

[114] History.com Editors. "Genocide" *Genocide - History.* https://www.history.com/topics/holocaust/what-is-genocide#section_4 (accessed November 23, 2019).

(Bosnian Muslim) and Croatian civilians. With a Yugoslav-backed army, Bosnian Serb forces killed approximately one hundred thousands of these civilians over a span of three years.[115]

While these events were occurring, unrest was stirring in Rwanda between the majority Hutus and the minority Tutsi. From April to mid-July of 1994, the international community did little (an identical response to the violence in Yugoslavia) as the Hutus wiped out around five hundred thousand to eight hundred thousand Tutsis.

It is reasonable to rank the biblical Conquest among these recent historic events in the discussion of most atrocious events of history, and so this thesis will thoroughly examine the differences between the indiscriminate genocides of recent history and the war Yahweh waged with His people in the Old Testament.

Christian Pacifism and the Just War Theory

A thorough understanding of the origins of both Christian pacifism and the just war theory begins with knowledge of the culture of the early Church. During the first centuries of the Church, "Christian involvement within the affairs of the State was limited…There were some Christians in civil service (…Luke 3:14, Mat 8:5-8) and the centurion Cornelius was used to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 10:35-48))."[116] Since the Roman government was in the business of oppressing the members of the early Church, "it would have been incongruous for a Christian to join the military and support the Empire's oppression of other Christians," so "the extent to which Christians were involved…was generally limited to praying for the emperor (1 Ti 2:1-2)."[117] Christians of this time, therefore, were pacifist in nature, as demonstrated by the

[115] Ibid.

[116] Harold Palmer, *Christian Pacifism and Just War Theory: Discipleship and the Ethics of War, Violence and the Use of Force* (TellerBooks, 2016), 17.

[117] Ibid.

thoughts of significant figures such as Origen (who, in response to accusations of Christians being bad citizens, replied "'We defend the empire better in another way.'"[118]), Tertullian, and Clement of Alexandria. This changed, however, with the conversion of Constantine in 312 AD, resulting in Christianity becoming the official religion of the Roman Empire. Because of this shift, military service and association lost its association with Christian persecution, and the members of the Church during this period of time therefore found no issue with military association. Moreover, they became aware of the necessity of "defending the Empire from northern invasions," thereby maintaining peace and/or reestablishing justice.[119] The Council of Arles and other figures of this time, such as St. Athanasius of Alexandria, also demonstrated this change in thought, and starting with Saint Augustine, began developing the Christian just war theory. According to Augustine of Hippo, war was a necessary consequence of human sin and evil, and God had instituted civil government to punish evil and defend the innocent with force when all else fails. Christians, he deduced, are governed by two worlds: the kingdom of God, under the law of grace; but also the government, ruled by the law of justice. Therefore, while a Christian must forgive his/her "enemy," he/she is to "actively seek [justice]," for the enemy is not free from the punishment of his/her wrongdoing. Augustine dismissed thoughts of contradiction to Jesus' command to "turn the other cheek (Matthew 5:39)" by arguing that this command is to be applied to the inner self; outwardly, war is a means of peace.[120] Aquinas further developed Augustine's argument, establishing conditions for a just war, including: 1) a

[118] Origen, *Contra Celsum, VIII*, 68, 73.
[119] Harold, *Christian Pacifism and Just War Theory,* 17-18.
[120] Ibid., 17-18.

legitimate authority with 2) a just case and a 3) right intention, and—centuries later—4) the exhaustion of all non-violent options and 5) a reasonable prospect of success.[121]

Over time, churches accepted and further developed either the just war theory or Christian pacifism. The Catholic Church, for example, was responsible for the addition of the latter two conditions for a just war mentioned above, requiring the following for a war to be called just: 1) the war must be waged by "a legitimate civil authority (*i.e.*, a State, in accordance with Romans 13), 2) there must be just cause "(*i.e.*, self-defense of the innocent…redressing an injury, punishing evil, [or] restoring territory unjustly seized)" and 3) right intention (to establish peace, not conquer or revolt).[122] War must be 4) the last resort and have 5) reasonable prospect of success, 6) grave damage from the aggressor, and 7) a production of evil proportional to that which is eliminated.[123]

The Eastern Orthodox Church, on the other hand, has no ethical teaching for just war in the writings of the Church's fathers, for they "never elaborate[d] a just war theory and instead [took] a pro-peace stance on the question of war," thereby deeming war as evil in all scenarios, though, the lesser of evils in some cases.[124] As a whole, "The Anglican Church…has never articulated a just war theory," though "some [Anglicans] accept Augustine's just war theory; others adhere to a strictly pacifist position."[125] Memmonites and Quakers, arising from the Protestant Reformation, embraced pacifism; Memmonites believed that Jesus' commands to love in Matthew 5:44 are also commands against participation in military commands, and the Quakers

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[121] Harold, *Christian Pacifism and Just War Theory,* 20.
[122]Harold, *Christian Pacifism and Just War Theory,* 21-22.
[123] Ibid., 22.
[124] Harold, *Christian Pacifism and Just War Theory*, 23.
[125] Ibid., 25.

totally committed themselves to non-violence, as shown in the "Declaration from the harmless and innocent people of God, called Quakers" to King Charles II in 1660:

> And he that hath commanded us that we shall not swear at all (Matt. v.34), hath also commanded us that we shall not kill (Matt. v.21), so that we can neither kill men, nor swear for or against them. And this is both our principle and practice, and hath been from the beginning, so that if we suffer, as suspected to take up arms or make war against any, it is without ground from us; for it neither is, nor ever was in our hearts, since we owned the truth of God; neither shall we ever do it, because it is contrary to the spirit of Christ, his doctrine, and the practice of his apostles, even contrary to him for whom we suffer all things, and endure all things.[126]

Augustine's just war theory is also rejected within the Evangelical Church, for it holds that because of such a theory, as American theologian and pastor Greg Boyd puts it, "Jesus' radical teachings get divorced from actual behavior."[127]

The just war position begins, predictably, in the Old Testament, specifically the declaration of war issued in Deuteronomy 20, setting "the general tone for Israel's relations with her enemies[,]…one of war and destruction rather than self-sacrificial submission and love."[128] Palmer finds that Jericho, however, was not an identified enemy of Israel, yet the great city's walls came crumbling down and everything inside destroyed. Palmer concludes, then, that the fault of Jericho was simply being in the way: that is, "they inhabited in the land that God promised to the Israelites."[129] It is well established that Israel in the Old Testament partook in severe violence against the vast majority of his enemies in the land promised to God's people. In the New Testament, the Palmer points to a particular event during Jesus' arrest at the Garden of Gethsemane: Peter's cutting off of a servant's ear. Though Jesus commanded Peter to put his

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[126] Dennis W. Mills, "The Quaker Peace Testimony." Accessed October 10, 2019. http://quaker.org/legacy/minnfm/peace/.

[127] Gregory Boyd, *The Myth of a Christian Nation* (Zondervan, 2005), 205.

[128] Harold, *Christian Pacifism and Just War Theory,* 29.

[129] Ibid.

sword away, for "all who take the sword will perish by the sword" (Matt. 26.52, ESV), just war theorists, according to Palmer, argue that Peter was not rebuked for carrying a sword, only for striking with it. If Jesus "eschewed violence, why did he even permit his disciple to carry [a sword]?"[130] In response to the Pacifist objection that just war theorists draw this argument from silence, Palmer writes that Jesus did not tell Peter to discard his sword (i.e. completely rid of it), but rather to put it back into his place, therefore implying that he did not condemn the possession of a weapon but rather "Jesus' command indicates that there is a time and place for violence, but the arrest scene at Gethsemane was not one of them."[131] The definition of the Greek word μάχαιρα (*machaira*) can be defined as any of the following: a large knife, used for killing animals and cutting up the flesh; a small sword, as distinguished from a large sword; curved sword, for a cutting stroke; or a straight sword, for thrusting. Of these, the just war theory agrees most with the latter two definitions. Just war theorists, according to Palmer, also point to God's use of (i.e. Jesus' and/or the apostles encounters with) soldiers throughout the New Testament. John the Baptist came into contact with soldiers but never commanded them to lay down their weapons, rather he warned against violent oppression of the people. In fact, Jesus praises a Roman centurion for his faith, and Cornelius, one of the first Gentile converts, was also a Roman centurion. None of these characters are ever rebuked because of their warring lifestyle, therefore implying that military service is, in fact, compatible with the kingdom of God.

While the just war theory points to the Old Testament commands of war and destruction as evidence of a military compatibility with God's kingdom, Pacifists claim that only the Old Testament's *principles* are applicable to modern Christians, not the specific commands, for

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[130] Harold, *Christian Pacifism and Just War Theory,* 31.
[131] Harold, *Christian Pacifism and Just War Theory,* 31.

example, calling for genocide and destruction. They point to the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15, which declared that Mosaic Law did not pertain to Christians. Moreover, "Israel was a theocratic society,"[132] commanded to destroy her enemies as their punishment for their sin; these commands came from God through prophets like Moses. These commands were for a specific people at a specific time, a time that has long since passed. The Old Testament, in fact, displays principles such as forgiveness and love, principles that are applicable and ought to be followed today because "they are reflections of God's unchanging character."[133] Though God commanded the destruction of His enemies, He never (and, therefore, neither did the prophets) taught His people to hate their enemies. In fact, the Old Testament contains teachings of helping one's enemy, for example, Solomon writes that "if your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink" (Prov. 25.21). The Pacifist argument claims that though Jesus said in "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy'" (Matt. 5:43), "Hate your enemy" was never commanded by any of the prophets. Instead, this command was, according to Friar Cornelius a Lapide in his Gospel of Matthew Commentary,[134] "said by the Scribes who interpreted the Law. For they, because they found in Leviticus 19:18, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor,' or 'thy friend,' as the Vulgate translates, inferred from thence that they should hate their enemies." Palmer notes that Pacifists also define a difference between commands and laws, for example, "God did not issue a 'law' to wipe out the Midianites (Num 25) as he gave, for example, a law to keep the Sabbath (Exo 20:8). The former was a command for a particular generation in a particular place at a particular time; the latter was intended as a

[132] Ibid., 41.
[133] Harold, *Christian Pacifism and Just War Theory,* 39-40.
[134] From the Patristic Bible Commentary.

universal law to govern all of the Israelites."[135] The command was a God-made decision to destroy Israel's enemies as punishment for their sins; therefore, His command extended to Israel and Israel only. "The Bible never grants Christians (or Jews) a general injunction to make war on or destroy the wicked. Rather…death is the natural consequence of sin, and God uses the Israelites…to carry out this consequence."[136] In summary, these Old Testament commands governed a nation; Christ's commands, on the other hand, govern the individual.

In the New Testament, Pacifists claim that Jesus never condoned the possession of a weapon, especially among His followers, and, therefore, the definition of the *machaira* that Peter was carrying in the garden of Gethsemane follows the first definition: "a large knife, used for killing animals and cutting up flesh."[137] In response to the just war opposition that every major Bible translation defines *machaira* as "sword," Pacifists argue, "*machaira*…is erroneously translated as 'sword' in translations colored by the erroneous doctrinal presuppositions of the translators."[138] Using Wesley's interpretation, Palmer indicates that Pacifists hold that what Jesus meant in Luke 22:38 was that His apostles obviously did not catch His point made earlier in verses thirty-six and thirty-seven; His phrase—"that's enough!"—was a reprimand for His disciples' lack of understanding shown by their literal interpretation of His words. Furthermore, two swords would have been sorely insufficient for a group of thirteen against a mob led by Judas. Palmer also notes Pacifist defenses against other verses in the New Testament that give the impression of Jesus condoning warfare and violence before highlighting verses in the Bible that endorse Pacifism. For example, in the Beatitudes (found in Matthew 5), "Jesus overrules the

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[135] Harold, *Christian Pacifism and Just War Theory,* 41.
[136] Harold, *Christian Pacifism and Just War Theory,* 42.
[137] Ibid., 31.
[138] Harold, *Christian Pacifism and Just War Theory*, 32.

principle of *lex talionis*, which was established in the Mosaic Law ("if any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn…)."[139] Thus, Jesus made it clear that retaliation, though the Mosaic Law allowed it (albeit with restrictions),[140] had no part in His kingdom. In response to just war theorists who argue, in this case, that Jesus did not overrule the *lex talionis* but rather clarified exceptions to it, Pacifists say that Jesus *fulfilled* the Old Testament law, and that "to interpret *lex talionis* as a law of continuous application would be a contradiction of Christ's fulfillment of the Old Testament law when He died on the cross."[141] As for who is to enact vengeance, Pacifists maintain Paul's words in Romans 13 that God instituted the existing authorities and, therefore, appointed them to undertake the punishment of offenders.

Characteristics of God

An understanding of God's attributes and characteristics is essential for an intensive study into God's acts in the Old Testament and Jesus' acts in the New Testament. In the discussions of Pacifism and just war or the God in the Canaanite genocide compared to Jesus on the cross, some attributes of God are brought to attention more than others, one of these being justice. The Old Testament is overflowing with descriptions of God's wrath and justice, given by God Himself or God-inspired authors. "It is mine to avenge; I will repay. In due time their foot will slip; their day of disaster is near and their doom rushes upon them" (Deut. 32.35). The prophets especially speak of God's judgement, both on Israel and enemy nations: "See,

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[139] Ibid., 51.

[140] According to Richard B Hays' commentary on the Beatitudes, *lex talionis* may have served to restrict the degree of vengeance against a wrongdoing, i.e., if an eye was destroyed, the most the avenger could do is destroy the offender's eye.

[141] Harold, *Christian Pacifism and Just War Theory,* 53.

the Lord is coming out of his dwelling to punish the people of the earth for their sins" (Isaiah 26.21). David wrote of God, "You were to Israel a forgiving God, though you punished their misdeeds" (Psalm 99.8). Clearly, not even God's chosen people got away with committing sin.

It is also understood, however, that God is gracious and merciful, as David writes, "The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. The Lord is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made" (Psalm 145.8.9). Jesus' ministry in the New Testament is filled with a concept of grace and forgiveness that was radically different to Pharisee thought and Israeli tradition. For example, Jesus' final words to the woman caught in adultery were, "'Then neither do I condemn you,'" … 'Go now and leave your life of sin'" (John 8.11). To the man lowered by his friends from the roof of the house Jesus was teaching in, He said, "'Son, your sins are forgiven'" (Mark 2.5).

In order to first say that God is just, A.W. Tozer defines what justice is: it is "indistinguishable from righteousness in the Old Testament…the same root word with variations according to the part of speech used. It means *uprightness* or *rectitude.* …To say that God is just is to say that God is equitable, that He is morally equal."[142] Judgement, then, is the application of justice to a moral situation, whether favorable or unfavorable, depending on if God finds the judged individual's ways equal or unequal. However, Tozer notes that justice is part of who God *is*, not something that obliges Him to act in a certain way, for "Nothing ever requires God to do anything. If you have a god who is required to do anything, then you have a weak god who has to bow his neck to some yolk and yield himself to pressure from the outside."[143] This, then, raises the question: how can God be just and justify a sinner? To answer this, Tozer discusses the

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[142] A.W. Tozer, *The Attributes of God: A Journey into the Father's Heart* (Camp Hill, Pennsylvania: Christian Publications Incorporated, 1997), 60.

[143] Ibid, 61.

unitary nature of God; that is, while a human is "composed of spirit, soul, and body" and can, therefore, be at war with different parts of him/herself, God is one and only one, so His attributes "never quarrel with each other;" therefore, "When God sends a man to die, mercy and pity and compassion and wisdom and power concur."[144] Furthermore, since Christ endured unbearable suffering and death on a cross, thus taking upon Himself the just punishment of sin, He is capable of pardoning a sinner; it was He, after all, that paid the sinner's debt, therefore changing what Tozer calls one's "moral situation." This is not to say, however, that God excuses sinners; rather, "When God looks at a sinner who still loves his sin and rejects the mystery of atonement [i.e. salvation through faith], justice condemns him to die. When God looks at a sinner who has accepted the blood of the ever-lasting covenant, justice sentences him to live."[145]

Wierenga notes two understandings of the claim of God's goodness, and references Aguinas to describe one understanding, that goodness is something desirable and "a thing is desirable only in so far as it is perfect;"[146] therefore, God is "the highest good"[147] because He encompasses all perfections. The other understanding of goodness is an expression of moral judgement: "God is morally good or morally perfect."[148] Wierenga then expands on what it means for God to be morally good, including, for example, that intentions and character are relevant to goodness.

Arthur W. Pink discusses multiple characteristics of God, including His immutability, holiness, patience, mercy, and wrath. The immutability of God, he says, is that God is immutable—i.e., unchangeable—in His essence; "His nature and being are infinite, and so

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[144] Tozer, *The Attributes of God: A Journey into the Father's Heart,* 64-65, 69.
[145] Ibid., 70.
[146] Thomas Aquinnas, *Summa Theologia,* Ia. 5, I.
[147] Wierenga, *The Nature of God: An Inquiry into Divine Attributes,* 202.
[148] Ibid., 202.

subject to no mutations. He cannot change for the better, for He is already perfect; and being perfect, He cannot change for the worse."[149] Because He is immutable in essence, He is also immutable in His attributes and His counsel.[150] God's holiness, according to Pink is manifested in His works, that is, His actions (for everything He originally created He declared "good"); His law, which, according to Romans 7:12, is holy; and the cross, which demonstrates God's abhorrence of sin. Pink also establishes God's holiness as a reason for the divine inspiration of Scripture, for, "An ineffably holy God, who has the utmost abhorrence of all sin, was never invented by any of Adam's fallen descendants!"[151] He could not have been invented them, for "Their conception of His character is altogether one-sided. They fondly hope that His mercy will override everything else. …They think only of a 'god' patterned after their own evil hearts."[152] God's patience, Pink says, is an extension of His mercy. God waited on Pharaoh, granting Him multiple opportunities to change his heart, and so God was merciful to Pharaoh despite ultimately bringing Egypt to her knees. The Israelites forty-year period of wandering in the wilderness served two purposes: 1) as God said, to ensure that no person that grumbled with the bad report from the spies about the Promised Land would live to enter the Land, and 2) to allow the sin of the Amorites become "complete" (Genesis 15:16). This second purpose is a clear display of God's patience: both with His people and with other parts of His creation.

Pink describes three types of mercy: general, special, and sovereign. God's general mercy is extended to all of His creation; special mercy is limited to the children of men; and sovereign

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[149] Pink, *The Attributes of God: A Solemn and Blessed Contemplation of Some of the Wondrous and Lovely Perfections of the Divine Character,* 32.

[150] Here, Pink uses "counsel" to mean God's will.

[151] Pink, *The Attributes of God: A Solemn and Blessed Contemplation of Some of the Wondrous and Lovely Perfections of the Divine Character*, 38.

[152] Ibid., 39.

mercy is reserved for those who are the heirs of salvation.[153] As for mercy seemingly shown to the wicked, Pink responds that such mercy is "of a **temporal** nature; that is to say, they are confined strictly to this present life. There will be no mercy extended to them beyond the grave.[154] This is due to His holiness, for "God has often forgiven sinners, but He never forgives sin,"[155] which He despises.

The last chapter of Pink's book discusses the wrath of God, which He argues must exist because "God is holy…He hates sin; and because He hates sin, His anger burns against the sinner: Psa 7:11."[156] The wrath of God, then, actually reveals the *righteousness* of God, for, "How could He who is the Sum of all excellency look with equal satisfaction upon virtue and vice, wisdom and holy? How could He who is infinitely holy disregard sin and refuse to manifest His 'severity' (Rom. 9:12) toward it?"[157]

God is praised as a "divine warrior" in both prophetic and psalmic texts, though the former tends to define the enemy more than the latter. The prophetic texts usually "portray the divine warrior acting in the distant future rather than praising him for a past victory or supplicating his help for a contemporary battle," as the psalmic texts would.[158] Many scholars, having examined both psalmic and prophetic texts, offer a broad definition: "YHWH is identified as a divine warrior whenever he fights for or against his people."[159] An analysis of divine

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[153]Pink, *The Attributes of God: A Solemn and Blessed Contemplation of Some of the Wondrous and Lovely Perfections of the Divine Character*, 66.

[154] Pink, *The Attributes of God: A Solemn and Blessed Contemplation of Some of the Wondrous and Lovely Perfections of the Divine Character*, 66.

[155] Ibid., 38.

[156] Pink, *The Attributes of God: A Solemn and Blessed Contemplation of Some of the Wondrous and Lovely Perfections of the Divine Character*, 75.

[157] Ibid., 75.

[158] Charlie Trimm, *"YHWH Fights for Them!": The Divine Warrior in the Exodus Narrative* (Piscataway, New Jersey: Gorgias Press LLC, 2014), 35.

[159] Ibid.

warrior texts reveals that there are several trends in the motif of the divine warrior, a common one being "YHWH's march from a southern territory, the trembling of the earth and mountains, and his entrance into his house, where he is proclaimed as king."[160] The divine warrior texts also commonly describe the presence of a heavenly army, commanded by YHWH to play an active role in battles.[161] Lastly, common words associated with war—for example, the use of "arrows," as seen in Ps 18:14 and Hab 3:11—are evidence for YHWH as a divine warrior, including descriptions of His powerful arm, hand, and/or breath. These texts also assert that, "YHWH's actions and status as divine warrior display his incompatibility among the gods," resulting in universal recognition of His power.[162] Furthermore, "biblical evidence indicates that YHWH did not temporarily as a divine warrior, but permanently took on the role of the divine warrior."[163] A large number of divine warrior texts distributed throughout the Old Testament provide evidence for YHWH as a divine warrior and that His actions as divine warrior were common parts of His portrayal, for "people assumed that he would act in his role…when they called on him to fight for them like he had fought for them in the past."[164] There are links between other roles ascribed to God—including king, judge, father, and redeemer—and his role as divine warrior. Culturally, "The kings of the Ancient Near East frequently portrayed themselves as powerful warriors to legitimate their status as kings. New kings often went on military campaigns in their first year to demonstrate to their people that the gods had chosen them to be king." Though definitely not a "new" king, God embarks on a military campaign, but with a twist: while He commands His

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[160] Trimm, *"YHWH Fights for Them!"*, 36. As found in the following verses: Exod 15:1-18; Deut 33:2-5; Ps 24; Hab 3:3-7 (see Trimm's text for the exhaustive list of verses).

[161] Ibid.

[162] Trimm, *"YHWH Fights for Them!"*, 36-37. Verses that are examples are also on these pages.

[163] Ibid., 37.

[164] Trimm, *"YHWH Fights for Them!"*, 37.

heavenly army, it—and He—army fight *alongside* a human army—the Israelites. And indeed, He shows His strength and demonstrates that He was the *only* king—and God—to be followed.

Thesis Proof

The Nature of Sin

Scripture, according to Gregory A. Boyd, "With the exception of its violent portraits of God, …*always* describes God's judgement in terms of divine abandonment. For within the biblical worldview, to be separated from God is the worst thing imaginable. God's presence is the source of all that is desirable and is what the human heart longs most for."[165] It makes sense, then, that the inverse be true: if God's presence is the source of all that is desirable, then the absence of God's presence is the source of all that is *un*desirable. For example, after Samuel anointed David as the next king (for Saul had repeatedly disobeyed God), Saul experienced torment because "the Spirit of the Lord had departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord tormented him,"[166] so Saul ordered David to play the harp for him to bring him peace when the evil spirit tormented him. In fact, in looking for a specific word for punishment in the Old Testament, one will not find such a distinct word: instead, the "biblical language for judgement…refers to the *effects* of human sin, [not] to penalty or punishment that God pronounces…or 'sends.'"[167] Boyd explains, "The Hebrew words for 'wickedness' (*ra'ah*), 'sin' (*hattā't*), 'trespass' (*āwān*), and 'corruption' (*sāhat*) have the same roots as the words used to describe the *destructive effects* of these sins ('disaster,' 'trouble,' 'destruction')."[168] Therefore, the Israelites would have understood punishment not to be a response to an injustice, but rather a consequence of an action. For example, the consequence of a person letting go of a pencil is that

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[165] Gregory A. Boyd, *Cross Vision: How the Crucifixion of Jesus Makes Sense of Old Testament Violence* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2017), 149.

[166] 1 Samuel 16:14

[167] Fretheim, Terrence E. *Creation Untamed: The Bible, God, and Natural Disasters.* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2010.

[168] Boyd, *Cross Vision*, 151.

the pencil falls to the ground: this is the consequence—that is, the *effect*—of the action. Punishment, on the other hand, is a force from outside of the action that acts upon the action-doer (for example, Student 1 punches another student, Student 2. The effect of Student 1's action is that his fist feels the blow he deals to Student 2; however, the punishment is that Student 1 is suspended from school). So when, then, is the effect of one's sin felt by the sinner? The effect is felt when the sin is brought to completion, as seen in James 1:15, "Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death." There is, therefore, no need for God to punish sinners: their sin destroys themselves. To emphasis this, Boyd points to Psalm 7, a passage with a distinct depiction of Yahweh as the divine warrior:

> "If he does not relent, he will sharpen his sword; he will bend and string his bow. He has prepared his deadly weapons; he makes ready his flaming arrows. Whoever is pregnant with evil conceives trouble and gives birth to disillusionment. Whoever digs a hole and scoops it out falls into the pit they have made. The trouble they cause recoils on them; their violence comes down on their own heads."[169]

As mentioned before, Israel understood punishment as the effect of their sinful actions; perhaps this was the only understanding at that time, not that God actually punished people for their sins (as one sees in the New Testament, where people believed that illnesses and ailments were a punishment from God for some sin committed by the sick person or his/her father).

What, then, can be made of events like the tragic Canaanite genocide, for the people did not physically destroy themselves? It may be possible that the destruction was to prevent their sin from becoming complete (therefore, their death was really an act of mercy, preventing further torment that the development of their sin would bring). However, Genesis 15:16 explicitly states

[169] Ps 7:12-16

that the Israelites were not to return—and conquer—the Promised Land until the fourth generation, "for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure," thus supporting the destructive nature of sin but not the *self*-destructive nature of sin. In fact, Scripture supports a view of sin as not only self-destructive: according to John, "If you see any brother or sister commit a sin that does not lead to death, you should pray and God will give them life. I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that you should pray about that. All wrongdoing is sin, and *there is sin that does not lead to death.*"[170] Again John's writing in Revelation reveals that sin can evoke punishment that is not from one's self: "I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this scroll: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this scroll. And if anyone takes words away from this scroll of prophecy, God will take away from that person any share in the tree of life and in the Holy City, which are described in this scroll."[171] Clearly, it is the sin that brings the punishment upon the person, which does not discredit Boyd; however, the verse above suggests that sin is *not* self-destructive, for it is made clear that it is God who "will add to that person the plagues described."

It is possible, then, that sin is both self-destructive and punishment-invoking in nature. For example, in the biblical worldview, debauchery is a sin, and, from a purely physical standpoint, getting drunk causes significant harm to one's body. In this case, the sin is self-destructive: the person will, if debauchery continues, experience organ failure and potentially die. This is also the punishment of their sin. Unlike drunkenness, however, idol worship does not cause the body to self-destruct (e.g. undergo organ failure); if God did not

[170] 1 John 5:16-17, emphasis mine.
[171] Revelation 22:18-19.

bring punishment upon Israel when the nation strayed from Him, the Israelites would likely have continued in their idolatry and, therefore, ceased to fulfill the tasks God had set before them. The issue with sin being *only* self-destructive is that it forces itself to be dependent on "natural forces" (like organ system failure, for example). A person who rapes someone may not attract an STD from, though such a "natural force" is self-destructive (that is, the person made a choice and, as a result, faces self-destructive consequences). As evidenced from both Old and New Testament, anyone unrepentant of their sin will experience the wrath and destruction of God, and since natural, self-destructive forces are not consistent, there must be an "unnatural force"[172] that assists in the judgement of sinners. It is impossible, therefore, for sin to be solely self-destructive: it must also provoke the action of an "unnatural force," that is, the divine wrath and punishment of God.

Now, it is of utmost importance to stress the incorrectness of assuming that every destructive event is a consequence of someone's sin; this is the completely opposing view to the self-destructive nature of sin. For example, some believe that the tragic events of 9/11 were the punishment for America's sins. Even Jesus refutes this, rebuking "people who claimed to discern the hand of God behind disasters that came upon various groups (Luke 13:1-5) as well as afflictions that came upon individuals (John 9:1-3)."[173] Indeed, because of the law, there are some offenses that invoke punishment from an external force, which is an unnatural force; however, maintaining that external forces will always bring punishment to sinners is illogical. If an alcoholic is totally isolated on a desert (except for an unlimited supply of alcohol), he/she will experience consequences for their debauchery—a malfunctioning and failure of their body due to

[172] The use of "unnatural force" here is to mean that the punishing force is not from within the individual and, therefore, not "natural."

[173] Boyd, *Cross Vision*, 159.

poisoning. It is, then, also impossible for sin only to be able to evoke the punishment of forces outside of the sinner. Therefore, sin can both be self-destructive and provoke punishment from an external, unnatural force.

Divine Inspiration of Scripture

Introduction

Some may argue that there is no possible way that God could have commanded the destruction of His creation; however, in Deuteronomy 20, God, the theocratic ruler, explicitly commanded Israel's Conquest of the land in which the Canaanite nations dwelled, known as the "Promised Land." To say He did not, then, is to say that the authors of Scripture have lied, which in turn discredits the divine inspiration of Scripture, turning the Bible as we know it into a human book that is susceptible to both human error and bias. The argument here is clear: if Scripture is divinely inspired, then God indeed commanded the Conquest; if not, there are a few possibilities. 1) It could be that, as C.S. Cowles says, "Their [(that is, "the mediators of God's self-disclosure under the old covenant, often prophets)] understanding of the 'truth' may have been flawed,"[174] or 2) the Canaanite Conquest is to serve as a warning to all who read of its accounts—that is, this is what happens when the words of God are misinterpreted: utter chaos, destruction, and shedding of innocent blood—in other words, genocide. There is a third possibility, one that, if true, exposes the violent tendencies of the young nation Israel, and that is the curse of Canaan, found in Genesis chapter nine. If the Bible is not divinely inspired, then this story could have been conjured, along with the curse, to serve as justification of the destruction of Canaan's descendants. If all of Scripture is divinely inspired, however, then it

[174] C.S. Cowles, et al., *Show Them No Mercy: Four Views on God and the Canaanite Genocide* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2003), 40.

goes without saying that the commands concerning war in Deuteronomy truly came from God, as the Scriptures say, and that He was expecting Israel to obey His commands as they entered the Promised Land.

The Story of the Bible: A Drastic Deviation from Culture and Human Nature

According to Arthur W. Pink, one can be sure of Scripture's divine inspiration by looking at a specific attribute of God: His holiness. It is clear that God hates all sin, as seen by the fact that "for one sin Moses was excluded from Canaan."[175] Pink argues that the unregenerate's conception of God is one-sided, for he hopes not only that God's mercy will spare him from punishment for his actions but that God will serve justice to whoever wrongs him. This is a flaw in humans that even Shakespeare points out when he writes, "Thou justice by thy plea, consider this, that in the course of justice none of us should see salvation." However, God does not operate according to this pattern that man has created in his heart. God indiscriminately punishes all sin, a concept that depraved mankind has difficulty bearing, for it spells doom for every creature on earth. If Scripture were not divinely inspired, it would be susceptible to the influence of man's depiction of a god "patterned after [his] own evil heart."[176] One, therefore, would read about a drastically different God, one that shows mercy to the authors but rains burning sulfur down on the authors' enemies. The Bible indeed tells of stories of God raining down sulfur on enemies of God's people, but it also speaks of judgement of that same people whose enemies were destroyed, thus making it clear that no one who sins escapes God's judgement. Scripture, therefore, has to be divinely inspired. No human would write about the kind of God found in the

[175] Arthur W. Pink, *The Attributes of God: A Solemn and Blessed Contemplation of Some of the Wondrous and Lovely Perfections of the Divine Character* (Swengel, Pennsylvania: Reiner Publications, 1966), 38.

[176] Ibid.

Old Testament. He is simply a God whose nature and character have superhuman origins that are a complete deviation from the pattern of man's wickedness.

A thorough investigation of both Biblical and other Ancient Near East texts reveals the nonstandardness of Scripture in comparison to other traditions. For example, most, if not, all ANE cultures told a flood story, and curses were very much a part of life during this time. According to Anne Marie Kitz:

> "Curses were used proactively and reactively. They were principally protective [and] dispelled malevolent forces and kept enemies at bay. But they were also the cause of misfortune, illness, [and] depression. …Among Akkadian speakers there was the *āšipu*. He sought to benefit those suffering from the effects of curses…disease, illness and any other consequence attributable to misfortune and maledictions. …On the opposite end of the spectrum was the *kaššāpu/kaššaptu*. This was also a professional curser, but he or she cursed for nefarious reasons."[177]

So, with these similar aspects, what *really* makes the Bible different from other Ancient Near East stories and traditions? Answer: they may be similar in plot, but they are drastically different in theme, characters, and even details. The Flood (discussed in the historical context of this thesis), for example, is a story told by multiple Ancient Near East traditions, including the multiple Mesopotamian traditions. However, significant differences exist between these traditions and the Bible, beginning with the reason for the Flood: God sent the flood because humanity had become so evil that "The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled;"[178] Enlil (one of the gods in an Old Babylonian Flood account), on the other hand, sent the flood because the humans had become so populous that they began disturbing his sleep. The former deals with a severe problem; the latter deals with a mere annoyance. The conclusion of these stories also differs from the Biblical tradition: of all the

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[177] Anne Marie Kitz, *Cursed Are You! The Phenomenology of Cursing in Cuneiform and Hebrew Texts* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2014), 3-4.

[178] Gen 6:6

known accounts of the flood, only the Bible's does not conclude with the immortalization of the "flood hero,"[179] and while the gods expressed sympathy and regret for their actions, God expressed no regret for sending the Flood; rather, quite the opposite happened, as mentioned earlier in Gen 6:6. Clearly the biblical Flood, though influenced by these earlier traditions, tells a drastically different story.

God to us: "These are my words"

The Bible provides evidence within itself that it is divinely inspired: Paul writes to Timothy, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."[180] It is important to note Paul's whole inclusiveness of all Scripture, even the horrible accounts of violence and genocide in the Old Testament, these, too, according to Paul, are divinely inspired. Another thing to note is the use of nouns such as "witness" or verbs such as "testify" by the authors of the Bible's books; John, in the first chapter of his gospel, writes, "There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light."[181] In the last chapter, he reiterates this assertion: "This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true."[182] In his final book—also the final book of the Bible—he writes that it is "the revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who testifies to everything he saw—that

[179] That is, the human who survives the flood.
[180] 2 Timothy 3:16
[181] Jn 1:6-8
[182] Jn 21:24

is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ."[183] These authors were sent from God to witness, testify, and record in writing the truth that they had received from God; therefore, their writing had to have been divinely inspired, because they were sent by the divine God to write His divine words. The prophets (with the addition of a few other characters, such as Moses) also appear to have received divine inspiration, for written multiple times in these books are phrases such as "This is what the Lord says."[184] They claimed to have heard directly from God, and they presented messages of doom and restoration that were not their own but were actually God's to His people the Israelites.

However, one may argue that anyone can claim to have heard from God or some other supernatural being, and he/she would be correct, for even during Rome's reign there were many insurgents who claimed to be prophets and, as a result, gained considerable followership. What, then, makes the Bible's claims different? Perhaps one can look at the fulfillment of Scripture to understand this. The Old Testament, especially in the prophets, is full of promises that are left unfulfilled at the conclusion of this section of the Bible. Then, Jesus stepped into the story, and not only did He fulfill the law, as He said He came to do, but He also fulfilled every prophecy made about Him in the Old Testament. According to Walter C. Kaiser:

> "Few will dispute that there are at least six direct Messianic predictions in the Pentateuch: Genesis 3:15; 9:27; 12:2-3; 49:8-12; Numbers 24:15-19; and Deuteronomy 18:15-18. Eve was promised in Genesis 3:15 that a male descendant from her line would crush the head of the serpent, i.e., the Devil himself, and win completely over evil, as the prince of evil, Satan, would be finally vanquished. Then in Genesis 9:27, God would come and live/dwell in the tents of Shem, the Semitic peoples [that is, the Jewish Semitic people, since it is Abraham that God calls to] be a blessing for all the nations on earth in Genesis 12:3. This promise could be narrowed down even further for the tribe of Judah. Son number four of Jacob would be the one God would invest with the scepter of ruling and

[183] Rev 1:1-2

[184] For verse references, see the above section, "Foreshadowing Destruction: Noah's Curse on Canaan," where I make the point that Noah's curse was not an inspiration from God because it lacked a phrase identical or similar to "This is what the Lord says."

> the one from whom the line of Messiah would descend (Gen 49:8-12). In fact, this coming one from Judah would be 'A star [that would] come out of Jacob, a scepter [that would] rise out of Israel' (Num 24:17). Moreover, the Messiah who would come would also be a 'prophet' (Deut 18:15) as well as a 'king' (Ps 72)."[185]

Moreover, there are Old Testament prophecies of what Jesus will do and what will happen to Him that came to pass. For example, Micah 5:2 prophecies that out of Bethlehem "will come…one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times," and in the Gospels one sees that Jesus was born in the town of Bethlehem. Isaiah 7:14 predicts the virgin birth; sure enough, Jesus was born of a virgin, Mary. Zechariah 9:9 speaks of Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem "on a colt, the foal of a donkey;" in the Gospels, Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey, and "A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, 'Hosanna to the Son of David!' 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!' 'Hosanna in the highest heaven!'"[186] There are still other prophecies, for example, that the Messiah will be rejected by His own people (Isaiah 53:3), betrayed by one of His followers (Psalm 41:9, which Jesus quotes when saying that Judas' betrayal "is to fulfill this passage of Scripture"[187]), will become thirsty (Psalm 22:15[188]), and have none of His bones broken (Psalm 34:20[189]). The Hebrew Bible is believed by some to have originated in the 6th century BC, by others in the 2nd century BC, but regardless of which date is more accurate, there is still a significant amount of time before the arrival of Jesus in the first century AD. These prophecies were not something added on to Scripture as Jesus walked on earth and did these

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[185] Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Jesus in the Old Testament.* August 9, 2011. https://gordonconwell.edu/blog/jesus-in-the-old-testament/ (accessed November 27, 2019).

[186] Matthew 21:8-9

[187] John 13:18

[188] The fulfillment of this passage is found in John 19:28.

[189] Like Psalm 22:15, this passage is also found fulfilled in John 19 (v. 36).

things; they were true predictions of a man and events that would not come for centuries. Thus, the fulfillment of prophecy supports the divine inspiration of Scripture.

Now, some books of the Bible are believed to be written much later than the events they describe occurred, so the question arises as to why these books would be divinely inspired, to which the simple answer is: oral tradition. Before a story or legend was recorded in written (usually on a tablet, as was done for the law Moses received from God), it was passed on orally; before Moses could *write* the law, he had to *receive* the law from God, who *spoke* it to him. Stories such as Noah's curse on Canaan and the Flood were passed down orally likely for many generations before finally being written down, so how did these stories stay divinely inspired, for there's a possibility that, like a game of telephone, the story may have been passed on incorrectly, resulting in a final, corrupted message. The answer to this question depends on two things: 1) the time of the creation of each story and 2) a culture of accurate storytelling. Eventually the stories preserved by oral tradition were written down, but the time between the creation of the story and its actual recording in writing is unknown. If there was a long gap of time, the tradition may have been harder to preserve accurately, but the recorded writing of a tradition created a short time ago would likely be significantly more accurate to the original tradition. Even if that does not hold, the accuracy of the storytellers can be counted on, for the preserving of myths, legends, and the like through oral tradition was a common practice, and it was (for many cultures and for a long time) the only means of preserving said myths and legends, thereby obliging the storytellers to be accurate enough to maintain the message of each story.

Conclusion

The Bible is indeed divinely inspired because 1) in many passages various authors note that "This is what the Lord says" or that they received word from God and they stand as witnesses to testify as to what they have heard or seen and 2) the story the Bible as a whole tells is one that completely deviates from standard culture and even human nature. Granted, there are elements in the Bible that can be found in other Ancient Near East religions, but these, as shown, are ultimately similar in plot but drastically different in theme, active characters, and details. As for human nature, humans desire justice for other people's wrongs while receiving only mercy for their own wrongs. This is not the story told in the Bible. That story is a story of intolerance of sin and a God who does not conveniently punish people for someone else but rather judges all for their sin, regardless of any acts of righteous in their lifetime, which, to God "are like filthy rags."[190] Indeed, this is a story that no human would ever dare to create on his own if he wished to promote his religious beliefs to popular thought. This, therefore, is the evidence for the divine inspiration of Scripture: it would be nonsensical for someone in the Ancient Near East to conjure a story like the Bible's with all its deviations and expect it to gain a following. If an author wanted to gain credibility or following, he would write a story that closely resembles or is nearly identical to the already existing stories of his time. The Bible uses the same ideas as stories in the Ancient Near East, but the concept and theme are drastically different; the only feasible explanation is that the text was inspired, in fact, divinely inspired.

[190] Isaiah 64:6.

Examination of the Old Testament

Acts of Wrath in the Old Testament

To examine all instances of violent wrath in the Old Testament would prove irrelevant and cause this thesis to become thoroughly exhaustive, so the cases of violent wrath have been narrowed down to three events in which it appears that God was actively involved: the Flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, and the Conquest.

Foreshadowing Destruction: Noah's Curse on Canaan

Though Moses is traditionally held to be the author of the Pentateuch,[191] there is a significant amount of uncertainty as to when the books of the Pentateuch were written and finally compiled. In Deuteronomy chapter five, Moses summoned all Israel and told them of the statutes and rules that God gave to him on Mount Sinai, which verses forty-four through forty-six of the previous chapter preface:

> "This is the law that Moses set before the people of Israel. These are the testimonies, the statutes, and the rules, which Moses spoke to the people of Israel when they came out of Egypt, beyond the Jordan in the valley opposite Bethpeor, in the land of Sihon the king of the Amorites, who lived at Heshbon, whom Moses and the people of Israel defeated when they came out of Egypt."

While not all the law is found repeated here, the Ten Commandments are repeated, along with other words of the Lord that Moses received concerning Israel's duties upon their entrance into the Promised Land, a warning against idolatry and not to "forget the Lord your God by not keeping his commandments and his rules and his statutes,"[192] observations of the Sabbatical Year and the Passover, and the infamous law concerning warfare. While some claim that Deuteronomy 4:44—"This is the law that Moses set before the people of Israel"—is evidence for

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[191] The first five books of the Old Testament: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.
[192] Deut. 8:11

Mosaic authorship, this verse does not say that this is the law that Moses wrote before the people of Israel; He simply *set* it before the people, which can be done orally or in writing. Since, according to Deuteronomy 5:1, Moses summoned all Israel and spoke to them, it can be inferred that the law set before the people was Moses passing down the law orally to the people of Israel. But although the assumption that the entire law was written at this point in Biblical history cannot be made, it holds that because the laws were observed even after Moses' death, they had been preserved orally. In fact, the Pentateuch's books are believed to have been written much after the events described in them. For example, according to Britannica, "An early edition of Deuteronomy as it exists today has been identified with the book of the Law discovered in the Temple of Jerusalem about 622 BC (2 Kings 22:8; 2 Chronicles 34:15)[,]…corresponding roughly to chapters 5–26 and 28 of Deuteronomy."[193] Despite this fact, however, the laws Moses received were still observed in the time following his death but preceding the writing of these books, a feat accomplishable only through oral tradition of the law. The Conquest of the Promised Land, then, was not grounded on a newly invoked idea; rather, they were founded on the commands and law made available through the generations by oral tradition.

These commands, given first to Moses, were extremely specific in regards to who was to be destroyed completely, who was to be offered peace, and who/what was to be spared from each city or nation. It is interesting to note that the Canaanites had already been cursed long before God included them in His "doomsday list."[194] The Canaanites, as their name implies, are the descendants of Canaan, who was the son of Ham, the son of Noah and brother of Shem and

[193] The other books of the Pentateuch have the following approximate dates: Genesis and Exodus—three literary traditions have been identified for these two books: the Yahwist, Elohist, and Priestly strains, written as early as 950 BC, 900-700 BC, and the 5th century BC, respectively.

[194] That is, the list of nations found in Deut. 7:1-5.

Japheth. This first curse on Canaan is found in Genesis chapter nine. Ham saw Noah passed out and lying naked in his tent, but instead of giving his father due respect and covering him, he told his brothers, Shem and Japheth. These two then walked into their father's tent backwards to clothe their father, who woke up, realized what had happened, and blessed Shem and Japheth for their reverence. However, Noah cursed not Ham but one of his sons, Canaan, the father of the Canaanites, who, according to Scripture, God commanded His people, Israel, to destroy.

There are three important things to note regarding Genesis 9: 1) the fact that Canaan was cursed when Ham was the offender, 2) the severity of the punishment, and 3) God's fulfillment of a mere mortal's prophecy generations later in the Conquest.

Noah's choice of offspring to curse leaves a couple possible implications: 1) Canaan was Ham's firstborn and so was the primary inheritor of the punishment for Ham's offense; 2) perhaps Ham loved Canaan more than he did his other sons—in this case, cursing Canaan would bring great humiliation, pain, and sorrow to Ham, and Canaan's esteemed position would be humbled generations later in the annihilation of his descendants; and 3) Canaan "just happened" to become the unfortunate recipient of Noah's curse as Noah was coming out of a drunken state. Although quite reasonable, these suggestions lack any substantial textual evidence to support them.

A fourth possibility exists that not only satisfies the present question but can also provide evidence for God's mercy in the Old Testament. Ham had a total of four sons; one was cursed, but the other three were left alone. In fact, part of the genealogy in Genesis 10 tells of the prosperity of one of Ham's sons, Cush: "Cush fathered Nimrod; he [Nimrod] was the first on earth to be a mighty man. He was a mighty hunter before the Lord. Therefore it is said, "Like

Nimrod a mighty hunter before the Lord. The beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. From that land he went into Assyria and built Nineveh, Rehoboth-Ir, Calah, and Resen between Nineveh and Calah; that is the great city."[195] Canaan may have been cursed, but Cush's offspring were far from weak; furthermore, it was Cush who built Nineveh, a city that was condemned to destruction because of their sinful ways but shown mercy the moment that the inhabitants repented. While it is Noah who technically extended this mercy to Ham—for the curse was a prophecy issued by Noah with no command from God to do so—God, in fulfilling Noah's prophecy, honors this act of mercy by commanding the total destruction of only Canaan's descendants.

There is a fifth possibility, one that is supported by more evidence than the other four. According to the *IVP Bible Background Commentary of the Old Testament*, "Ham's indiscreet action need not be seen as the 'cause' for the curse, only the occasion that evoked it. Compare, for example, when Isaac asked Esau to prepare a meal so that he could bless him; the meal was not the cause of blessing, it only created a suitable environment for it."[196] Genesis 10:6, however, reveals that Canaan was not Ham's only son: he had three other sons (Cush, Put, and Egypt), each appearing to have had the same chance of being cursed by Noah. The *IVP Commentary*, however, provides an answer as to why Canaan was chosen: "The biblical writer has no need to preserve the whole [story]—he merely chooses those sections that are pertinent to his point and relevant to his readers, since *the Canaanites were the Hamites with whom Israel was most familiar*."[197] The writer, then, adds an element to this story: the Israelites were most

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[195] Gen. 9:8-12, *English Standard Version.*

[196] John H. Walton, et al., *IVP Bible Background Commentary Old Testament* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 40.

[197] Ibid., emphasis mine.

familiar with the Canaanites because the Canaanites were the people they encountered—and conquered—in the Promised Land. It makes sense, then, that this passage tells of a curse on Canaan, because Canaan's descendants truly were brought to ruin, while the Shemites and Japheth's descendants lived on in other parts of the world. Some may still be wondering, however, why such a severe punishment? The JPS Torah Commentary provides an answer, saying of Gen 9:21 ("he became drunk and lay uncovered inside his tent"), "The act [of uncovering oneself] is associated with shame and with loss of human dignity."[198] Evidence of this fact can be found in Genesis chapter three, where, upon eating the fruit, Adam and Eve realized they were naked and clothed themselves, and, when God entered the garden and asked why they were hiding, Adam replied, "'I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.'"[199] Clearly, exposing oneself or seeing someone exposed was a disgusting act, for even in Exodus God commands Moses, "And do not go up to my altar on steps, or your private parts may be exposed."[200] This clarifies why what Ham did could be seen as well-deserving of a curse, for Ham not only saw his father uncovered but also did not cover him, which was, according to David A. Baer and Robert P. Gordon, "a serious lapse of filial obligation on Ham's part."[201] They then explain what this obligation was and where it came from:

> "This obligation is clearly spelled out in the Ugaritic Aqhat epic, where one of the duties of the son towards his father is specifically stated to be 'to take his hand in drunkenness, to bear him up [when] full of wine' (*KTU* 1.17.I.30-31). Deutero-Isaiah also refers to this obligation when he says of Jerusalem, drunk with the wrath of God, 'There is no one to

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[198] Nahum M. Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 65.

[199] Gen 3:10

[200] Ex 20:26

[201] David A. Baer and Robert P. Gordon, *Leshon Limmudim: Essays on the Language and Literature of the Hebrew Bible in Honor of A. A. MacIntosh* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013), 33.

> guide her among all the sons she has borne; there is no one to take her by the hand among all the sons she has brought up' (Isa 51:18)."[202]

The dishonoring of a child's parents was a crime punishable by death, according to the law given to Moses by God to rule the nation of Israel that had just marched out of Egypt, so, although this event happens long before the law of Moses, the understanding of the disrespect at hand shows that there indeed ought to be a punishment of some sort. This, however, does not explain why Canaan was cursed, but the *IVP Background Bible Commentary* offers a reason that is also affirmed by the *Cornerstone Commentary on Genesis*: the curse was not because of the sin, but, rather, the sin gave the "occasion" for the curse. Therefore, the curse was going to happen, and Ham's sin against his father provided the ideal timing for Noah to give his sons their due blessings or curses. It is important to note that Noah's curse is, in a way, similar to a prophecy: he spoke what would happen to the Canaanites, along with Shem and Japheth's descendants; this "prophecy" then came to fulfillment when the Israelites entered and began their Conquest in the Promised Land. Evidence for Ham's sin being the right occasion for the curse can be drawn from a similar event involving Jacob and Esau: Isaac, as a dying father, was going to bless his children, specifically his firstborn. He told Esau, "Prepare me the kind of tasty food I like and bring it to me to eat, so that I may give you my blessing before I die."[203] The meal itself was not the cause of the blessing—that is, Esau did not bring in a meal for Isaac to say, "How nice! Let me bless you in return for your thoughtfulness;" rather, Isaac was preparing to bless Esau and simply wanted his favorite meal before he did so. An example of where a curse *was* invoked by human action is the Fall of Man:

> "So the Lord God said to the serpent, '*Because you have done this*, Cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all

[202] Ibid.
[203] Gen 27:4

> the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.' To the woman he said, 'I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.' To Adam he said, '*Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit* from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat from it,' Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.'"[204]

It is obvious from the text here that it is because of the sin of Adam, Eve, and the Serpent, that the three of them receive curses from God. Noah's curse on Canaan, however, is different in that it was not the result of Ham's action; rather, Ham's sin provides the opportunity for Noah to issue his blessings and curses for his sons and their offspring.[205] This, then, may offer insight into the kind of people that Ham, Shem, Japheth, and their children are; Ham lives a life that solicits a curse, and the curse is given to him, whereas Shem and Japheth live righteous lives and are blessed by their father for it. The exception to this is if Noah happened to love Shem and Japheth more than Ham and so curses this unwanted third son, but if this is the case then 1) Moses loses his righteous standing with God, and 2) God would not bring to fulfillment blessings and/or curses that intended harm for unrighteous motives.

Now, a final question remains—God fulfills this prophecy, made by a man: what does this imply? The fact that God affirms the blessings and curses that Noah spoke upon his three sons and their offspring suggests a couple of things: 1) that He is in agreement with Noah's punishment, supporting the emphasis on honor to the head of the household; 2) considering the

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[204] Gen 3:14-19, emphasis mine.

[205] Fathers could and did bless not only their own sons but their son's children as well. For example, Joseph brings his sons Ephraim and Mannasseh to Jacob for them to be blessed before Jacob died. See: Exodus 48.

fourth possibility explained above,[206] He is in agreement with Noah's mercy on the rest of Ham's offspring; or 3) the Scriptures describe Noah as "a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and [walking] faithfully with God,"[207] and so God respects, shows favor to, and empowers Noah to make such a prophecy on the lives of his offspring.

In Scripture, when a prophet speaks a message from the Lord to the people or to a person, he begins with "This is what the Lord says" (e.g. Ex 4:22, 7:17, 32:27; Joshua 24:2; Judges 6:8; 1 Samuel 2:27) or similar phrasing. However, in Genesis 9, there is no such phrase in the text for the curse and blessings Noah speaks on his children. This is not unusual, however, for in Genesis 27, where Isaac blesses Jacob, there is no mention of this blessing being a word from the Lord by use of "this is what the Lord says" or a similar phrase, neither is there usage of this phrase in Jacob's blessing of his children (Genesis 49) or Joseph's children (Genesis 48). The father's blessing/cursing of his children appears to be commonplace in the Bible, for it happens on multiple occasions; in fact, God is the first to give a fatherly blessing upon finishing His creation of the world: "God blessed them and said to them [mankind], "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."[208] Additionally, Isaac, as discussed earlier, blesses Jacob and curses Esau, and Jacob, before he breathed his final breath in the land of Egypt, blesses some of his sons (e.g. Reuben and Judah) and curses the others (e.g. Simeon and Levi),[209] the blessings and curses being given based on the kind of lives each son had lived thus

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[206] "The fourth possibility:" see above where I discuss the five possibilities for the severity of Noah's curse on Canaan.

[207] Gen 6:9

[208] Gen 1:28

[209] See Gen 49 for the full account of Jacob's blessings and curses.

far (Simeon and Levi, in Gen 34, had massacred all the men in an entire city and were, therefore, cursed by Abraham for their violent rashness and anger).

The Conquest: Divine Wrath as a Result of Divine Intolerance

Historians have deduced from the Bible that the Conquest of Canaan began around 1406 BC, likely with Israel's defeat of the invading King Sihon of Heshbon at Jahaz. However, modern evidence may suggest that the accounts of the Conquest do not coincide with written history. Regardless of this discrepancy, however, there still exists a story where God orders the destruction of multiple nations, and there still exists a need to understand the purpose and significance of the Conquest. Besides, not every story told in the Bible is of a real event; for example, the writing style of Job suggests that the book is a modified version of a parable told across multiple Ancient Near East religions; Jesus' parables are not of actual people (no part of the definition of parable demands that it utilize or even symbolize real events or people). The Conquest, whether it is historically true or simply a story, has a consistent theme throughout: the supremacy of God and His intolerance of idolatry and anything unholy.

This theme is evident in both the laws bestowed upon Israel and the required actions not just for the Conquest but regular life in the nation of Israel. Some may wonder what was special about Israel that God chose them. The answer: absolutely nothing. This is not a sign of God's carelessness or lack of resources; rather, it is a sign of His ability. Take, for example, two basketball teams: on one team are a starting lineup of athletes that are talented enough to all receive Division I scholarships; on the other team are a group of players that only play recreationally at the local park. It will not be hard to have a successful season with this first

team—given that the coaching is not downright terrible—but the second team will need a miracle to compete with the first team. The first team possesses considerably more special traits than the second team, which is blatantly average. This second team is Israel: they are a people that begin with one man and his family, a man who leaves his home and blindly follows the voice of God out into lands he may have never ventured had not God called him. The bottom line is this: God does not need "special" people to achieve His purposes. There is no favoritism in the choosing of Abraham nor the designation of Israel as His people; it will, therefore, suffice to say that God's choice of person/people to "be a blessing to all nations" is a choice that one, not being God, will be unable to understand perhaps until he enters the kingdom of God.

Now, one of the sins that is highlighted consistently and found recurring is the sin of idolatry, which raises the question, what is special about idolatry? In God's eyes, "All wrongdoing is sin"[210] and "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,"[211] so it is understood that all sins are viewed with the same filthiness in God's eyes. Yet, idolatry seems to stand out in the Old Testament: the first *and* second commandments given to Moses on Mount Sinai deal with idolatry; the next story immediately after Moses' receiving of the law is punishment on Israel for idolatry; and the seven nations God commands complete *ḥērem* of were idolatrous nations. Both then and today the esteemed position and authority of gods is evident, as people worship and obey gods that they believe in. There is one issue with this, though: God is the one true God, and so idolatry is not just the worship of a false god but the neglect of the true supreme being that brought everything into existence. Today, Christians recognize the supreme being of God; however, a people fresh out of slavery in Egypt and following a pillar of

[210] 1 John 5:17
[211] Romans 3:23

cloud by day and fire by night would not be so confident in the omnipotence of God. The dilemma arises: how can God reveal His power to His chosen people in a way that they will understand (that is, in their cultural context)? The answer: go to war. When two nations war against each other and one emerges victorious, the victor takes captives[212] and plunders the loser's livestock and jewelry. However, something more important than these things takes place: the gods of the victor replace the gods of the loser. Simply put, much of the events of one's life are believed in this culture to be results of the gods' feelings toward the person: if a fire burns some of the harvest, the gods are mad; if abundant rains come, the gods are pleased. This carries over into the battlefield: if an army wins, its gods were more powerful than the gods of the opposing army, and since the victor's gods were believed to be stronger, they became the new gods of the losing army. Therefore, for the Israelites to recognize the true power of the God they had been following around in a desert for forty years, they have to see him destroy the gods of other nations, and the only way that can happen is if Israel goes to war with God fighting with them. So, while the initial response to the Conquest's violence is the thought of genocide, perhaps it is more correct to understand it as deicide, a war between God and all the other gods, fought by God's people against all the other nations. Take, for example, the ten plagues of Egypt: each plague is designed by God to exploit the weakness of the Egyptians' main gods. For example, the first plague—the turning of the Nile River into blood—exposed the weakness of the Egyptians' river god. After the final plague, then, it is no wonder that "the people feared

[212] Usually POWs, virgin women for the soldiers, and young men either for forced labor or, in the case of King Nebuchadnezzar, education in the new order (that is, education and full-on immersion into the victor's culture, possibly to purge of one's national identity).

the Lord and put their trust in him and in Moses his servant"[213] even before they had begun their journey into the desert and, ultimately, to the Promised Land.

It is clear from the text itself that it is indeed God who commanded the Israelites to conquer the nations of the Promised Land and, more specifically, execute *ḥērem*[214] on the seven nations: the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites (Deuteronomy 7:1-5). These seven nations are not the only inhabitants of the Promised Land, however, but for the other nations dwelling in the land God provides rules and guidelines for how to wage war and what to plunder once the Israelites had claimed victory. It is absolutely mandatory to note the dependence on God for not just the "ban" but also every battle that the Israelites fight in the Promised Land. If there is a formula, it is this: the Israelites + God = victory, but Israelites – God = defeat; this is consistently the case in Israelite history. Numbers 14: 36-45 confirms the latter part of this formula:

> "The men Moses had sent to explore the land, who returned and made the whole community grumble against him by spreading a bad report about it—these men who were responsible for spreading the bad report about the land were struck down and died of a plague before the Lord. Of the men who went to explore the land, only Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh survived. When Moses reported this to all the Israelites, they mourned bitterly. Early the next morning they set out for the highest point in the hill country, saying, "Now we are ready to go up to the land the Lord promised. Surely we have sinned!" But Moses said, "Why are you disobeying the Lord's command? This will not succeed! Do not go up, because the Lord is not with you. You will be defeated by your enemies, for the Amalekites and the Canaanites will face you there. Because you have turned away from the Lord, he will not be with you and you will fall by the sword." Nevertheless, in their presumption they went up toward the highest point in the hill country, though neither Moses nor the ark of the Lord's covenant moved from the camp. Then the Amalekites and the Canaanites who lived in that hill country came down and attacked them and beat them down all the way to Hormah."

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[213] Exodus 14:31

[214] Also called the "ban," see the definition of *ḥērem* in the historical context of this thesis under the section, "Definitions and Characteristics of 'Holy War.'"

In contrast, each of the battles that the Lord commands the Israelites to fight have at least one thing in common: the presence of Yahweh the divine warrior, causing the enemy to flee in what would have appeared to be fear of an army that was much smaller in size.[215] Indeed, Scripture recounts that, "when all the Amorite kings west of the Jordan and all the Canaanite kings along the coast heard how the Lord had dried up the Jordan before the Israelites until they had crossed over, their hearts melted in fear and they no longer had the courage to face the Israelites."[216] Even before they commence warfare, the Israelites are a threat not to be met menacingly but to be feared utterly.

Hardened Hearts or Innocent People?

The remaining concern with the Canaanite genocide, then, lies in the perceived "innocent" people: surely not all of the Canaanite people are unrelenting in their wicked ways, right? There is not a way to prove this true; however, there are some reasons as to why God did command complete *ḥērem* of the seven nations, one being the hardness of the victims' hearts. When a person is unrepentant of their evil ways, the Scriptures, especially in the Old Testament, say of that person that his heart has become hardened; for example, Pharaoh's heart is hardened against Moses and God, which is why he repeatedly refuses to let the Israelites go. However, multiple Scriptures raise the following question: did God alone harden Pharaoh's heart, and is this the same for the Canaanite kings such as King Sihon of Heshbon? The text suggests that it is God who hardened their hearts,[217] but it therefore appears that God creates these men purely to manipulate and ultimately destroy them, a stark contrast from God's description as "abounding

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[215] An explanation of the size of Israel's army will come in the next section: "Mercy in the Old Testament."
[216] Joshua 5:1
[217] See: Exodus 7:2-4, Joshua 11:20, Isaiah 63:17.

in love and faithfulness."[218] In the case of Pharaoh, it is often neglected that it is not God who hardened Pharaoh's heart initially, and Exodus 7 and 8 confirm this; it is only after these two chapters is the phrase "the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart" used. Ultimately, sinners are punished for the sin they commit; it is the sinner that makes the decision that results in his/her destruction. The Canaanite kings live in idolatry and sinful revelry; their hearts were hardened so that they would attack Israel to be destroyed by God and His people. Indeed, it is because of this hardening of heart that they meet their destruction, thus crediting sin with a "self-destructive" nature, but it is still an external force that brought the actual destructive punishment upon the kings and their armies. Hardening of hearts, then, is not God's way of cruelly setting up people but rather allowing them to give way to their sinful desires and let the consequences of their decisions ultimately destroy them.

Some may argue, though, that there still could have been that one righteous person dwelling in the land; for example, Noah is the righteous man chosen by God to preserve the human race. However, in the case of Noah and other righteous men (e.g. Job), Scripture makes it explicitly clear that they are exceptions to the wickedness of the world, outliers to the idolatrous lifestyle of humanity. The text begins with a focus on the depravity of humankind before naming the righteous person and describing him as "righteous" and/or "blameless" before God. There is no such description of such character where there is mention of any of the seven nations.

The Flood

In contrast to the Conquest, there is no involvement of people as instruments of divine wrath; the punishment here is executed by and only by God, and the people are the sole

[218] Exodus 34:6.

recipients of His wrath. As noted above, however, one man and his family escape this divine punishment: Noah. The authors take care to show the reader what makes Noah so different from the rest of humankind that he caught God's attention and became a key part of God's plan: "But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord...Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked faithfully with God."[219] Interestingly enough, idolatry is not explicitly listed as an evil the people were committing; truthfully, however, the passage offers little detail to the exact sins, rather generalizing human depravity by saying, "The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time."[220] Scripture also makes it explicitly clear that it is indeed God who brings the floodwaters and the rain to destroy His own Creation. As mentioned in the previous section, there are no "innocent" people: it is only Noah, for only he is pointed out as an exception to humanity's wickedness, and only he and his family are saved.

It is interesting to point out the differences between the biblical tradition of the Flood and other Mesopotamian traditions,[221] particularly the ending and aftermath. In the biblical tradition, Noah and his family disembark on Mount Sinai, Noah makes an altar and sacrifices to the Lord, and the Lord, pleased by the offering, promises to never destroy the whole earth by flood again. Other Mesopotamian traditions differ, however: deities such as the gods Enki and Ea, after flooding the earth (for much less rational reasons: Enki floods the earth because the humans had grown in number and disturb his sleep; God, on the other hand, never slumbers[222]) are sorry for their actions; God, however, expresses no sympathy, and actually expresses regret only in having

[219] Genesis 6:8-9
[220] Gen 6:5
[221] For the thorough analysis, see my historical context under the section, "The Flood."
[222] See Psalm 121:3

created humans (Genesis 6:6). The message is clear: God does not tolerate evil or any sort. Noah is not perfect, but it is obvious that he wholeheartedly follows God for him to be described as righteous and blameless. The righteous and blameless will save their lives, but the unrepentant and corrupt will lose it.

Sodom and Gomorrah: Calling All Righteous People…Wait…

Perhaps the most well known part of this story is Abraham's "negotiation" with God, where he asks if the Lord dare destroy a city in which righteous people live. This story creates a couple of implications: 1) that the righteousness of one person has the ability to spare the unrighteousness, and 2) God will not bring the righteous and the unrighteous to the same end. Again, it is made clear that it is God who brings His wrathful punishment upon the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, for they are not destroyed by warring people but by burning sulfur. The consequence of disobedience is strikingly clear in the account of Lot and his family's escape from Sodom and Gomorrah; the cities hold not even ten righteous people and, therefore, God is to destroy them. The authors even give the reader an insight into how depraved the people of these cities were: "Before they had gone to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom—both young and old—surrounded the house. They called to Lot, 'Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them.' Lot went outside to meet them and shut the door behind him and said, 'No, my friends. Don't do this wicked thing.'"[223] Ultimately, the two angels (disguised as visitors) gather Lot and his family and allow them to escape, but not even this family is free from God's intolerance, for Lot's wife disobeys the angels, turning to look back at the city, and receives immediate punishment: a

[223] Genesis 19:4-7

transformation into a pillar of salt. Again, the theme is clear: God is supreme and does not tolerate idolatry and wickedness.

Though the seven nations experience *ḥērem* because of their idolatry, Israel also receives punishment for their sins as well. In fact, the following pattern can be observed in the book of Judges: the Israelites fall into sin (especially idolatry), God sends prophets to warn His people of imminent destruction, the people refuse to listen, they are forced into captivity by another nation, they cry out to God, and He brings them out of captivity, thus restoring them. Even the most famous characters of the Bible receive consequences for their shortcomings: Moses, because of his anger, is not allowed to enter the Promised Land with the Israelites; David commits adultery and murder, and loses his illegitimate son as a result; and because Solomon allows himself to be led away into idolatry by his concubines, the nation of Israel is split into a norhern and southern kingdom.

Conclusion

It is a serious mistake to assume that the Old Testament tells a story of purely wrath and destruction, and it is a grave error to believe that the divine violence of the Old Testament is "balanced out" by the mercy quietly displayed therein. Major themes exist throughout the Old Testament: 1) God is all-powerful, more than even the people He has chosen understand; 2) He is utmost intolerant of sin and wickedness—especially idolatry; and 3) He is impartial in His doling out of punishment—Israel, too, though she be the nation God chose, faces the wrath of God as a punishment for her sin. Whereas some sins can easily self-destruct the sinner committing them, the of wrath and destruction by God in the Old Testament is against sins that are not purely self-destructive in nature and, therefore, require an external force for judgement.

For those whose sin required an external force to invoke punishment, God hardened their hearts so that their actions would produce consequences that would serve as the punishment of their sins. Rest assured: the Lord never overlooks evil, nor does He brutally punish the innocent; He is, therefore, righteous and just in His actions.

Mercy in the Old Testament

The "Formula of Grace"

Evidence of mercy in the Old Testament is often tainted—overlooked, even—by the violence that riddles this section of the Bible, and one must search thoroughly to find the divine attributes belonging to God that are more positive in nature. According to Arthur W. Pink, one of God's attributes is His patience, which is actually a manifestation of His mercy. What he means is highlighted by the formula of grace, which is founded majorly on Exodus 34:6-7, where the Lord Himself tells Moses the kind of Lord He is. It is interesting to note that this formula of grace is found in the Old Testament, the section of the Bible more popularly known for its atrocious violence. Kratz and Spieckermann examine and analyze this theological formula of grace, which appears multiple times in the Old Testament:

> "the formula praises Yhwh as a deity, whose nature is dominantly determined by his inclination toward grace. The adjectives… 'merciful' and… 'gracious' [as well as others related] are so closely connected to the predicate of 'æræ' appayim 'slow to anger,' that it seems reasonable to consider God's anger an exception to his grace. …the expression 'slow to anger' iself…indicates God's reluctance than inclination toward wrath."[224]

The formula, according to Kratz and Spieckermann, highlights the significant imbalance between God's wrath and mercy and "praises Yhwh as a deity," ascribing to Him words such as

[224] Reinhard G. Kratz and Hermann Spieckermann, *Divine Wrath and Divine Mercy in Ancient Antiquity* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 9.

ra*ḥûm* ("merciful") and *ḥannûn* ("gracious").[225] What is more interesting, however, is the use of another word: *ḥœsœd*. While *raḥûm* and *ḥannûn* are adjectives with "roots [that] go back to divine predicates in Mesopotamia and the ancient Syro-Canaanite area[, t]his is not true for the term *ḥœsœd,* which means "kindness, lovingkindness, steadfast love."[226]

Further examination of the predicates utilized in this Old Testament-originated formula reveals that reflections upon God's nature found in Isaiah and Jeremiah are "a continued contention with the formula of grace in the light of contemporary challenges. [And] as for the Deutero-Isaianic passages in…Isaiah, they are closely related with the conception of a mediator – the Servant of the Lord – who will bring the torah-bound salvation to all nations or even atone the sins of many through his own affliction and death."[227] Though Israel, according to Deuteronomy 20, is commanded to completely eradicate the Canaanite nations dwelling in the Promised Land, Jeremiah 22 seems to present a different story:

> "This is what the Lord says: 'Go down to the palace of the king of Judah and proclaim this message there: 'Hear the word of the Lord to you, king of Judah, you who sit on David's throne—you, your officials and your people who come through these gates. This is what the Lord says: Do what is just and right. Rescue from the hand of the oppressor the one who has been robbed. Do no wrong or violence to the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place. … if you do not obey these commands, declares the Lord, I swear by myself that this palace [that is, Israel] will become a ruin (v. 1-3, 5).'"

In drastic contrast to the command of *ḥērem* of the seven nations in the Conquest, the Israelites are given a new command: to cause no harm to foreigners, thus demonstrating that God

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[225] Kratz and Spieckermann, *Divine Wrath and Divine Mercy,* 10.

[226] Hermann Spieckermann, "God's Steadfast Love Towards a New Conception of Old Testament Theology." *Biblica* (Pontifical Biblical Institute) 81 (2000): 305-327.

[227] Kratz and Spieckermann, *Divine Wrath and Divine Mercy,* 12. See the following verses for reference to the Servant of the Lord bringing Torah-bound salvation: Is 42:1; 49:1-6. The following are verses for the Servant of the Lord atoning the sins of many: (Is 50:4-9; 52:13—53:12).

is not an indiscriminate destroyer in the Old Testament. He is a divine warrior,[228] but He is also a divine helper. It is also worth noting God's patience, which, according to Arthur W. Pink, "is really a display of His mercy…[and] one way in which it is frequently manifested.[229] To Pharaoh God gives multiple opportunities to repent of his hard-heartedness and set free the Israelites before humbling Pharaoh with the death of his firstborn and destruction of his army. Even with the Canaanite nations God has patience, for He told Abraham, "In the fourth generation your descendants will come back [to the Promised Land], for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure."[230]

Israel: the Remnant

The Israelites wander the wilderness for forty years; during this time, God is patiently allowing the Amorites sin to reach its "full measure." As for Israel, the nation turns from God time and time again, but God never completely destroys them for their idolatrous sins (which begin as early as Moses' receiving of the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai). Whenever the people complain as they journeyed to the Promised Land (Num 21:4-5; 11:1,4; Exodus 16:3, for example), God responds with discipline but not utter annihilation: in Numbers 21:6, *many* of the people died from the snake bites, but not *all*. Moreover, for those who are bitten and "looked at the bronze snake [that God commanded Moses to make], they lived" (Num 21:9). Though Israel's initial reaction to the inhabitants of the Promised Land is described in Numbers 14:2—"[they] grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, "If only

[228] The concept of God as a divine warrior is discussed in the section, "Characteristics of God."

[229] Arthur W. Pink, *The Attributes of God: A Solemn and Blessed Contemplation of Some of the Wondrous and Lovely Perfections of the Divine Character* (Swengel, Pennsylvania: Reiner Publications, 1966), 56.

[230] Genesis 15:16.

we had died in Egypt! Or in this wilderness!"—God, originally appearing to destroy the people with a plague, is then convinced by Moses to forgive them, a clear act of mercy.

Eventually, the Israelites conquer and begin dwelling in much of the Promised Land, but time and time again the nation is led away into idolatry. Yet, God remains patient; when Israel strays, God sends a prophet. A thorough reading of the prophets Hosea, Joel, and Amos reveals a common theme among the three prophets: God is angered by the sin of Israel and will not tolerate it any longer; however, His desire is not to destroy His people but rather for them to repent, so that He may restore them, which He will do even after they have faced punishment for their idolatry. Thus, the concept of a remnant is born: though Israel is often subjugated and thrown into captivity as a punishment for their sins—and even after the nation is divided in two—a remnant of Israel always remains.

The Law: Defending the Defenseless

The law, when thoroughly examined, is evidence for a God who cares for His creation. In a culture where women were significantly less in status than men, God's law for His people actually protected women in marriage:

> "If a man takes a wife and, after sleeping with her, dislikes her and slanders her and gives her a bad name, saying, "I married this woman, but when I approached her, I did not find proof of her virginity," then the young woman's father and mother shall bring to the town elders at the gate proof that she was a virgin. Her father will say to the elders, "I gave my daughter in marriage to this man, but he dislikes her. Now he has slandered her and said, 'I did not find your daughter to be a virgin.' But here is the proof of my daughter's virginity." Then her parents shall display the cloth before the elders of the town, and the elders shall take the man and punish him. They shall fine him a hundred shekels of silver and give them to the young woman's father, because this man has given an Israelite virgin a bad name. She shall continue to be his wife; he must not divorce her as long as he lives."[231]

[231] Deuteronomy 22:13-19.

Other commands seem peculiar—harsh, even—at first glance, but, in reality, they are a means of protection for those who couldn't protect themselves (i.e. women). Take Deuteronomy 22:25-29, for example:

> "[I]f out in the country a man happens to meet a young woman pledged to be married and rapes her, only the man who has done this shall die. Do nothing to the woman; she has committed no sin deserving death. This case is like that of someone who attacks and murders a neighbor, for the man found the young woman out in the country, and though the betrothed woman screamed, there was no one to rescue her.
> If a man happens to meet a virgin who is not pledged to be married and rapes her and they are discovered, he shall pay her father fifty shekels of silver. He must marry the young woman, for he has violated her. He can never divorce her as long as he lives."

The first law here seems reasonable, even at first glance: a man raped a woman in open country—where she could scream for help but not be heard—and he was to be put to death. The second law, however, may appear confusing to many: is it not punishment to the woman to force her to be married to the man that has raped her? In order to understand this law one must understand the culture and roles of each gender in Ancient Near East society. During this time, women are powerless without a male figure, for it is men who own land, work jobs, and provide for their families. Women never—if not, rarely—own land, and they work jobs even less (besides bearing and raising children and cooking. One could say, then, that the cult of domesticity existed long before the birth of the term). If a woman became a widow and had no sons to support her, she was essentially destined to live—and die—in poverty. This is why Boaz is an important figure in the story of Ruth; Ruth had no husband to "redeem" her, and the man that was her guardian-redeemer refused to redeem Ruth, which is why Boaz takes Ruth and spares her from poverty and despair. This second, law, therefore, actually *protects* the woman that is raped, for not only does the guilty man have to pay a dowry of fifty shekels to the victim's

father, he is now married and has to support his wife, thereby saving her from the prospect of raising a child in poverty.

In a number of wars Israel wages against nations in the Promised Land, the army is commanded to kill all the men but spare the women, who could be taken as plunder.[232] Even then, God gives the army instructions on marrying a woman taken as plunder:

> "When you go to war against your enemies and the Lord your God delivers them into your hands and you take captives, if you notice among the captives a beautiful woman and are attracted to her, you may take her as your wife. Bring her into your home and have her shave her head, trim her nails and put aside the clothes she was wearing when captured. After she has lived in your house and mourned her father and mother for a full month, then you may go to her and be her husband and she shall be your wife. If you are not pleased with her, let her go wherever she wishes. You must not sell her or treat her as a slave, since you have dishonored her."

God clearly does not overlook women; He makes a special effort to defend the defenseless in society. Throughout the Old Testament, two things are especially clear: 1) God's intolerance of sin (especially idolatry, as this is a significant recurring sin among the Israelites) and 2) His desire to restore—not destroy—His people.

Conclusion

Thorough investigation of the Law and the Prophets reveals God's showing mercy in the Old Testament, therefore proving that the Old Testament is not void of a merciful God. In a culture where women had little or no rights, God granted them protection under the law—that is, His law. God does not only play divine warrior; He plays divine helper, and He helps those who are unable to help themselves. As for Israel, the Remnant was a testimony to the "formula of grace," which highlights God's patience, a sign of God's mercy, according to Pink. Truthfully,

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[232] Consistent exceptions to this command were the seven Canaanite nations, which God commanded the total destruction of.

one finds a God in the Old Testament that is as described in all of Exodus 34:6-7: "'The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.'"

Examination of the New Testament

Introduction

In contrast to the Canaanite genocide and other acts of Old Testament destruction is the forgiveness in Jesus found in the Gospels. Looking at both the Old Testament and the New Testament simultaneously raises the question did God have a change of heart transitioning from the Old Testament to the New Testament? In this thesis it has been thus far shown that God did not show only His wrath in the Old Testament, but at first glance, one does not find any other accounts of mass genocide in the New Testament. Instead, one finds stories of a man who claims to be God and forgives people of their sins, for example, the woman caught in adultery (John 8) who, according to law, should have been stoned. How, then, can God eradicate the seven nations listed in Deuteronomy because of their idolatrous sin and then forgive a woman for breaking the law? Is there discontinuity in God's nature between the Old and New Testament? The short answer: no; the in-depth answer will be herein discussed.

Jesus: Pacifist or Zealotist?

From hearing Scripture in the synagogues, many people believe that the prophesied Messiah is destined to arrive and lead a rebellion against the Roman Empire, ultimately crushing

it and establishing a new order. Rome is severely oppressive, and Jesus actually addresses some grievances the people had concerning the government, for example, taxes (Matthew 22:15-22). King Herod, as Scripture reveals, orders the death of all babies two years or younger in order to get rid of Jesus, who he (Herod) perceives as a threat to his throne, having heard about Jesus from the three magi. Despite the oppressive lives many of the people live, rebellions are not commonplace everywhere because the Roman Empire tactfully instills fear into whoever they conquer. Those who attempt rebellions are often put down with ease and the leaders publicly punished for all to see and be warned of the reward one receives for violent action against the Empire. Now, though these rebellions may not have been common, the Zealots are strongest in Galilee, the center of the Zealotist movement and where Jesus lives. Jesus does not join the Zealots in the battle preparations, however; He comes with a different message: "'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near'" (Matthew 4:17)[233] Through His entire ministry, the answers Jesus provided for the Pharisees and the common people satisfied neither party yet puzzled both, and some of His answers are used in the debate of whether Jesus was a pacifist or a revolutionist.[234] One of the key New Testament accounts used to point to Christian pacifism is Jesus during His arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, where He rebukes Peter for striking the servant with his sword, saying, "all who draw the sword will die by the sword."[235] However, Jesus knows that He must be arrested, but His disciples do not understand this; rather, they still perceive Jesus as the one who will lead a great military rebellion to overthrow the Roman government. Therefore, seeing his "military leader" being threatened with imprisonment or worse, Peter strikes to defend

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[233] Edwin Prince Booth, *New Testament Studies: Critical Essays in Honor of William Jackson Lowstutter* (Abingdon-Cokesbury Press), 235-236.

[234] For detail on the evidence for both sides, see the historical context of this thesis under the section "Christian Pacifism and the Just War Theory."

[235] Matthew 26:52.

Him, a protective instinct. This, then, allows one to then perceive that Jesus tells Peter, "Warfare is not a part of my kingdom." However, it is more plausible that, in rebuking Peter, Jesus is telling Him, "Do not prevent that which must happen to me." And indeed, Jesus says immediately after His rebuking comment to Peter, "'Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?'"[236] More than a Pacifist stance, it seems that this passage is an account of Jesus trying to help Peter understand that the events that are happening at that moment, along with the events to pass shortly after, *had* to happen; it is futile to try and prevent them, for doing so will prevent not only the Scriptures from being fulfilled but also prevent humanity from having their past, present, and future sins atoned. Thus, Jesus maintains what can be called a "radical third viewpoint" stance; that is, in instances where the Pharisees tried to trap Jesus (e.g. the woman caught in adultery and the question about taxes), there are two sides to support: 1) the Pharisees (by advocating complete adherence to the law), and 2) the people's (by demonstrating rebellion against the Roman order), but Jesus deftly maneuvers His way out of the Pharisees' traps by picking neither side; rather, He sets up His own side: "give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's."[237] Likewise, when facing His arrest in the garden, Jesus picks neither Pacifism nor just war; rather, He submits Himself to what must happen for a greater purpose.

This then, provides an answer to the events of both the Old and New Testament. Jesus rebukes Peter for striking with a sword, why? Because He wanted Peter to understand that what was happening right before Him had to happen for a greater purpose. God tells Moses that He

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[236] Ibid, v. 53-54.
[237] Matthew 22:21

will harden Pharaoh's heart, why? Because it had to happen for God to show His power to the Egyptians and the Israelites while also liberating the latter group. God hardens the hearts of the Canaanite kings, why? Because it had to happen for them to go to war against and lose to God and His people so that the nations would come to see the supremacy of God, who was fulfilling the promise He made to Abraham. In short, *God does what He needs to do to fulfill His purpose,* and this is what justifies anything God does, for His purpose is good.

Jesus: "Your Sins are Forgiven"

It may still be quite concerning to many, however, that Jesus seemingly lets the woman caught in adultery go free with a simple admonishing of "leave your life of sin."[238] There are some possibilities as to why this story happens and why the outcome is the way it is. First, there is a true implication, one that Jesus was getting at for the Pharisees and others present: like the woman, they had also sinned; what, then, gives them the right to punish with death the woman before them? Additionally, woman do not enter prostitution willingly during this time, as is the case for many women today; often, it is poverty that drives women to prostitution. In the case of idols, prostitution is a ritual practice for worship of the god Baal (worship that the Israelites, much to their regret, get involved with at a point in their time in the Promised Land). Jesus is *not* condoning prostitution; by telling the woman, "Neither do I condemn you," He is acknowledging that she had committed a crime that could be condemned. However, He is emphasizing that imperfect people (i.e. the Pharisees) cannot enforce the law from the viewpoint of perfection; by challenging anyone who has not sinned to throw the first stone, He causes the people to realize that, like the woman, they had sinned at some point in their lives, too.

[238] John 8:11

Of the many things that baffle the Pharisees in regards to Jesus, one of the most "blasphemous" ones is Jesus' forgiving of people's sins. To them, Jesus is just a human claiming to be "the Son of God:" how can He, a mere mortal, forgive the sins of another person, sins that are not even against Him? Obviously, Jesus is more than a "mere mortal," but the question still remains as to why/how Jesus chooses who to forgive and how to punish. Who does Jesus choose to punish? Anyone who is unrepentant; who does Jesus choose to forgive? Anyone who is willing to humble himself/herself before the feet of Jesus to repent and follow Him. After all, Jesus begins His ministry calling for repentance, and no one who humbles himself/herself at the feet of Jesus is rejected by Him. The two blind men cry out, "'Have mercy on us, Son of David!'" and are healed; the sinful woman at the house of Simon the Leper who anoints Jesus and falls at His feet has her sins forgiven. When the rich young ruler approaches Jesus and asks Him what must he do to inherit eternal life, Jesus told Him what he can do and invites the young ruler to follow Him.

Judgement in the New Testament

At the same time, however, anyone who is unrepentant and chooses to reject Jesus' invitation to follow Him will not enter the kingdom of God with Jesus but rather will face condemnation (see: Matthew 11:20-24) and "be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."[239] This "secondary" end result is a common part of many of Jesus' teachings—that is, He teaches the people both what they should do in order to inherit the kingdom and how to then live on earth, and then He gives a warning to those who refuse His teaching. Such an example of this is Matthew 5, the Sermon on the Mount, where

[239] Matthew 8:12

Jesus gives the people what is called the New Mandate. Reminding the people of what the law said, He then takes the application of the law to a new level of understanding and action:

> "'You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' *But I tell you* that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca,' is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell. … You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' *But I tell you* that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell. It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.' *But I tell you* that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery. Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but fulfill to the Lord the vows you have made.' But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. …You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' *But I tell you*, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'[240] *But I tell you*, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.'"[241]

Through a repeated use in structure ("You have heard that it was said...*But I tell you*"), Jesus calls those who desire to follow Him to a higher standard of living, one that, though the ground level is easily achievable (laws such as "do not murder" and "do not commit adultery"), the level of application Jesus preaches here seems unattainable. This was Jesus' instruction in

[240] The reasoning behind the Jewish command of hating one's enemy is explained in the historical context of this thesis under the section, "Mercy and Judgement in the New Testament."

[241] Matthew 5:21-22, 27-30

God's ways, but He also warns the people, "do whatever it takes to avoid hell;" therefore, His "*radical love is followed by warnings of spiritual danger.*"[242]

In the Gospels one finds that Jesus teaches the same demonstration of God's mercy found in the Old Testament: His patience. Upon request, the disciples had Jesus explain to them the meaning of the Parable of the Weeds:

> "He answered, 'The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom. The weeds are the people of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. 'As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let them hear.'"[243]

Time after time Jesus teaches this "fiery judgement" to those who give ear to His words, a warning that destruction is imminent if people continue to refuse to repent, a judgement that is essentially an annihilation of the unrepentant, the same way that *ḥērem* is an annihilation of the idolatrous and unrepentant. Just like the Old Testament, there is a gap of time before this judgement comes to pass, and so in His warnings of coming judgement Jesus emphasizes the message He speaks at the beginning of His ministry: "Repent, for the kingdom is at hand."

Apocalyptic War: Violence in the End Times

The two main schools of thought regarding the apocalyptic literature of Revelation maintain either the belief that John's letter is completely figurative or the belief that John writes

[242] Stephen K. Moroney, *God of Love and God of Judgement* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2009), 119-120.

[243] Matthew 13:37-43

of events that are to literally happen.[244] Regardless, it is evident that Jesus' return will be met with some resistance, whether physical or spiritual: in one school of thought, this resistance will be purely the "spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms,"[245] and in the other the resistance shall come in the form of an actual war. In his essay Merrill claims that the lack of Yahweh war terms in the New Testament is proof that Old Testament war "has no place in the age of the church—at least, no legitimate place."[246] However, one cannot expect to find exact Old Testament Yahweh terms in the New Testament: the Old Testament is written in Hebrew, while the New Testament is written in Greek. The question, then, is does one find in the New Testament the Greek equivalent of the Old Testament's Hebrew Yahweh war terms? While unable to study the Greek in this thesis, it is still obvious that there is violence occurring in the end time depictions John left for his readers. In the end, the unrepentant meet the wrath of God on an equivalent scale that they do in the Old Testament: then, God destroys them physically; in Revelation—assuming the figurative interpretation of John's book—God destroys them spiritually, that is, they either cease to exist entirely or are removed from the presence of God, which is divine abandonment. And regardless of the literalness of figurativeness of this book, another thing is clear: no one is as powerful as God (affirmed in the Old Testament's Conquest), who will always—*always*—emerge victorious.

Apocalyptic literature is designed to be a source of encouragement, and in the case of John's book, apocalyptic literature is a double-edged sword: it gives encouragement for those living righteously (Revelation is written circa 96 AD, a time where Christians and the Church

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[244] Find the full discussion on Revelation in the historical context of this thesis under the section titled, "Revelation."

[245] Ephesians 6:12

[246] Longman, "The Divine Warrior," 292-302.

continued to be persecuted severely) and it warns the unrepentant of their fate (which will not be a good one). Indeed, then, Revelation is a book to prepare God's people in the same way Jesus told His disciples, "'I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.'" It is also a book to prepare unbelievers for their destructive end if they refuse to repent of their sins: "the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."[247]

Conclusion

The first words of Jesus' ministry are "Repent, for the kingdom is at hand." God has sent Prophets to the people; He has sent them John; and now, He sends them Jesus as the time for judgement approaches. It is true, then: all this time, God has been waiting. Now, however, He is warning the people that He is not going to wait much longer; the time to repent is *now,* and those who are willing must turn from their ways and follow Him while the unrepentant are left to face trial by fire on the Day of Judgement. John reasserts the close proximity of the kingdom and the necessity to repent and/or remain faithful to God in the apocalyptic final book of the Bible. This examination has revealed that 1) there is evidence of God's wrath in the *New* Testament, and 2) His wrath has not changed in essence—those who are unrepentant meet the same fate as those in the Old Testament that were unrepentant: destruction.

[247] Revelation 21:8

Concluding Remarks

Both the divine violence of the Old Testament and the divine judgement of the New Testament serve as punishment for the unrepentant for the purpose of God fulfilling His purposes on earth. And yet, in both sections, God's patience is portrayed: in the Old Testament, God allowed the sins of the Amorites to become complete; in the New Testament, the Sower—that is, the Son of Man, who is God—will wait until the end of the age to send out His angels to harvest the field and burn the weeds, that is, "the people of the evil one." While reuse of Yahweh terms is not found in the New Testament, the same destruction of people and places is found, mostly in Jesus' prophecies; Jesus prophecies the fall of the Temple of Jerusalem—a destruction of infrastructure—and the fiery judgement of those who refuse to repent—a destruction of people. The only difference, then, that can be noted between the Old and New Testament is not that one has wrath and the other does not; it is that the Old Testament showcases divine *violence* while the New Testament places emphasis on divine *judgement.* Both are events that are warned of in their respective sections; divine *violence* is physical violence employed by the Divine to destroy the unrepentant; divine *judgement* is the promise of this violence should the unrepentant remain unrepentant. In short, in the Old Testament, judgement *came*; in the New Testament, judgement *will come.*

Having established this fact, then, one can now consider other questions regarding the forgiving, Divine Warrior, for example, does He condemn war? While Pacifists point to Jesus' rebuke of Peter in Gethsemane and argue "yes, He does," Jesus' arrest has been examined thoroughly in this thesis to show that Jesus is rebuking Peter for trying to prevent what had to happen; it was not a rebuke against warfare. In fact, the Bible acknowledges that war is a part of

life (Ecclesiastes 3:8), and in no encounter with a man of the army does Jesus condemn their position. A significant reason behind Christian Pacifism's development in the early Church is the persecution that the Church experienced from the Roman Army—no Christian desires to join an army that is persecuting his/her brothers or sisters in Christ. With this in mind, then, should Christians continue military service today, or followers of the Way ought to refrain from the draft for religious reasons? Finding no condemnation on Roman centurions or soldiers from God or Jesus Christ, and recognizing Jesus' "that's life" statement in the Garden ("all who draw the sword will die by the sword"[248]), it can be concluded that it is not sinful to serve as a soldier.

Now, should Christians begin another "holy war"? To which the answer is a resounding *no!* The Conquest that is found in the Old Testament had a specific time, specific place, and was directed toward specific people groups with specific requirements and restrictions for specific cities. The specificity and context of Yahweh war have not been recreated in this day and age; therefore, Christians have had no justified basis for engaging in holy wars since the Israelite Conquest of the Promised Land. Indeed, the Crusades were not a properly justified "holy war," for the people fought because they believed the Pope promised them the forgiveness of their sins. It should be noted, then, that God's forgiveness is unconditional—one does not work to earn it—therefore, the Pope has no authority to grant conditional forgiveness.

In the case of *jihad*, or the holy war of Muslims against those who refuse to be converted, the Muslims are actually justified...in their own perspective. Simply put, the Israelites slaughtered because God commanded them to; Muslims commit terrorist acts because the Qur'an—their authority—tells them to. The question, then, is who is right: God or Allah, or,

[248] Matthew 26:52

even more specifically, who is *real*: God or Allah? Again, this thesis is limited to defending the unchanging nature of God and does not discuss the difference between God and Allah. It is important to note, though, that the Qur'an, according to Merrill, contradicts itself on warfare, sometimes advocating "a pacifist position in the face of controversy (Sura 15:94-95); [other times permitting] defensive war…; [and] still others [advocating] sanction wars of preemption or aggression (Sura 2:191, 217)."[249] However, the Bible also has its share of what seem to be contradictions, for instance, Proverbs 26:4-5: "Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you yourself will be just like him. Answer a fool according to his folly, or he will be wise in his own eyes." Though this appears to be a contradiction, the underlying message of these verses is to emphasis the futility of answering a fool "according to his folly." Now, does the Qur'an apply this same kind of contradictory principle? Possibly, for the Qur'an was not investigated for this thesis. What can be noted, however, is the difference between the Qur'an and the Bible's violent commands: while the Bible provided considerably specific instructions on time, place, people, and more, the Qur'an's calls to war seem to be much more generalized. As for the Bible, it is as Merrill says "If no case could be made for Yahweh war without Israel's participation in Old Testament times, surely none can be made today whether done in the name of Christ, Allah, or any other authority."[250] The key to the Conquest is the involvement of God, and God is involved because He commands it. No other time—past or present—has had these conditions satisfied.

This thesis does not cover the existence of hell or the salvation status of either young children or those who have never heard the name of Jesus, but assuming there is, at least, some place of separation from God, the question arises as to why a loving God would send people

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[249] Cowles, et al., *God and the Canaanite Genocide*, 93.

[250] C.S. Cowles, et al., *Show Them No Mercy: Four Views on God and the Canaanite Genocide* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2003), 85.

there. As seen in the Old Testament, the hearts of the unrepentant become hardened, and this is also true of the Pharisees in the New Testament. This hardening of hearts results in an intentional ignorance of the truth, and Jesus, never forcing anyone to follow Him, divinely abandons these people, for they refuse to repent and follow Him. The unrepentant, then, will face judgement because of their hardness of heart, likely in the form of divine abandonment.

Nevertheless, it is, therefore, upheld that the extent of God's wrath is no more and no less in the Old Testament than the New, and the extent of His mercy is no more and no less in the New Testament than the Old Testament. They are the same, and, therefore, God is the same.

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