

The Context Bible

Life Group Lesson 22

May 26- June 1, 2014

Acts 7:9-7:44

Introduction to the Context Bible

Have you ever wished the Bible was easier to read through like an ordinary book – cover to cover? Because the Bible is a collection of 66 books, it makes reading like an ordinary book quite difficult. Compounding this difficulty is the fact that the later writers of the New Testament, were often quoting or referencing passages in the Old Testament. In fact, much of the New Testament makes better sense only if one also considers the Old Testament passages that place the text into its scriptural context.

You are reading a running commentary to The Context Bible. This arrangement of Scripture seeks to overcome some of these difficulties. Using a core reading of John’s gospel, the book of Acts, and the Revelation of John, the Context Bible arranges all the rest of Scripture into a contextual framework that supports the core reading. It is broken out into daily readings so that this program allows one to read the entire Bible in a year, but in a contextual format.

Here is the running commentary for week twenty-two, along with the readings for week twenty-three appended. Join in. It’s never too late to read the Bible in context!

Week Twenty-two Readings

<p>5/26 Stephen’s Speech Acts 7:45</p> <p>Josh 5-8</p>	<p>5/29 Stephen’s Speech Acts 7:45</p> <p>Josh 17-20</p>	<p>5/31 Stephen’s Speech Acts 7:45</p> <p>Judg 1-4 Prov 21:7-21:8</p>
<p>5/27 Stephen’s Speech Acts 7:45</p> <p>Josh 9-12</p>	<p>5/30 Stephen’s Speech Acts 7:45</p> <p>Josh 21-24 Num 32</p>	<p>6/01 Off</p>
<p>5/28 Stephen’s Speech Acts 7:45</p> <p>Josh 13-16</p>		

STEPHEN'S SPEECH (Acts 7:45)

We continue several weeks of reading in support of Stephen's speech to the authorities where Stephen defended his message that proclaimed a resurrected Jesus as both Lord and Messiah. Stephen told Old Testament stories to the authorities, and Luke gave a synopsis in Acts. We give the greater storyline through the contextual readings.

Because Stephen's narrative followed the Old Testament historical story of God and Israel, we have changed the format of these lessons a bit to cover the same storyline from the Old Testament texts, rather than working to break out the Scriptures on a daily basis. Those Scriptures that go beyond the narrative will be segregated out as relevant.

READING PURPOSE: For Stephen and the early church, Jesus and Christianity were not divorced from the Old Testament. Jesus was not the Son of a new God. God had not changed with the incarnation. God was working toward Jesus' transforming moment for humanity from the very beginning. We will see this as we continue to explore the fuller narratives behind Stephen's speech.

Joshua 5-24; Numbers 32; Judges 1-4

In Acts 7:45 Luke gives us one verse that sums up Israel's history during the historical time recorded in Joshua and Judges. We do not know if Stephen merely made a one-sentence summary or if Luke did the summarizing from a fuller speech. The latter seems more likely as Stephen would likely have had a full hearing, and not simply a 2-minute lecture.

The history is interesting in light of Stephen's redemptive message of Jesus Christ. Joshua and Judges speak of the judgment of God upon sin in a most direct and profound way. Many people agree with Martin Luther that a healthy understanding of the grievous nature of sin and its rightful condemnation is a necessary precursor to the fuller understanding of God's gracious forgiveness in Christ. In other words, as we become aware of the penalty of sin and the bondage of the law, we more readily appreciate and accept the grace in Jesus.

Our class lesson on these passages is not a parsing of each chapter or experience. Rather we consider two of the more vexing issues that stem from these readings. First, what is the archaeological evidence of the destruction of Jericho (Josh. 6) and second, what can we learn or consider about God's nature in light of the commands of destruction and death he issued in the contextual readings.

Jericho – the biblical account

Joshua tells an amazing story about Jericho. Moses had died, the Israelites had a new man in charge, and a lot of military conquests lay ahead. The Israelites were not some

elite trained military force. They were shepherds who had spent most of their life trying to eke out an existence in the wilderness between Egypt and Canaan. These people had seen some fighting, but most of their confrontations were internal and non-violent.

I suspect if I had been there, the major question on my mind would concern the change in leadership. Time had shown that Moses had a clear line of communication with the Lord. To a lesser extent, Aaron also had extra insight from the Divine One as well. With Moses, battles were won, although in at least one, he had to keep his arms up to ensure a victory. My question would have been whether or not the Lord was with Joshua the same way! Would Joshua be able to hear the special and sometimes detailed instructions of the Lord? Would Joshua be able to help these wilderness shepherds in war against the various people in Canaan?

Jericho would have answered my questions! The first battle for Joshua and the Israelites in the post-Moses era came after crossing the Jordan River. (Even that crossing was one where God's work through Joshua mimicked the Lord's prior crossing of the Re[e]d Sea with Moses.)

For the confrontation with Jericho, the Lord gave Joshua some most unusual instructions:

March around the city, all the men of war going around the city once. Thus shall you do for six days. Seven priests shall bear seven trumpets of rams horns before the ark. On the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets. And when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, when you hear the sound of the trumpet, then all the people shall shout with a great shout and the wall of the city will fall down flat. (Josh. 6:3-5).

Now, that surely struck the Israelites as bizarre as it does the first-time reader today. That is not standard military tactic!

Joshua and the people followed God's instructions precisely, and when the seventh day came, after the seven-circle march and the appropriate horn blasts,

The people shouted a great shout, and the wall fell down flat (Josh. 6:20).

If I had been there following these instructions, then seeing the results would have fully confirmed to me both Joshua's leadership and the Lord's anointing on him. This was a man to whom God was clearly speaking in great detail!

I suspect that this story was included in such detail in Scripture because of this confirmation. It told the people to trust Joshua and to trust the Lord who was behind Joshua. Jericho was certainly not a large or important town. Several of the towns we

considered in the last lesson were bigger and more significant, yet this story gets the primary attention within the Joshua narrative. It was the first victory without Moses, and it was very significant to the people.

Because the means of victory were so exotic, the story has held the fascination of people throughout the ages. It is not surprising that as archaeology began to develop as an academic discipline, Jericho was an easy attention getter! The attraction of discovering the famous fallen walls surely made it easier to raise funds for the work involved in the dig!

The account of Jericho takes up more room in the Joshua narrative than any other battle or confrontation.¹ The entire southern campaign against a coalition of five kings and involving a number of towns all fits into chapter 10; the entire northern campaign and battle at Hazor fits neatly into chapter 11. So as we read an entire chapter dedicated to the specifics of the battle of Jericho, a natural question arises: Why?

Why would this much time be spent on this battle? Was it simply to put some enthralling story into Israel's past (regardless of its truth)? If one were writing fiction, it would seem much more sensible to write this magnificent victory as one over Hazor or some other significant town. Jericho was not a large town, or even a town of great note. It was relatively isolated around an oasis/spring near the Dead Sea.

The "Why?" question has an easy answer if the story is real history. From a historical perspective, it makes sense that the battle would unfold as it did. As referenced earlier, it certainly would solidify the people behind Joshua after Moses' death. There could be little question that Joshua was God's anointed after this incident. Further, as the first battle west of the Jordan River, it set a measure of fear and concern into the other towns and people soon to face the Israelites. The events make great sense as history, but as fiction, they are surprising. In spite of this, many scholars believe the Jericho account to be fiction concocted hundreds of years later. Archaeology supposedly proves this fiction by showing that Jericho did not exist at the time of Joshua and an Israelite incursion in the Late Bronze Age (particularly c. 1230BC).

Jericho – the archaeology

As interesting as the biblical story of Jericho is, the story behind the archaeology is almost its equal! Let's start today and work back.

Don C. Benjamin, teaches Biblical and Near Eastern Studies at Arizona State University. In previous lessons, Benjamin published a textbook *Stones and Stories: An Introduction*

¹ Arguably the battle for Ai gets more space, but even Ai is linked to Jericho because of the difficulties related to the sin of Achan arising out of a failure to follow God's instructions in Jericho.

to *Archaeology and the Bible*.² It is the kind of book that undergraduate students might use in a course on the subject. Benjamin does a wonderful job at giving introductory information on some of the history of Biblical archaeology, on the methods of excavating a site and other non-controversial information and data.

In other places, however, Benjamin makes opinionated statements that beg for footnotes or other explanatory information. As they are, his opinions read like facts, leaving the reader to try and discern where his writings are factual and where they reflect his own interpretation of controversial evidence. Jericho is a good example of this.

Benjamin writes,

An ongoing challenge for cultural historians working in the world of the Bible is how to resolve contradictions between material remains and written remains [i.e., the Bible]. For example, the preached tradition understands the books of Joshua and Judges to be a description of how miraculous military victories confirmed the Hebrews' faith in Yahweh. Nonetheless, Kathleen Kenyon (1906—1978), who excavated Jericho from 1952 to 1959, could not confirm that there was a city at the site when the Hebrews were in Syria-Palestine. Instead the Hyksos' city of Jericho was destroyed in 1350 b.c.e.—more that 250 years before Joshua (1200—1000 b.c.e.)—and that the site remained abandoned until 716 b.c.e., when Hezekiah of Judah rebuilt it.³

Admittedly, Benjamin is not writing for a court, or even a law school professor, but writing like this would never get him a decent grade in a law school research and writing class. Nor would he fare well in math class if he thinks a destruction in 1350 bc is 250 years before a Joshua invasion in 1200 bc (which is better noted in the range of 1225 bc)!⁴

Benjamin makes multiple assumptions and conclusions, writing as if it is all well settled and beyond dispute. As a result, it leaves an unwary reader accepting his words as true. Meanwhile, those who know enough to see his words as opinions cloaked as data, likely know enough to not be reading such a primer in the subject.

² Benjamin, Don C., *Stones and Stories: An Introduction to Archaeology and the Bible*, (Fortress Press 2010).

³ *Ibid.*, at 92.

⁴ Benjamin gets his dates all wrong here. The prevailing opinion is that Middle Bronze Age Jericho was destroyed as part of the Egyptian expulsion of the Hyksos around 1560 BC. Jericho lay dormant for almost two hundred years after that. See Kenyon, Kathleen, "Jericho", *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land* ("NEAE"), Stern, Ephraim, ed. (Simon & Schuster 1993) at 680.

Let us dissect what he writes. Benjamin first assumes that there are contradictions between the written record (the Bible) and the material record (archaeological findings). The only substantiating evidence for this opinion is the example given of Jericho. He says that Jericho was abandoned, and no city existed on the site from 1350 to 716 bc. His cite for this, to the extent he has one, is Kathleen Kenyon and her excavations from 1952 to 1959.

By the flow of his statements, we should be able to read Kathleen Kenyon's writing on her findings at Jericho and see the Jericho site abandoned from 1350 to 716 bc. We then turn to his bibliography to find which of Kenyon's writings he gives as references. (This is always interesting because when books are given simply in bibliography without page and line cites, the author does not necessarily indicate he/she has read the references. It simply can be a list of authoritative materials!)

Interestingly, of the Kenyon references given by Benjamin, none are Kenyon's writings of her dig at Jericho. He gives two books she wrote *before* finishing her Jericho excavations. He also gives a general book she wrote, *Archaeology in the Holy Land*,⁵ and a set of essays published right before she died (as edited a decade later).⁶ Neither of these books are her detailed analysis of her findings at Jericho.⁷

The findings of Kenyon are not hard to get. If Kenyon's opinions are his justification for his conclusions, Benjamin should be able to go straight to the primary source of Kathleen Kenyon and read what she has written. It is not hard, yet, many in academia unfortunately give well-circulated opinions of certain references rather than actually doing the investigation to see if the opinion is accurate. In 1957, Kenyon published *Digging Up Jericho: The Results of the Jericho Excavations 1952-1956*, copies of which are still available today.⁸

Kenyon's book referenced above is not the only primary source for her opinions. Benjamin could read her opinions in countless articles she published in academic journals as well as her encyclopedia entry in *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*.⁹

⁵ Kenyon, Kathleen, *Archaeology in the Holy Land*, (Thomas Nelson 1960)

⁶ Kenyon, Kathleen and Morey, P. R. S., *The Bible and Recent Archaeology*, (John Knox 1987).

⁷ Benjamin also provides the bibliographic information on Kenyon's 1971 book *Royal Cities of the Old Testament*, (Shocken 1971) which is not based on Jericho either.

⁸ Kenyon, Kathleen, *Digging Up Jericho: The Results of the Jericho Excavations 1952-1956*, (Praeger 1957).

⁹ Kenyon, Kathleen, "Jericho", *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, Stern, Ephraim, ed. (Simon & Schuster 1993) at 674ff.

Using these primary sources, let us put Benjamin's statements about Kenyon's findings to the test. Does Kenyon find the site "abandoned" from 1350 to 716 bc? The simple answer to this is: "No!" There is more detail in the answer, however, which points out the logical fallacy of Benjamin and others in rendering their comments on Kenyon's findings.

To best understand this point, let us first use a simple illustration. Last spring, we took our children to a sandy ocean beach. We went near the water's edge and built a tremendous sand castle. More than a castle, we built a village. It was quite spectacular. The next day, there was little to no evidence of that sand village. It was gone. I could tell you about it, explain the number of walls and the moat built around it. I could detail the towers and the bucket-shaped main building, but there was nothing remaining to show you.

Of course it is obvious to anyone thinking through this illustration that the tide and waves eroded the sand castle/village. Its residue was lost in the innumerable sand grains of the beach.

Now the question: Supposing this story is true, does the lack of evidence mean that there was never a castle? Of course not. Erosion is a foreseeable event that would keep anyone from such a claim. One might say that there is "no evidence of a castle," but one should never say that the evidence proves the castle was never there.

This illustration helps us understand what Kenyon actually said, versus what Benjamin claims she said. Kenyon's excavations uncovered a Jericho of great antiquity. She found activity features that dated back past 9,000 bc.¹⁰ It was a natural place for settling in the sparse desert-like land around the Dead Sea because it had a constantly flowing spring of fresh water. For thousands and thousands of years people called that area home.

A typical feature of towns like Jericho was defensive walls built around the settlement. These walls protected the townspeople from marauders as well as wild animals. Unsurprisingly, therefore, Kenyon and earlier investigators¹¹ found evidence of defensive walls in various places and at various times in Jericho's history. Kenyon also

¹⁰ NEAE at 675.

¹¹ Kenyon was not digging on virgin ruins. Jericho had been subject to many other digging efforts, some of which left a bit of a mess! The Palestinian Exploration Fund sponsored excavations beginning in 1867 featuring work from Lord Kitchener and Captain Charles Warren. Then again between 1908 and 1911 the Austro-German team led by L. Sellin and T. Watzinger conducted digs there. British Professor John Garstang led a major archaeological effort from 1930 to 1936. Kenyon even discovered an area that had been backfilled by Garstang's crew. Kenyon set out the difficulty posed by the efforts of these earlier digs in *Digging Up Jericho* at 43ff.

found evidence that the town's walls periodically fell down, whether from erosion, lack of maintenance, earthquakes, or enemy attack. She similarly found evidence of the population changing from one type of people to another. Here are some excerpts of her Jericho findings:

- “Like Pre-Pottery Neolithic A, its successor, Pre-Pottery Neolithic B, came to an abrupt end...The buildings and surfaces of the period are eroded on an angle sloping down to the exterior of the town...the terraced walls had collapsed in whole or in part, and floors behind them had been washed out.”¹²
- “Jericho at this stage [the Proto-Urban phase] had grown into a steep-sided mound beside the spring responsible for its continued existence...The walls were completely destroyed, by earthquakes, by enemies, or merely through neglect.”¹³
- “The end of Early Bronze Age was sudden. A final stage of the town wall, which in at least one place shows signs of having been hurriedly rebuilt, was destroyed by fire.”¹⁴
- “Associated with these earliest Middle Bronze Age levels was a succession of town walls of the same brick type as those that form the Early Bronze Age...It is probable that elsewhere the line of these early Middle Bronze Age walls followed approximately that of the Early Bronze Age walls...However, for the greater part of the circuit, the earlier walls alone survived.”¹⁵

As the various historic settlements came to an end at Jericho, one of two things occurred. Either the town was fairly quickly re-inhabited, or it lay abandoned for some time. When the town was quickly re-inhabited, the ruins were evident for Kenyon's excavators. The evidence of a new settlement was architectural (different building styles), different burial practices (seen in the tombs), different pottery styles, tools and weapons.¹⁶

When there was no immediate resettlement, the result was erosion:

¹² AENE at 677.

¹³ *Ibid.*, at 678.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, at 678-679.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, at 679.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, at 679.

- “Between the Pottery Neolithic and the next stage at Jericho there is another gap...The gap is indicated by the usual erosion stage.”¹⁷
- “The greater part of the summit of the mound suffered very severe erosion during periods in which the site was unoccupied.”¹⁸
- In reference to the end of a Middle Bronze Age phase, “Only in one place, at the northwest corner of the town, did the glacis [an earthen berm/wall that often served as a base for an additional brick wall] survive to its full height, with the foundations of the wall above it. Elsewhere erosion had removed some 6 m [19 ½ feet] of it and, with them, all traces of the Middle Bronze Age walls.”¹⁹

With these background findings, we turn now to what Kenyon said specifically about a Late Bronze Age occupancy at Jericho. Kenyon actually said that *there was some Late Bronze Age II settlement, but of unknown size and extent*. The dating she believed would likely have been in the 1300 bc range rather than 1200 range, but even there she was not absolutely certain. The problem, as she pointed out, was that after this Late Bronze Destruction, the site lay dormant and subject to erosion for perhaps as much as 500 years.

Here are Kenyon’s own words on this:

- “Jericho, therefore, was destroyed in the Late Bronze Age II. It is very possible that this destruction is *truly remembered* in the Book of Joshua, although archaeology cannot provide the proof. The subsequent break in occupation that is proved by archaeology is, however, in accord with the biblical story. There was a period of abandonment, during which erosion removed most of the remains of the Late Bronze Age town and much of the earlier ones. Rainwater gulleys that cut deeply into the underlying levels have been found.”²⁰ (Emphasis added).

Kenyon does not deny the Joshua story, nor does she say it runs contrary to the evidence. She simply points out that any evidence was washed away and so archaeology cannot answer that question! So, for example, when speaking of the defenses for that

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, at 678.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, at 679.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, at 680.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, at 680.

time period, she does not say, “there were no walls.” Instead, she says, “Of the defenses of this period, nothing at all survives.”²¹

On the pottery finds in the tombs, she does not date the pottery to the 1200’s bc, but dates them 75 years or so before Joshua. But even here, she carefully notes that the pottery is “definitely later than 1380 bce...[although] probably not as late as the thirteenth century.”²²

The date of the pottery found in the tombs should not be misunderstood to equal the date of any Late Bronze Age occupation. Common sense explains why. Suppose a pot in the tomb is reasonably dated to 1300 bc. That means that the pot was placed in the tomb some time after that date. If the people were in the practice of making brand new pots (or trading for them) and placing those brand new pots in the tomb, that would help. No one suggests that such was the case, however.

We have used (old) pots that are likely going into the tombs. If a 1300 bc pot is 30 years-old when it is placed in the tomb, then the tomb records a population that died in 1270 bc, not 1300 bc. If the pot had been in the family for 50 years when placed in the tomb, then the person died in 1250 bc, etc. Furthermore, the burials occurred when survivors were able to bury their family that passed on before them. As the Joshua story sets out the events, this never would have happened. Joshua and the Israelites claim to have slain all the inhabitants leaving the town abandoned. There would be no burials from the time of Joshua.

In reviewing the findings of John Garstang, who excavated Jericho several decades before Kenyon (see footnote 10), we see Kenyon is more specific on her dating of the tomb finds.

The tombs were then re-used between about 1400 b.c. and c. 1350-1325 b.c.²³

She then goes on to document the finding of one building dated in the Late Bronze II time frame with a small juglet (a pottery piece) on the floor. In this context, Kenyon writes much as she did in the article quoted above:

The houses of the Late Bronze Age Jericho have therefore almost entirely disappeared. We have already seen that over most of the summit of the *tell* even the houses of the certainly populous Middle Bronze Age town have vanished, and only levels of the Early Bronze Age remain. We have also

²¹ *Ibid.*, at 680..

²² *Ibid.*, at 680.

²³ *Digging Up Jericho* at 261.

seen how the process of erosion was washing away the middle Bronze Age houses on the east slope... This process was arrested when the town of 1400 b.c. was built on top of the wash, but this in turn was abandoned, and erosion has almost removed it.²⁴

As to Joshua and the Jericho walls, in her book Kenyon did not dismiss the story. She simply wrote,

It is a sad fact that of the town walls of the Late Bronze Age, within which period the attack by the Israelites must fall by any dating, not a trace remains. The erosion which has destroyed much of the defences has already been described. It will be remembered that the summit of the Middle Bronze Age rampart only survives in one place. The Late Bronze Age town must have either re-used this, or a new wall may have been built above it, so nothing remains of it.²⁵

Kenyon then gives a movie-like description of what it might have been like during the Joshua attack on Jericho. Her final cite of evidence is the small juglet referenced above. She notes,

The evidence seems to me to be that the small fragment of a building which we have found is part of the kitchen of a Canaanite woman, who may have dropped the juglet beside the oven and fled at the sound of the trumpets of Joshua's men.²⁶

Going back to Kenyon as a primary source, one must wonder if Benjamin and others bothered to read her before using her as their source that Jericho was unoccupied from 1350 bc until 715 bc.²⁷

²⁴ *Ibid.*, at 261.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, at 262.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, at 263.

²⁷ Benjamin is not the stray bullet missing the mark on Kenyon. Repeatedly scholars publish wrongly on her findings. See, e.g., Cline, Eric, *Biblical Archaeology: A Very Short Introduction*, (Oxford 2009) at 41, "According to Kenyon's findings, Jericho had remained essentially deserted for the rest of the Late Bronze Age and into the early part of the Iron Age. It was therefore uninhabited at the time of Joshua and the coming of the Israelites. Thus the archaeological findings and the biblical account are asymmetrical (or inconsistent with each other)"; Dever, William, *Who Were the Early Israelites and Where Did They Come From?*, (Eerdmans 2003) at 46, "Moreover, Kenyon showed beyond any doubt that in the mid-late 13th century B.C.—the time period now required for any Israelites 'conquest'—Jericho lay completely abandoned."; Price, Randall, *The Stones Cry Out: What Archaeology Reveals About the Truth of the Bible*, (Harvest House Publishers 1997) at 143, "In the 1950s, however, Kathleen Kenyon excavated at Jericho and...announced that her findings revealed that the city had been destroyed

Still to be assessed in this process is the adequacy of Kenyon's conclusions about erosion stripping the Jericho mound of evidence of any Late Bronze Age town. There we turn our attention now.

Jericho and geoarchaeology

Reading the scholars on the walls of Jericho, there are some that argue that erosion has removed the evidence of the Late Bronze Age settlement at the site. This view is set out not only by Kenyon, but also by K. A. Kitchen and others.²⁸ Those in disagreement mention the erosion idea in an off-hand manner, even claiming it a desperate rationalization with no basis in reality.²⁹

Should we simply satisfy ourselves with one side or the other? If we believe in the story, do we just accept the "erosion theory"? If not, do we agree with the name calling on the issue to avoid any need for real inspection or fair investigation? Of course the right thing to do is to consider the argument on its merits, not blindly accepting the view of either camp, simply because it comports with our own.

Since the 1970's an increasingly common academic discipline termed "geoarchaeology" has taken geoscience and used it in an archaeological context.³⁰ While different scholars use the terms in different ways, this is an academic discipline that applies geology as a science to interpretation of archaeological remains. Geology, of course, includes the study of the effects of erosion on soils and other earthy materials.³¹ Within

around 1550 B.C., and therefore had long been uninhabited when Joshua arrived on the scene." And at 148, "Kenyon's excavations at Jericho convinced her that no one had occupied the city after 1550 B.C."

²⁸ Kitchen, Kenneth, *The Bible & Archaeology Today*, (Wipf and Stock 2004) at 89; Hoffmeier, James, *The Archaeology of the Bible*, (Lion Hudson 2008) at 69.

²⁹ See, e.g., Finkelstein, Israel and Silberman, Neil, *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of its Sacred Texts*, (Free Press 2002) at 81-83, "In the case of Jericho, there was no trace of a settlement of any kind in the thirteenth century bce...There was also no sign of a destruction...Thus the famous scene of the Israelite forces marching around the walled town...was, to put it simply, a romantic mirage...Passionate explanations and complex rationalizations were not long in coming, because there was so much at stake...In the case of Jericho, some scholars sought environmental explanations. They suggested the entire stratum representing Jericho at the time of the conquest, including the fortifications, had been eroded away."

³⁰ Rapp, George and Hill, Christopher, *Geoarchaeology: The Earth-Science Approach to Archaeological Interpretation*, (Yale University Press 2006), at 1-2.

³¹ Geosciences focus on erosion as an important factor in farmlands maintaining soil, in changing courses of rivers and shorelines, and in other areas where erosion can have a near immediate effect. The University of Michigan and the Institute of Water Research set up factors to help determine the rate of erosion. They developed a formula where the erosion of soil was equal to a combination of rainfall/runoff, soil erodibility, the length of slope on the area, the steepness of slope, the cover (vegetative) over the area, and the maintenance work to stop erosion. If we were to take this formula

the framework of Kenyon's opinions on the erosion at Jericho, geoarchaeology offers models and information that allow intelligent assessment of her conclusions.

Well-published and scholastic archaeologists have recognized and focused on erosion.

Erosion is an important factor in archaeological investigations, as archaeologists often find sites at places where erosion has occurred... Unfortunately, because erosion is ongoing, this means that many sites can be lost before they are found.³²

In Ebert and Singer's published analysis of how to predict erosion, they set forth a number of factors involved in computing erosion including soil structure and texture, slope of the material featured in erosion, wind and wind direction, and water/rain (especially the speed of the running water—the steeper the slope water runs on, the greater the erosion). Steeper slopes, like earthen embankments, lose more soil and surface from both runoff and wind than more flat surfaces. Coverage factors, especially thick groupings of trees, are the best protection against erosion.

Ebert and Singer's article is not blazing new ground. It is standard recognition in that scientific discipline. It is not written with any religious agenda. It is totally secular in its purpose and content. Similarly, the textbook by George Rapp, a Professor of Geoarchaeology, sets out the same principles.

Rapp explains the importance of slope and vegetation:

Slope stability and effective ground cover (vegetation) are the keys to understanding local erosional processes that take place away from meandering rivers and wave-pounded coasts.³³

Rapp also explains the role of water, not only pounding and running down sloped embankments and walls, but also undermining the integrity of walls by attacking the foundations and ground support from below.

back to Jericho in 1230 BC, we would check on the intensity and frequency of rains, note the excessive way the clay mud brick could erode absent protection, measure the length and steepness of the slope on the mud brick walls, note the total lack of vegetative cover, and recognize that as Jericho was to lay deserted for 400 years, there would be no maintenance on the walls. This would give us a good measurement for the rate of erosion, but without a time machine, we cannot do more than approximate these factors. See this in usage at the Michigan State website: www.iwr.msu.edu/rusle/factors.htm.

³² Ebert, David and Singer, Matthew, "GIS, Predictive Modelling, Erosion, Site Monitoring," *The Sheffield Graduate Journal of Archaeology*, Dec. 2004 (8).

³³ Rapp at 249-250.

Water is the most aggressive weathering agent there is...Structures built on slopes underlain by shale, unconsolidated sediments, or fill can topple or come apart because of uncommonly heavy rainfall that saturates new parts of the underlying ground, causing major downslope earth movements.³⁴

Rapp does note an additional important feature left out by Ebert and Singer: earthquakes and seismic disturbances. Noting that structures of walls around ancient towns frequently had stone reinforced foundations with mud brick walls on top (like excavation indicates were present in earlier-aged Jericho), Rapp explained that earthquakes could topple and destroy the mud brick walls without destroying the underlying stone walls or foundations. This would subject the mud brick walls to great erosion from subsequent rains and wind.³⁵

Where does this data intersect with the Jericho site? Jericho lies below sea level in the Dead Sea valley. It would likely have little slope stability both from the lack of vegetation (the area is a natural desert, absent the spring that was nearby) and from seismic activity. As Rapp noted,

Archaeological excavations and recorded earthquake history along the Dead Sea fault running between Israel and Jordan [the Jericho area] provide an almost continuous record for more than 2,000 years. T. Niemi and Z. Ben-Avraham have found evidence for earthquakes in Jericho from slumped sediments of the Jordan River Delta in the Dead Sea. They used seismic-reflection data to show that a long-term record of ancient earthquakes in Jericho can be found in the sedimentary record.³⁶

Again we emphasize Rapp is not writing a book with any religious overtones. It is simply a scientific textbook that never mentions or references any matter of religion or the Bible.

While it may seem obvious that such earthquakes might have occurred during the time frame of the Late Bronze/Early Iron Ages, it is not a matter without its own scientific inquiries.

Stanford geophysicist Amos Nur published his findings on the Late Bronze Age earthquake activity of the Eastern Mediterranean, including the Dead Sea/Jordan Valley in 2000. His findings were significant to our discussion:

³⁴ *Ibid.*, at 254, 258.

³⁵ Rapp at 258ff.

³⁶ Rapp at 260.

While the evidence is not conclusive, based on these new data we would suggest that an “earthquake storm” [clusters of quakes] may have occurred in the Late Bronze Age Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean [including the Jericho area by his maps] during the years 1225-1175 bc. This “storm” may have interacted with the other forces at work in these areas [erosion] c. 1200 bc and merits consideration by archaeologists and prehistorians.³⁷

Earthquake data and natural lack of vegetation are not the only connection points between state of the art scientific analysis/modeling of erosion and the site at Jericho. A closer focus on the remains at Jericho shows that the other erosion factors discussed above also come into play. After spending several successive winters excavating Jericho, Kenyon noted the weather pattern regarding the rainy season.

Winter rains in the Jordan Valley are violent while they last, and summer heat tends to reduce all surfaces to crumbly dust, easily washed away by the next rains.³⁸

Geologist Paul Goldberg notes the importance of driving hard rains in his textbook on geoarchaeology emphasizing,

Intensive rainstorms, are seen as the most important cause of major erosional and depositional events.³⁹

In a later section of the book dealing specifically with the ruins known as “Tells” or “mounds” which include Jericho, Goldberg adds that the mud brick used frequently in the walls and homes “are particularly susceptible to erosion by rainfall.”⁴⁰ Of course we already referenced Kenyon writing about her findings of “rainwater gulleys that cut deeply into the underlying levels” of Jericho.

Aside from the theoretical and scientific assessment of erosion’s reality, there is one more important avenue of inspection: observation.

While no one has lived the hundreds of years necessary to observe the erosion at Jericho’s ruins, it does not mean that we are without an ability to make observations. The ruins at Jericho go back past 8,000BC. In those ruins, Kenyon and others traced destructions and rebuilding. As was typical in the ancient world, the rebuilding came on

³⁷ Nur, Amos and Cline, Eric, “Poseidon’s Horses: Plate Tectonics and Earthquake Storms in the Late Bronze Age Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean,” *Journal of Archaeological Science* (2000) 27, 43-63.

³⁸ *Digging Up Jericho* at 259-260.

³⁹ Goldberg, Paul and Macphail, Richard, *Practical and Theoretical Geoarchaeology* (Blackwell 2006) at 77.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, at 227.

top of the older destroyed level, creating the mound or Tell shown today. The rebuilding would serve to insulate the lower layers from erosion. The top most layer would typically suffer the erosion, not the layers covered up.

The erosion problem was greatest when the site lay dormant after destruction. Then the layer that is on top is the layer that was destroyed. Without any upkeep or rebuilding, the abandoned layer was subject to all the destructive erosion forces detailed earlier. We know this to be true at Jericho because of observation in the archaeological binoculars.

The Middle Bronze Age town was built over the Early Bronze Age remains. After a destruction of the Middle Bronze Age town, there was a dormant period of almost 200 years. This time period was enough to wipe away through erosion almost all evidence of the thriving Middle Bronze Age town. The reason we know much about the Middle Bronze Age town is what was learned from the excavation of Jericho tombs from that time period.

Consider then the destruction set out in Joshua. The town was not only destroyed, but it lay dormant for twice as long as the period needed to remove almost all evidence of the Middle Bronze Age town. For 400 years, the decay and erosion took place. Furthermore, the residue from run off and erosion would likely go toward the east, toward the Jordan River (toward where the land slopes). Yet that area is not available for careful excavation because it has already been destroyed in the construction of a road that cuts right through the eastern boundary of ancient Jericho.

Conclusion

Kitchen went through a disclosure of his perspective on erosion and then concluded,

We will never find “Joshua’s Jericho” for that very simple reason [erosion].

This brings us to a most important point about Biblical archaeology. Archaeology is not the apologetic hammer. It does not destroy the faithless or the faithful. It can give us insight into Scripture and the customs and significance of its setting, but there is nothing in the archaeological record that destroys or proves the faith.

A Warrior God

The Problem

We constantly hold God to our internal moral standards of right and wrong. Whatever we think is right, we expect of God. Whatever we think is wrong, we disassociate from God. For example, consider what happens when many people read God’s instructions to Saul about the Amalekites:

Go strike Amalek and devote to destruction all that they have. Do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey (1 Sam. 15:3).

Many people recoil in horror; perhaps most people recoil in horror!

This act of God seems offensive not only by the moral standards of most today, but also by the moral standards Jesus taught as the true morality of God. It is Jesus who taught:

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you are also to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another (Jn. 13:34-35).

Jesus also instructed Peter to put away his sword when Jesus was being wrongfully arrested (Jn 18:11). It was Jesus who said,

You have heard that it was said, “You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you (Mt. 5:43-44).

Jesus also gave this admonition,

You have heard that it was said, “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also (Mt. 5:38-39).

These teachings of Jesus seem very contrary to the Old Testament instructions of God to the Israelites prior to invading the Promised Land:

But in the cities of these peoples that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance, you shall save alive nothing that breathes, but you shall devote them to complete destruction, the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, as the Lord your God has commanded (Dt. 20:16-17).

In summarizing the actions of Joshua and the Israelite army, Josh. 10:40 states,

So Joshua struck the whole land, the hill country and the Negeb and the lowland and the slopes, and all their kings. He left none remaining, but devoted to destruction all that breathed, just as the LORD God of Israel commanded.⁴¹

⁴¹ We need to be cautious about over-reading this passage as meaning that Joshua and the Israelites truly destroyed all people living in the Promised Land as opposed to all those engaged in battle. As discussed in the previous series, within the context of the book, Joshua left much unconquered.

As we look at the lessons of Joshua, this section of study focuses on the issue of God as warrior. We examine the actions and instructions attributed to God which seem contrary to both our moral expectations of God and to the teachings of God in the New Testament (and other parts of the Old Testament) as a God of love, long-suffering and patient, seeking redemption rather than revenge.

This is not a new problem; we are addressing one that has concerned thoughtful scholars and students for millennia. One 45-minute lesson cannot do justice to the subject matter. To more fully develop the issues, we have more material than one week's class, but it provides extra to help frame the debate and discussion as the teacher thinks best. We now move from the problem to the most common or noteworthy solutions generally offered. Then we offer a proposed set of ideas for further consideration.

Potential Solutions

There are a number of proposed solutions to the issue of God seemingly portrayed in Scripture as at times, vengeful, a warrior, and an extremist who embraces punishments and consequences that seem to far outweigh the crime. Some of these views defend the actions of God; others disassociate God from the described behaviors. We will first look at those views that disassociate God from the actions in question. We discuss three ancient views that embraced this disassociation:

1. Scriptural rewrites.

As we remember that the Bible we have today was the product of thousands of years of copying and writing – long before Guttenberg's press of 1450 – we recognize that scholars must work hard to determine with precision the reading of the autograph original texts of each biblical book. In other words, if our copy of Genesis, for example, dates hundreds or even over a thousand years from when the original was written, how do scholars figure out where copying errors were made?

Scholars' tools for these challenges are many, and scholars can readily identify certain types of changes in the copies of the texts we have today. Easy changes include misspellings, transposed letters, copying the same line twice, *etc.* Another area where scholars identify changes from the original text involves scribes' edits that were copying the texts after their completion.

Scholars have readily identified areas where scribes made changes in the text as they copied various Old Testament books out of a concern for how those books portrayed God. These were scribes, generally thought to be making copies of Scripture from 400BC to about 100BC. They would modify the reading of Scripture when they thought the words might bring reproach upon the character or person of God. For example, while our copy of the Hebrew text of 2 Samuel 12:9 asks,

Why do you treat the *word of the LORD* with contempt?

Many scholars believe the original text asked,

Why do you treat the *LORD* with contempt?

These perceived changes were made “to protect God from reproach...to avoid dishonor to God or to revered persons.”⁴² The fact that some scribes copying Scriptures between the Old and New Testament time period felt compelled to make subtle changes to protect God’s reputation, is one of the earliest examples of disassociating God from something in Scripture deemed “below” God and his character or dignity.⁴³

The approach indicates that for many, going back thousands of years, an approach to the problem of Scriptural portrayals of God that run contrary to the readers’ values, is simply to disassociate God from the actions. In modern parlance, “He didn’t really do that!”

A further example of re-writing Scripture is found in the non-biblical book of *Jubilees*. This book was written between 161 and 140BC.⁴⁴ This book attempts to retell many stories of the Bible as allegedly told to Moses while he was spending his 40 days on Mount Sinai before God. In *Jubilees*, it is the master demon Mastema who has God test Abraham by asking for the sacrifice of Isaac (Jub. 17:16). This is a clear move away from Scripture’s claim simply that God came to Abraham asking for the sacrifice.

The idea that Scripture could not really mean what Scripture seems to be saying repercolates in other approaches, as we will shortly see. All of these similar approaches run into many of the same problems, as we will discuss later.

2. A Different God.

One of the first major heresies confronted by the early church came from the teachings of Marcion. Marcion was born in Sinope, Asia Minor somewhere toward the end of the first or beginning of the second century. A wealthy ship owner and merchant, he moved to Rome around 135 A.D. Some early authorities indicate that Marcion’s home church

⁴² McCarter, Peter Kyle, *Textual Criticism, Recovering the Text of the Hebrew Bible* (Fortress 1986) at 58-59. Changing one or more of the letters in the word is termed “*tiqqune soperim*” (Hebrew meaning “scribal corrections”). Scholars debate both the frequency and placement of these emendations. See the explanations in Wurthwein, Ernst, *The Text of the Old Testament*, (Eerdmans 1995) 2d ed. At 17ff.

⁴³ We should add that among those passages generally agreed as amended by scribes, the text is altered minimally. See generally, Brotzman, Ellis, *Old Testament Textual Criticism, A Practical Introduction*, (Baker Academic 1994) at 117ff; Hayes, John, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, (Abingdon 1979) at 55.

⁴⁴ See the Introduction and Translations by O. S. Wintermute in Charlesworth, James H., ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, (Doubleday 1985) v. 2, at 44.

(where his father was Bishop!) had already expelled him for heresy or moral misdeeds. Arriving in Rome, Marcion became a major player in the Roman church donating a large sum of money. The Roman church eventually returned the money and also expelled Marcion for his heretical teachings and ideas.⁴⁵

Marcion taught that the church wrongly used and supported the Old Testament. For Marcion, the God of the Old Testament was clearly different than the God of the New Testament and Jesus. Using Luke 5:36-38 (the parable of the wineskins) and Luke 6:43 (“no good tree bears bad fruit nor does a bad tree bear good fruit”), Marcion argued that Jesus’ message was totally new and apart from Judaism and the Jewish scriptures. Marcion wrote a listing of proofs that the Old Testament God was different from that of the New Testament.⁴⁶ For example, The God of Genesis could not find Adam and Eve, having to call out, “Where are you?” (Gen. 3:9), whereas Jesus knew even the thoughts of man (Luke 5:22). A similar “proof” for Marcion was the God of the Old Testament saying, “an eye for an eye” (Ex. 21:24) where Jesus said, “If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also” (Lk 6:29).

Marcion considered the God of the Old Testament as a vengeful and hateful God contrasted to the loving God of the New Testament. Similarly, the Old Testament God was centered on legal minded justice while the New Testament God and father of Jesus was merciful. The Old Testament God worked through his faulty creation; the New Testament God came into that creation to save mankind.

Marcion put together his own set of acceptable scriptures. Marcion’s “Bible” or “canon” consisted of Luke edited to his liking, and ten of Paul’s letters again edited and explained by the peculiarities of Marcion’s beliefs in introductions to the books. Marcion sought to distance the true teachings of Paul and Luke (and thereby of Jesus) from that of the other apostles. Marcion believed that Paul, Jesus, and Luke had supported his belief that the Old Testament god was a vengeful, hateful, harsh, and judgmental god distinct from the God of the New Testament. Similarly, Judaism was a corrupt and wicked faith that promised an earthly Messiah to set up an earthly kingdom. That anticipated event was pre-empted by the loving God of the New Testament who sent Jesus (not a man, but an apparition!) to destroy the Old Testament and Judaism by revealing it for what it was.

When Marcion put together his scriptures, he used the gospel of Luke, and none of the other three. Even the gospel of Luke required revisions, however, so Marcion left off the first two chapters that linked Jesus to the Old Testament by birth and teaching.

⁴⁵ Polycarp, the Bishop of Smyrna, reportedly ran into Marcion in Asia Minor (or Rome, depending upon account). As Iranaeus reported the account, Marcion asked Polycarp, “Do you recognize me?” Polycarp responded, “I recognize you for the firstborn of Satan!” Iranaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book 3, 3:4.

⁴⁶ This publication was called, *Antithesis*, and is lost. What we know of it today comes mainly from Tertullian’s writings against Marcion from about 200 A.D.

Similarly, Marcion left out the temptation narrative in Luke 4:1-3 because Jesus quotes Deuteronomy three times in response to Satan's temptations. Luke 4:16-30 where Jesus claims to fulfill the Old Testament was also booted from Marcion's bible. Paul's writings also suffered editing from the hand of Marcion. Much of Romans 9-11 was removed, as were the critical verses from Romans 3:21-4:25. In Galatians, Paul's usage of Abraham as an example of faith was excised.⁴⁷

The effect of Marcion on the church was significant. He spread his heresy far and wide (Tertullian would say he planted churches the way wasps do nests!). Marcionism grew so much that the movement lasted several hundred years. Not a small feat when you consider that it taught celibacy, so growth only occurred through conversion!

Of course, Marcion's solution to the difficult Scriptural portrayals of God are only as reliable as one's willingness to throw away most all of what the church and Judaism has recognized as Holy Writ.

3. A Different Hermeneutic.

Rather than completely rejecting the Old Testament, many scholars, ancient and modern, read portions of the Old Testament as something different than the simple history some of those portions seem to convey. We shall consider both an ancient and a modern use of this approach.

Origen and the Alexandrian School

In Alexandria, Egypt, a tradition of reading the Old Testament allegorically preceded even the Christian writers.⁴⁸ Similar allegorical approaches were a hallmark of the early seminary at Alexandria, home to many noteworthy early church figures including Clement of Alexandria (c.150 - 215) and Origen (c.185 – 250).

Origen worked hard to understand the unity of Scripture and of God as revealed in Scripture. In the face of Marcionism and other heresies in the early church, Origen believed that the one God was revealed in both the Testaments, and a peacemaker was

⁴⁷ Marcion taught an ethic that was very impressive. No doubt many converts were won over to his system simply by his lifestyle. Again, there are impressive lifestyle examples found in heresies of orthodoxy today, but that does not change the issues of truth in belief and understanding. Marcion was celibate and required the same of his followers. He taught people that morality was important and urged people to live, denying the pleasures of this world and dedicating themselves to the next world. For more on Marcion and early church heresies see the Church history series under our website at www.Biblical-Literacy.com. The most thorough contemporary work on Marcion is Harnack, Adolf, *Marcion, The Gospel of the Alien God*, (Baker Books 1990).

⁴⁸ Jewish writer Philo of Alexandria read Old Testament passages allegorically.

the person who could demonstrate the concord and peace of the Old Testament with the New.⁴⁹

Toward that end, Origen believed that there were three possible levels for understanding Scripture. The most basic level was the literal one. Beyond that, however, Origen believed were more profound and useful categories of moral interpretation and of allegorical interpretation. Here was where Origen frequently found his answers to the perplexing problems we discuss today.

We have a set of Origen's sermons on Joshua. Origen understood the message of Joshua not in literal terms, but allegorical ones. The inhabitants of Canaan that were to be destroyed by Israel were symbolic of our sin. When Joshua was instructed to fully and totally annihilate and destroy the local inhabitants, what Origen understood the instruction to fully destroy the sin within us, whether that sin was old, or new, fully-grown or infantile. Not just the sin, but also all that went with the sin (livestock, *etc.*). All was to be destroyed and devoted to God.

Within us are the Canaanites; within us are the Perizzites; here are the Jebusites. In what way must we exert ourselves, how vigilant must we be or for how long must we persevere, so that when all these breeds of vices have been forced to flee, "our land may rest from wars" at last?⁵⁰

Of course, Origen saw this allegory even more convincingly since "Joshua" as a name was the Hebrew version of the Greek name "Jesus." As Joshua led the people to victory over the Canaanites, Jesus leads the believer to victory over sin.⁵¹

Siebert and the Historiography Approach

Eric Seibert is a Professor of Old Testament at Messiah College, a private congregation associated with the Brethren church. One hallmark of the Brethren church is its stand for pacifism, even in the face of war.⁵² Seibert grew up with pious convictions in that denomination, and it is not surprising that he found the Old Testament scriptures that show God ordering battle and war very troubling.

Seibert has written a book he uses as a text in teaching classes on this subject entitled, *Disturbing Divine Behavior: Troubling Old Testament Images of God*.⁵³ In the book,

⁴⁹ Bruce, Barbara, *The Fathers of the Church: Origen, Homilies on Joshua*, (Catholic University Press 2002) at 6-7.

⁵⁰ Origen, *Homilies on Joshua*, at 34.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, at 26ff.

⁵² Read more about the Brethren church and the Anabaptist movement from which it developed at the church history lessons on the class website referenced in footnote 8.

⁵³ Seibert, Eric, *Disturbing Divine Behavior: Troubling Old Testament Images of God*, (Fortress 2009).

Seibert takes a 21st century approach to the problem that, like Origen, dismisses much of the literal meaning of the Old Testament passages in question, yet for an entirely different reason. While Origen was always concerned with every word, believing that all Scripture had a role of edifying the reader (even the most minute passage), and hence the Bible was word for word precisely what God intended, Seibert takes a different view.

Seibert does not believe that the texts accurately convey history. Instead, he considers them part of a genre of literature that he and a number of other scholars term “ancient historiography.” After a rather superficial walk through some issues that he believes disproves the historical value of the biblical history books, he then explains the “type” of literature he believes is present:

Assuming that Old Testament narratives were written to preserve a record of what actually happened is a modern—not an ancient—historiographic assumption... Old Testament narrative represents a distinct literary genre that needs to be understood on its own terms.⁵⁴

Seibert then offers several distinguishing hallmarks of his idea of “ancient historiography”:

- The “narratives often reveal more about the Author’s timeframe than the stories.”⁵⁵ Seibert believes Joshua was written in the late 600’s BC, not in the real time of Joshua.
- “Old Testament narratives were more concerned with literary persuasion than with historical objectivity.”⁵⁶ In this sense, Seibert believes the authors “massaged” the facts to make their points, regardless of historical accuracy.
- “Old Testament narratives put words in people’s mouths.”⁵⁷ Seibert believes that when someone is said to have spoken something, the speech was not truly spoken. It was just a way of conveying a message important to the story.
- “Old Testament narratives view the world theologically.”⁵⁸ For this reason, the authors supposedly supply theological reasons for events regardless of whether

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, at 105-106.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, at 108.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, at 110.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

the theological reason was valid. So when Scripture says, “God did or said xyz, one should not believe it as history, but merely a way to further a storyline.

Any regular follower of this class will recognize that this is not a view to which I subscribe. While my objections are many, I will list just three, starting with the weakest and working to the strongest concerns:

1. Seibert reminds me of many of my friends who went to graduate school and were taught this approach, but never spent the time trying to examine it on its own merits, opting instead to follow it as the popular notion. Now this is not a valid reason for my rejection of his opinions, but merely an observation of what might be true.⁵⁹ Suffice it to say it makes me suspicious and a more careful reader of how he justifies his conclusions.
2. Seibert does a thoroughly inadequate job of arguing that the accounts could not be historical in an accurate sense. A primary example is the two-page treatment of why the Joshua events are impossible according to the “archaeological evidence.” For example, referencing Jericho, Seibert fails to fairly parse through the evidence as we have above. Instead, Seibert merely quotes Finkelstein and Silberman’s conclusions that Jericho was unoccupied at the time of the invasion of Canaan.⁶⁰
3. Most importantly, this approach by Seibert removes any historical validity from most of the Bible, save perhaps only that authenticated by extra-biblical evidence. Seibert wants the readers to embrace a “Christocentric Hermeneutic” by which he means, believe and understand that God is as revealed by Jesus. The problem here is that many will say that the New Testament narratives are “ancient historiography,” just as Seibert thinks of the Old Testament. At what point does one decide that history truly took place? Seibert tries to get there by urging his students to be “discerning readers,” but in my opinion, he fails to give real objective ways to decide what he believes is real (what Jesus said) versus what he believes was pushing an agenda (the Joshua narratives for example).

In conclusion, the modern scholar Seibert (and others in his school of thought) joins the ancients in trying to disassociate God from the behavior ascribed to him in the Old

⁵⁹ A proper examination would begin by identifying multiple extra-biblical examples of this narrative type. This identification should show the types to proceed from the same culture in the same time range for similar reasons. Then taking those examples, study to find the characteristics that both show it to be such “ancient historiography” and show how to make the determination. Seibert does reference Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Yet, most scholars recognize the ancients always understood those works as a fictional storyline (actually they were Greek poems!). This is true even though the *Iliad* used the background of the war with Troy as its basic storyline. Importantly, not even Seibert argues that the poems are cultural equivalents to the Hebrew narrative histories.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, at 101-102.

Testament. These “disassociation approaches” are contrasted to those approaches that seek to accept God’s behavior as set forth in the difficult passages. We turn to those now.

4. God is complex and at times, abusive.

Rabbi David Blumenthal, a professor of Judaic studies at Emory University, authored a book entitled, *Facing the Abusive God: A Theology of Protest*.⁶¹ In the book, Blumenthal tries to understand how God could allow such travesties as the holocaust or the sexual abuse of a child. His conclusion is that sometimes God is abusive. Blumenthal writes,

God is abusive, but not always. God, as portrayed in our holy sources and as experienced by humans throughout the ages, acts, from time to time, in a manner that is so unjust that it can only be characterized by the term “abusive.” In this mode, God allows the innocent to suffer greatly. In this mode, God “caused” the holocaust, or allowed it to happen (emphasis in original).⁶²

Having set this out, Blumenthal then chides God adding,

Abusive behavior is abusive; it is inexcusable, in all circumstances (emphasis in original).⁶³

Not surprisingly, in an earlier chapter where Blumenthal sets out six personal attributes of God, his list includes as number three, “*God is powerful but not perfect.*”⁶⁴

Blumenthal has no trouble understanding or accepting the Old Testament passages that seem to disturb many in what they might indicate about God. For Blumenthal, they accurately reflect the idea that God is not perfect, has a temper, and sometimes does very abusive and inexcusable things.

This idea certainly runs counter to the idea contained in both the Old and New Testament that God is in fact perfect. We read in Deuteronomy 32:4,

The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he.

Similarly in 2 Samuel 22:31 (and Psalm 18:30) we read,

⁶¹ Blumenthal, David, *Facing the Abusive God: A Theology of Protest*, (Westminster/John Knox 1993).

⁶² *Ibid.* at 246.

⁶³ *Ibid.* at 248.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* at 16.

This God—his way is perfect; the word of the LORD proves true; he is a shield for all those who take refuge in him.

Jesus echoed this same conviction when he urged his disciples to seek perfection as their God and Heavenly Father is perfect (Mt. 5:48).

While one sympathizes with those who have endured the worst pains and travails, and while nothing can equal the pain of what transpired in the holocaust, save maybe those children who endure sexual abuse, it does not seem to resolve the issue of these passages in a way that is consistent with other teachings of Scripture.

5. God has divine immunity.

In 2003, Zondervan published a book as part of their “Counterpart Series” that featured four different theologians advancing four different views on the issue of “God and Canaanite Genocide.”⁶⁵ One of the theologians is Professor Daniel Gard who teaches theology at Concordia Theological Seminary. Gard does a good job describing the “Divine Immunity” position:

Nothing evil can be attributed to God because God is in his very essence good... What appears to the human mind as “evil” acts of God are in fact not “evil” acts at all since they come from the Lord himself. There simply comes a point in which human reason must bow to the divine and recognize that his ways are truly not ours and his thoughts are truly above our own (cf. Isa. 55:8-9).⁶⁶

This view accepts the actions of God but does not seek to judge them or hold them in any negative light. By definition, God’s actions are termed both right and righteous. His actions are simply accepted. A major criticism levied against this approach is that it “discourages certain kinds of questions and restricts honest inquiry about the character of God...[It] leaves little room for vigorous engagement with questions of divine justice and fairness.”⁶⁷

6. God had just causes for his actions.

Walter Kaiser joined with four other authors in compiling a book entitled, *Hard Sayings of the Bible*.⁶⁸ In the book, Kaiser addresses the questions of why God said,

⁶⁵ Cowles, C. S., et al., *Show Them No Mercy: Four Views on God and Canaanite Genocide* (Zondervan 2003).

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* at 55.

⁶⁷ Seibert at 73.

⁶⁸ Kaiser, Walter, *et al.*, *Hard Sayings of the Bible*, (IVP Academic 1996).

“Completely Destroy Them!”⁶⁹ Kaiser asserts that Scripture provides the reason, at least partially, for God’s actions:

God dedicated these things or persons to destruction because they violently and steadfastly impeded or opposed his work over a long period of time.⁷⁰

Kaiser points out the Genesis 15:13-16 passage where God says he will wait to lead the Israelites from Egypt until “the iniquity of the Amorites” is “complete.” Similarly, Kaiser points to Deuteronomy 9:5,

Not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart are you going in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations the LORD your God is driving them out from before you, and that he may confirm the word that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

For Kaiser, the actions of God are consistent with the motive of cutting off a gangrenous limb:

This is not doing evil that good may come; it is removing the cancer that could infect all of society and eventually destroy the remaining good.⁷¹

While the explanations given by Kaiser resonate with other passages of Scripture, his explanation fails to consider (or at least fails to address) the instructed slaughter of infants and young children.

7. God’s actions were for the greater good.

When Jesus was asked why Moses allowed divorce, if indeed divorce was not within God’s intention for marriage, Jesus responded, “Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce, but from the beginning it was not so” (Mt. 19:8). The concept Jesus conveyed was that God was, in a sense, making the best of a bad situation. Things were not going to be handled in the perfect way God would order, and so God set in place a procedure to minimize the harm from the sin.

In a similar manner, some understand the actions of God in destroying the Canaanites (and others) as something that, while not the best course, was the best course *under the circumstances*. An example of this reasoning is found in the writings of Gleason Archer, professor of Old Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. Gleason writes that:

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, at 206-207.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* at 206.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* at 207.

The baneful infection of degenerate idolatry and moral depravity had to be removed before Israel could safely settle down in these regions and set up a monotheistic, law-governed commonwealth as a testimony for the one true God. Much as we regret the terrible loss of life, we must remember that far greater mischief would have resulted if they had been permitted to live on in the midst of the Hebrew nation.⁷²

In other words, as bad as it was, it could have been worse! Gleason's analysis has some scriptural support from passages like Deuteronomy 20:16-18,

But in the cities of these peoples that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance, you shall save alive nothing that breathes, but you shall devote them to complete destruction...that they may not teach you to do according to all their abominable practices that they have done for their gods, and so you sin against the LORD your God.

The difficulty in Archer's approach, like the "just cause" approach of Kaiser, is that it fails to address the order to kill infants. Are we to believe that the one-week old infant growing up in a monotheistic Israel would lead the Israelites astray after idols?

Terrence Fretheim, an Old Testament Professor at Luther Seminary, takes a similar approach but with a different "greater good." Fretheim argues that even in violence, God is seeking to accomplish loving purposes. Writing in part in response to the violence of 9/11, and the assertion by perpetrators that God religiously justified it as a holy war, Fretheim distinguished God's actions of war and killing in the Old Testament:

God's *uses* of violence—and that phrasing is important—are associated with two basic purposes: judgment and salvation...God's use of violence, inevitable in a violent world, is intended to subvert human violence in order to bring creation along to a point where violence is no more.⁷³

So, Fretheim argues that God uses violence to push the world closer to no violence—paying an ugly price today to eliminate ugliness tomorrow.

Seibert challenges Fretheim's approach as one that allows the ends to justify the means.⁷⁴ God can do something wrong, he asserts, in order to accomplish something right. This is not a totally fair critique, however, for the argument of Fretheim is that something wrong will be done either way. God's actions are to prevent the greater wrong, not to use a wrong to make a right.

⁷² Archer, Gleason, *An Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, (Zondervan 1982) at 158.

⁷³ Fretheim, Terrence, "God and Violence in the Old Testament," *Word & World*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Winter 2004) at 22-25.

⁷⁴ Seibert at 80.

8. God's actions are a part of his progressive revelation.

Progressive revelation refers to the idea that over time, God revealed more and more of his nature and purposes as the cultures and understandings of people were able to process the fuller revelation. In Christ, this doctrine teaches, the revelation of God is made complete. (“Whoever has seen me [Jesus] has seen the Father” – Jn. 14:9).

Tremper Longman, Old Testament Professor at Westmont College, wrote one of the four views in the Zondervan Counterpoints series discussed earlier. In his chapter, Longman sets out what might be fairly construed as “progressive revelation applied to divine warfare.” Longman writes of “five phases of holy war in the Bible”:

Phase 1: God Fights the Flesh-and-Blood Enemies of Israel.⁷⁵

This was the type of military battle described in Joshua.

Phase 2: God Fights Israel.⁷⁶

Longman explains that as Israel learned to live under covenant with God, they learned that failure to abide within that covenant brought judgment upon them, just as they had been God's tools to bring judgment upon other nations and peoples. An example from Joshua is given in the defeat of Israel at the hands of Ai after Israel failed to fully obey God in dedicating all treasure from Jericho to the LORD (Josh. 7).

Phase 3: God Will Come in the Future as Warrior.⁷⁷

This is seen as the note on which the Old Testament ends—God will not allow his people to be eternally in bondage. “One day God will come again and free them from their oppression.”⁷⁸

Phase 4: Jesus Christ Fights the Spiritual Powers and Authorities.⁷⁹

As Jesus arrives, the revelation progresses and the war is no longer fought on a flesh-and-blood level. It is a war against powers and forces that are met without conventional weapons. Jesus gives sight to the blind, heals the lame, cures the leprous, gives hearing to the deaf, raises the dead, and preaches good news to the poor (Mt. 11:4-6). The violence of phase four comes in the opposite manner than one might expect. God does

⁷⁵ Cowles at 174-175.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* at 178.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* at 179.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

not wage war with physical violence on others. Rather, others use physical violence on God, which is then received as a military victory over the dark powers and forces!

The crucifixion of Jesus indicates a transition away from old physical war against the enemies of God in favor of a higher victory—a spiritual victory. So, Jesus teaches people to win by losing, that the first will be last and the last first (Mt. 20:15-17). He tells Peter to put up his sword knowing he could call legions of angels should he choose a physical fight (Mt 26:52-54).

Paul takes this concept and gives it further explanations in Ephesians 6:12-18,

We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times.

This places the later ideas of the New Testament not as a contrary revelation of God, but a further more progressive revelation.

Phase 5: The Final Battle.⁸⁰

The state of things after the sacrifice of Christ is not the final stage of revelation of God as warrior. The book of Revelation teaches in very vivid language that Christ will come back as holy warrior and will finally right all wrongs, leading into the next age when the beast and false prophet are thrown into the fiery lake of burning sulfur while their army is killed with the sword proceeding from the mouth of Christ (Rev. 19:11-21). While the exact meaning of this vision is yet to be seen and understood, we do note that the New Testament teaches that the current state of battle between right and wrong, will one day find its culmination in right winning and wrong being destroyed.

The progressive revelation view sort of begs the question of why an all powerful God acts in an apparently immoral way. It seems to explain *what* he is doing, but not *why*.

These viewpoints are some of those expressed by authors and theologians, both ancient and modern. These arguments are not the only ones, and others espouse these arguments differently. However, they serve to give a flavor of what others assess when

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* at 182.

reading these difficult texts and as such, give background ideas and pitfalls in our suggested considerations below.

Suggested Considerations

So we approach, with a measured respect for eternity, the problem discussed previously: How does a God of love (1 Jn. 4:8), a God who teaches love for enemies (Mt. 5:43-44), a God who teaches some measure of personal pacifism (“If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also” Mt. 5:38-39), a God who says we will be known by the love we show (Jn. 13:34-35) – how does this same God tell the Israelites coming into the Promised Land:

But in the cities of these peoples that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance, you shall save alive nothing that breathes, but you shall devote them to complete destruction, the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, as the Lord your God has commanded (Dt. 20:16-17).

This same God later told King Saul:

Go strike Amalek and devote to destruction all that they have. Do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey (1 Sam. 15:3).

To better understand the solutions, we need to examine the problem more clearly. On a micro-level, this problem is one of these specific instructions pertaining to Israel’s invasion of Canaan and some other military actions. But on a broader level, the problems are larger. For even if we could explain the meaning of these invasion passages as less terminal than they appear, we are still confronted with God proclaiming himself the destroyer of all humanity (save Noah and family) in the flood. This, of course, included every child of every age. Even if we could explain this broader level of concern, however, we have yet a third level of issue, namely God’s passive allowance of violence. How do we wrestle with an all-powerful God allowing the holocaust – or the sexual abuse of a child?

At its core, then, the issue of God’s instructions to Joshua and the Israelites is part of a much broader issue:

How do we explain our observation and experience of evil in light of an all-powerful and all-loving God?

These questions tug at our hearts and minds as we try to make sense of God and of our faith.

We begin noting that this section is not entitled “Solution.” We are not going to solve a problem that has plagued thinking people for millennia in a 45-minute lesson. In fact,

one of the biggest difficulties in writing a lesson on this subject, as opposed to a book, is culling the issues and arguments into bite-size while making sense and being fair to the material. Our goal, therefore, is to offer some constructive ideas and resources to help influence our thinking, study, and prayer on these subjects. Hopefully this lesson will serve as a catalyst for further discussion.

The format for this section stems heavily from my life as a lawyer. Lawyers are taught to approach learning and educating through the Socratic method. Named after Plato's teacher Socrates, this method is used in law school education. Most every class is taught not by lecture, but by questions. The professor calls upon the student and grills her or him to both educate and train the future lawyer. Then as trial lawyers, we live in courts built off the same tool in a drive for truth. Witnesses are put on the stand, and the truth is determined through a question and answer process.

The key for a lawyer (or law professor) is to *ask the right questions*. It is too common for someone to ask questions that make assumptions that cloud the answer. Just the other day someone suggested a speech topic for an upcoming lecture:

"The Bible or the Enlightenment: Which is the source of American Religious Liberty?"

Now that may be a valid question, or it may not be. It assumes that the answer is either the Bible or the enlightenment. What if the truth is a combination of the two rather than one or the other? For that matter, what if the truth is that neither is the source?

I would suggest that a similar improper first question on our issue is:

Why would a loving, moral God use evil or allow evil to occur?

This question assumes a definition of evil and, to some degree, a definition of love. For many, asking this improper question is the same as saying:

If I were God I would not allow things I don't like to happen.

If we wish to fairly consider this subject, we need to make sure we are asking fair questions! We set forward four questions as a framework for constructing ideas on the problem of a good God and the presence of evil.

What is evil?

This is a fundamental question that lies at the heart of the problem. How we answer this question determines much of our understanding of the problem of God's existence and God's justice.⁸¹ As we were leaving class last week, a friend of mine in attendance, a

⁸¹ The theological term "theodicy" is often used to speak of explaining God in light of the existence of evil. This term comes from two Greek words, *theos* meaning "God" and *dike* meaning "justice."

very intelligent and well-educated ivy-league doctor, said to me, “You set out my arguments very well. This is why I do not believe in God.” For my friend, there can be no God in light of the evil we see.

My core question to anyone with this view is always the same: What is evil? Evil must be more than pain or harm. For a doctor causes pain when he removes an organ that has cancer. Is the doctor doing evil? Not by most people’s definition. So do we define evil as doing harm when compared to the good that comes from the action? In other words, if the doctor does a better good by his deed than the measurable pain or harm, the deed moves from vice to virtue? That seems inadequate too for perhaps the surgery by the doctor does not work, in spite of the doctor’s best efforts. Do we say then that the doctor did evil? Maybe we need to consider motive. Could we say that evil is doing harm without a superimposing motive of a worthy purpose? Of course the question then becomes one of what is a worthy purpose?

In defining evil, should we give different definitions depending upon the *kind* of evil? Do we say that there is a “moral evil” as opposed to an evil behavior?

As a framework for answering “What is evil?” I would suggest there are alternative perspectives. One is to view and define evil based upon my conscience and observation. If I feel abortion is evil, it is. If I feel abortion is not evil, then it is not. Evil becomes a subjective term. Evil becomes, like beauty, something in the eye of the beholder. Of course the immediate problem here is the fluid nature of evil. What was evil last night may not be this morning. What is evil to one is not evil to another. Evil as a concept is difficult to maintain consistently when it is simply subject to the conscience of the individual.

A second idea is to take the moral consensus of a society and make it the definition of evil. So rather than simply rely on the individual’s conscience, evil gets its definition from community conscience. What do “most people” agree is right and wrong? Again, however, this definition still produces a subjective and inadequate answer. Mere mention of Nazi Germany and the holocaust points to the core problem: If a society deems it moral and ethical to gather all Jews together for a final solution of extermination, does it make it right? Can the community conscience trump that of my own conscience?

A third idea is to make evil the core historical values that have led to the development of mankind, as it exists in the modern cultural world. Again, though, we are at a subjective definition that lacks the ability to give an adequate working definition. It is like the old issue of seeing a glass half empty or half full. Do we see the tragedies of Darfur, of the holocaust, of the Bolshevik Revolution, of American slavery, etc., as acceptable moral

good since they were part of the shaping that gave definition to our humanity as it exists today?⁸²

All of these ideas given so far carry a common denominator: they draw their definition from humanity (individually or collectively). In that regard they all also fall short of providing a solid objective working definition for evil (or for good for that matter).

The theist has a different option for defining evil and good. The theist can look outside of humanity for the definition and offer a truly objective (from a human's perspective) definition.⁸³ Evil and good can be defined by appealing to the moral nature of God. "Good" is then defined as the actions and values of God; "evil" is the antithesis of good. What God does is deemed "good" and that which is contrary to God's morality is "evil."

This is not a novel perspective developed conveniently for this class. This concept was in the teaching of Christ. When the rich ruler approached Christ and called him "good teacher," Christ underscored a theistic view of "good" asking,

Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone (Lk. 18:19).

Paul certainly seems to indicate the same objective idea of good. It is the most sensible understanding of his claim that no one does a good deed, "not even one" (Rom. 3:12).

This is not simply a New Testament concept. In Isaiah 64:5 we read,

You meet him who joyfully works righteousness,
those who remember you in your ways.

This is a Hebrew structure called "parallelism." It gives the same idea in two different phrasings as a means of poetic expression. So this passage is equating one who "works righteousness" to one who remembers God's "ways." Goodness or righteousness derives its meaning as the ways or morals of God. Isaiah then contrasts righteousness and God's ways in the next verse with those of man whose "righteous deeds are like a polluted garment."

If we define good as characteristic of God and distinguish/define evil as that which is contrary to God and his morality, then how do we process that feeling in our gut that God is doing something wrong when he orders the killing of every "man and woman,

⁸² Some might respond, "No, history has shown these tragedies as against the flow of core values." Yet an argument can be made that the negative experiences helped shape and define the responses and, as such, were an integral good part of the historical development of core values. These arguments can push both ways in an exchange that could continue *ad infinitum*.

⁸³ This lesson is not written as an apologetic. It is not written to persuade or argue for the existence of God. Certainly, however, these issues go to the core of certain arguments for believing in God. The question of which worldview best explains the world we experience is an appropriate question to ask in trying to determine whether the Christian worldview is more or less valid than another.

child and infant”)? I suggest it goes back to our constant struggle to make God into our image rather than seeking our transformation into his. Here is my point: everything dies. It is the factual reality of life in our fallen world. The real issue is, who makes the decision of when someone (or something) dies?

Death is not a pleasant idea for most, and it is a painful emotional amputation for the loved ones who survive the death of someone dear. Some would argue that anytime a loved one dies, there is an evil. I know that as my dear grandmother of 92 lay dying, many of us were still praying for her to have a few more good years (or even months or days). It hurt for her to pass, even after 92 incredible years on earth.

But the decision of her death was not a human one. We did not decide to “put her down” as one might a sick pet. By our faith, we understand God took her. So if we consider death as a moral issue, as an issue of evil, our suggested framework dictates that the decision of human death is God’s, not man’s. This does give God the right to determine when one dies and, as long as it is God’s determination, we deem it moral and right.⁸⁴ Now that is not to say we are pleased with it, nor is it to say that it is the choice we would make. Again though, we are stuck in a moment. We do not share God’s eternal view. Somehow in the midst of eternity as well as the space and time of earth God makes choices on death and it might even be a bit arrogant to suggest that we know better than he on this matter.

This is what makes the issue of war perplexing to many people. At what point is it proper for man to wage war and, consequently, to make the decision of when some people (even “collateral damage civilians”) will die. Aquinas went to great lengths to set out the “just causes” necessary for a leader to declare war. His reasoning was a process that analyzed the values of God in such a way as to determine whether such a war was God’s will. In other words, before man should ever take a life, whether in war, in self-defense, or in capital punishment, the question involves determining the will of God in that situation. Death is God’s jurisdiction, not man’s.

This approach on the death issue allows us to accept that God has every right as well as reason to order the deaths of Canaanites or anyone else in the Old Testament, the New Testament, or today. For God to move someone from earth’s temporal moments into eternity is part of his work and plan and we can accept it as such. But what do we do about the suffering that occurs short of death? How does this objective view of good and evil fit into the suffering of a defenseless child at the hands of a sexual predator?

⁸⁴ Lawyer turned theologian Udo Middleman would likely object to this point as worded asserting that God “seems to be often outraged, disappointed even” over some deaths like that of Lazarus, where Jesus openly wept (Jn. 11:35). *The Innocence of God*, (Paternoster 2007) at 9. Our response is that the text does not indicate Jesus wept over the death as opposed to over the hurt in the people who did not know, what Jesus already knew, that Jesus was about to raise Lazarus from the grave. We do agree with Middleman that in God’s principle design of life on earth, death, pain and misery are not the “good” in the creation story.

This issue does not fall into our question on the table! This issue gets dealt with in a later question of this lesson. This first question is simply, what is evil? As people of faith we answer that evil is that which God would not do, as opposed to good, which is what God would do.⁸⁵ Our chore, then, is to determine the will of God in situations and, in doing so, determine what is good.

At our disposal on such determinations are the revelation of Holy Scripture, as well as prayer, godly counsel, and Spiritual insight. As Paul explained,

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the *will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect* (Rom. 12:2).

Our greatest resource is the life of Christ. For in Christ we see God manifest and dwelling in the form of man. We see God's interaction with people from all walks of life. We see God teaching his followers what to say, what to do, and how to understand and relate to God. Jesus taught that when seeing him, one was seeing the Father (Jn. 14:8-11).

Now if we take our definition of evil further into our questions, we now ask, why we have evil in a world made by God?

Why is there evil in our world?

If we carry forward into this question the definition of evil as that which is contrary to the nature and morality of God, we are asking this question in a very specific light. We want to know why there exists in our space and time, anything contrary to God's will and morality. As God is all-powerful, should there be anything that is not aligned with him?

The orthodox biblical answer is that we live in and experience a fallen world in travail and groaning for redemption. The Biblical story of Adam and Eve provides the contrast between how God wills creation and how we live creation. God created and everything was good. Within his creation, however, were free willed beings that could choose to live within God's morality or not. They could choose God or choose rebellion – good or evil.

We find here that while facing the intellectual struggle of evil's genesis, we run straight into the paradox of free will in the midst of an omnipotent God! (As if our chore was

⁸⁵ From a human definition of evil as that which we detest or find harmful, we can certainly find God doing "evil." God brings righteous judgment upon sin, including the punishment of death. That may not seem "good" or "right" to us but as God does it, we must proclaim it righteous.. Isaiah the prophet uses this sense of the word "evil" writing of God, "I form light and create darkness, I make well-being and create calamity ["evil"]" (Isa. 45:7). This calamity/evil is distinct from true moral evil. It is the just recompense for sin.

not daunting enough). Again it is useful to remember that this lesson offers constructive ideas for dialogue, not the finely packaged gift of full and satisfactory answers to answer everyone's every question. In this regard, however, we urge the premise that God has set the world up in a way where man can freely choose. Adam and Eve could choose to eat or not to eat. Jerusalem could choose to honor and follow God or not ("O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and *you would not!*" Mt. 23:37).

We would urge the discussion around the idea that God is a reality who has definite morality in his existence. As such, to the extent there is something that God is, there is also something that he is not. In moral terms, if there is something about God we define as good, there is that which he is not we can define as evil. In Biblical terms, God is "light" and in him is no darkness (I Jn 1:5). God is "truth" (Jn 14:1); but that which is adverse to God has nothing to do with truth, but inhabits lies (Jn 8:43-45). God is "just" and his ways are ways of "justice" (Dt. 32:4); injustice is the opposite of righteousness (Jer. 22:13). God is "life" (Jn 14:1); while that which is not of God (immorality/sin) brings death (Rom. 6:23).

So God created a world with a humanity able to choose between God's ways and ungodliness – between good and evil. Man chose the evil, and just as evil is outside of God's essence, so evil leads to its own consequences which are outside of God's essence. Evil choices brought evil conditions into the world.

David Birnbaum commented on the choice of man in Eden:

Thus, when man chose to eat from the Tree of Knowledge, he chose to accept the entire set of dynamics of the Tree of Knowledge, and he turned his back on the entire set of dynamics of the Tree of Life. It was actually man who determined his own "expulsion" from the Garden of Eden's bliss. It was man seeking the destiny of the Tree of Knowledge with all that the choice implies.⁸⁶

This is now the world into which we are each born and in which we exist. A world sculpted by rebellion to God and his character. A world destined for those things outside God. Rather than a world of good, of light, of truth, of justice, or of life, we have a world of evil, darkness, untruth, injustice and death.

We should add that the choice of rebellion and evil was not simply that of Adam and Eve. It is also the choice of people today. Paul made clear that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom.3:23), but it goes deeper than that. Man can, and occasionally does, choose to do awful acts of evil. Hitler's holocaust was a horribly evil act. Sexual abuse is a horrible evil. Emotional abuse can destroy much of a person.

⁸⁶ Birnbaum, David, *God and Evil: A Unified Theodicy/Theology/Philosophy*, (Ktav 1989) at 87.

These are not “creations of God;” these are not the “will of God;” these are atrocities and acts against God’s will done by free choosing humans. These are acts the believer laments and fights against.

Now while man’s choosing evil changes man, it does not change God. God is still good, light, just, etc. How this good God fits into the evil in the world is our next question.

Where is God in the midst of the evil in this world?

The magnificence of God is his presence in this world and in its pain while also existing beyond this world and moment. In theological terms, God is both immanent (present in all aspects of space and time) and transcendent (lying beyond our limits of space and time). In Bono-speak, God is both in the moment, but not *stuck* in the moment.

The atheist abandons the quest of finding God in the midst of evil, believing that the two cannot co-exist. The theist finds God working in and even through the evil of this world. That does not confuse this issue with one of God being responsible for evil. We need to keep our questions separate.

God works through evil and suffering to develop character. Paul found that, “insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities” developed the character of Christ in him (2 Cor. 12:10). The author of Hebrews explained Christ was fulfilled in his humanity as he garnered the experiences and fruit of obedience in suffering (Heb. 2:10; 5:8-9). Peter emphasized the blessings on those who suffer (1 Pet. 3:14ff).

Paul saw God not only working in his own life through suffering, but also in the lives of others. Certainly this is the example of the cross, where all humanity gains profit even as God/Christ suffered from the evil of injustice. Paul adds that it is his experience as well when he gladly suffers with Christ “for the sake of the elect” (2 Tim. 2:1-11). Paul thought it of supreme importance to share in the sufferings of Christ (Phil. 3:8-11).⁸⁷ He even thanked God for his suffering that resulted in benefit to the church (Col. 1:24).

The Psalmist found affliction worked in his life to bring about obedience and growth:

Before I was afflicted I went astray,
but now I keep your word (Ps. 119:67).

James wrote of the transformational power of suffering and trials,

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its

⁸⁷ Church history is replete with examples of God using the believer’s suffering and even the martyr’s death as a testimony to grow the church. The lawyer turned theologian Tertullian wrote that: “the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church” (*Apologeticus*, Chapter 50).

full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing (James 1:2-4).

One of the lessons of Job is that God is able to work through the suffering and tragedies both to grow the individual and to work out God's plan in the lives of his people.⁸⁸

It is apparent from our reading of Old Testament texts that God uses death, military conquest, and suffering as tools for recompensing sin. In Zechariah 13:8-9, the prophet writes the declaration of the LORD,

I will...refine them as one refines silver, and test them as gold is tested. They will call upon my name, and I will answer them. I will say, "They are my people"; and they will say, "The Lord is my God."

The imagery of heating the metals to a melting point for purification applied not simply to the individual but to the community of God as well.

We should add that as we are considering God's role in the midst of evil, we are not able to do so fully. Understanding God fully is far beyond our comprehension. We can know him truly, but not fully. Stuck in our moment, we see in a mirror dimly as opposed to eternity where we shall see clearly (1 Cor. 13:11-13). We can say with confidence, however, that God, who knows when a sparrow falls, knows our moments and our travails (Mt. 10:28-30). He promises that they will never be more than we can handle (1 Cor. 10:12-13), and that through each issue, nothing will separate us from his love (Rom. 8:35-39).

One vivid location of God in this world of suffering is found in the life of Jesus of Nazareth. Through the incarnation, God definitively entered into our moment in human form, subjecting himself to human suffering and evil. The famous question, "Why do bad things happen to good people?" really finds expression in the experiences of Jesus. Orthodoxy teaches that Jesus alone is the one man who lived a perfect life (i.e., lived as God himself would live). Jesus had no sin that would incur death, no errors that needed refinement and sculpting. Jesus existed in the very form of God and emptied himself taking the form of a man to deliver mankind from the penalty incurred in Eden and through lives of sin. Jesus suffered at the hands of a just God because justice demands vengeance (or punishment if we'd rather be milder in language).

If we are to find God acting "unfairly," punishing the innocent, and raining death on the undeserving, we find it once in history—in the life of Christ. Of course we know that this punishment was voluntary. As John wrote, "God so loved the world, he sent... (Jn. 3:16). Or as Paul wrote, Jesus so loved the world; he came (Phil. 2:8-10)!"

⁸⁸ More careful examination of Job and God's seemingly passive approval of suffering will come in the upcoming classes on that book.

Here at the cross of Christ we see God's dynamic usage of the harms and evil from the sin of the world. Under his hands sin and suffering brings forth the fruit of forgiveness, his will for the ultimate good of mankind.

What is the future of evil?

The crucifixion and resurrection signals the end of evil. Evil and the curses of the fall do not gradually go away. They are not made better and better as time goes on. They do not one day cross the line of morality into the zone of "goodness." They are destined for death, the right and just result of sin. That which is not of God, is not of life.

Paul wrote about the Ephesians being "dead" in their trespasses, not sick or gravely ill (Eph. 2:1-3). Jesus did not say that one needed to improve for eternity, but used the term of needing a new birth (Jn 3:1-8). In this sense Paul writes of Christ as the new Adam, the firstborn of a new creation (Rom. 5; 1 Cor. 15:45ff).

Not just people, but creation itself groans for the release from the bondage of sin's curse.

For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now (Rom. 8:20-22).

Revelation shows Christ coming forth in warrior form to put the final deathblow to the forces of sin and its curses. Consider Revelation 19:11-16,

Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.

The promise of a new age where "the dwelling place of God is with man" and where "He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God" (Rev. 21:3-4) is a place where,

He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away (Rev. 21:5).

In that coming age, the Creator God will make “all things new” (Rev. 21:5). It is this assurance that brings Scripture to a close with John’s plea, “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! (Rev. 22:20).

CONCLUSION

We do not suggest that all answers to all probing questions are or could be in this lesson. We are presenting core ideas for discussion and consideration. When considering the actions of God as set out in difficult Scriptures, one of the hardest things is being stuck in a moment and contemplating the deeds of an eternal God. In doing so we must never lose sight that our struggle against evil and suffering is God’s struggle as well. The story of the cross is the story of an historical intervention of God directly into human history to bring victory over the suffering and evil of man’s sin.

Our struggle for good is God’s struggle for good. When we give food to the hungry, water to the thirsty, when we tend to the sick, we are doing the work of God (Mt. 25:39-40).

QUESTIONS FOR WEEK 22

These lessons open up many areas for discussion. We list a few questions to start the discussions.

1. Where does evil come from?
2. How do we see God in the Old Testament also in the life and death of Jesus?
3. How does the Old Testament view of God affect our view of God today? How *should* it affect our view?

Week Twenty-three Readings

<p style="text-align: center;">6/2 Stephen’s Speech Acts 7:45</p> <p>Judg 5-6 Nm 31</p> <p style="text-align: center;">6/3 Stephen’s Speech Acts 7:45</p> <p>Judg 7-9</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">6/4 Stephen’s Speech Acts 7:45</p> <p>Judg 10-13 Nm 6:1-21 Prv 30:18-19</p> <p style="text-align: center;">6/5 Stephen’s Speech Acts 7:45</p> <p>Judg 14-17</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">6/6 Stephen’s Speech Acts 7:45</p> <p>Judg 18-20</p> <p style="text-align: center;">6/7 Stephen’s Speech Acts 7:45</p> <p>Judg 21 1 Sam 1-2 Prv 20:11</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>6/8 Off</i></p>
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