

GOD COMMANDED THE KILLING OF PEOPLE!

What Should You Say When
People Ask Why?

by Rev Sylvester Herbert



There are some Scriptural passages which some persons, even Christians, find disturbing. Here are two of them:

"In the cities of the nations the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance, do not leave alive anything that breathes. Completely destroy them ... as the Lord your God has commanded you. Otherwise, they will teach you to follow all the detestable things they do in worshiping their gods, and you will sin against the Lord your God."

Deut. 20:16-18, NIV

This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'I will punish the Amalekites for what they did to Israel when they waylaid them as they came up from Egypt. Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy all that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys.' I Sam. 15:2-3, NIV

Some persons who read the Bible have concluded that the God of the Old Testament is a vindictive warmonger who is guilty of

committing crimes against humanity. Why would a loving God give these overly harsh commands to kill people? Shouldn't Christians be embarrassed by God's actions? There are indeed reasons which, when examined in their historical context, put the actions of God in an entirely different light and even compel us to admit that what God did was right and necessary. Here are three compelling reasons:

1. Pervasive and contagious evil among unrepentant people must be judged

The severe action of God towards these people was not rash. For hundreds of years, they had engaged in detestable practices such as idolatry, child sacrifice, bestiality (having sex with animals), incest, and other deviant sexual acts. They refused to turn away from their sin even though they had ample time and opportunity to do so.

If the people had repented, God would have spared them because it is the nature of God to do so. The Word of God is clear: God's desire is that the wicked turn from their sin rather than die (Ezek. 18:31-32; 33:11; see also II Peter 3:9). A case in point is the people of Nineveh whom God said He would destroy. However, when they repented, God relented. In a similar vein, someone like Rahab who was a Canaanite did not experience God's judgment because she chose to believe in God.

2. Nothing and no one should stand in God's way to bless humanity

God's plan to redeem humanity originated in eternity past (Rev. 13:8). The promised Messiah was central to that plan (Gen. 3:15). Satan's plan has always been to counter the plan of God. So, he sought to corrupt and even destroy the nation through whom the Messiah would come. God's redemptive purpose for humanity was of such paramount importance that it sometimes necessitated drastic action like the destruction of peoples and cultures to ensure its fulfilment. To put this another way, God did what He did in Old Testament times so that people like you and me can experience His wonderful salvation. Should we not be considered odd, even thankless, if we

object to actions God undertook to help us?

3. God has the right to judge His own creation as He sees fit

Our God is Sovereign! This distinctive attribute of His is seen everywhere in Scripture. The psalmist declares: "Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him (Psa. 115:3, NIV; see also Deut. 32:39 and Dan. 4:35). You are being presumptuous if you believe that God should do things according to your expectations, or that God should be judged by standards set by our secular culture or even by the United Nations. God is not obligated to explain His actions to anyone. Nor should we assume that once explained we would understand all His whys. God's ways are clearly higher than man's ways (Isa. 55:9; see also Rom. 11:3).

No right-thinking person would claim it is wrong to bomb a terrorist camp (even if there were women, children, and animals present) if the bombing would result in the greatest good for the greatest number of people. If we support such actions by human beings who are flawed, why can we not support similar actions by a just and holy God who has our best interest at heart? ☩