

God of War

“The entire concept of a God of justice and mercy ordering the slaughter of thousands of people on many occasions I find abhorrent. This is an issue I have always had profound trouble with and one I suspended judgment on when I began to believe.. The responses to this problem I have seen so far (God did them a favor, they were like cancer, or God’s justice is beyond ours) seem to me to be lame or inappropriate.” - from a letter to Timothy Keller

Let’s be honest: The Old Testament God sometimes seems cranky and eager to smash something. That is a daunting image of God, especially when compared to the mild and humble picture of Jesus. If the New Testament God is Mr. Rogers, the Old Testament God is Randy Couture. However, neither of these caricatures is accurate. This post is the first part of a series on an often uncomfortable topic:

God of War.

Growing up Mennonite, we never talked about God and war. We read the story about David and Goliath with as much detachment and inner condemnation as we could. We wondered how much we should cheer for David’s mighty men, who were the elite forces of their day. We cheered when Sampson brought the temple down, but with some guilt. (Plus he had long hair, and that was a problem for us too.) So what do you think we did with all the God-ordained wars in the Old



Testament?

Nothing.

We loved Jesus when he said “love your enemy” and “turn the other cheek,” but God? God in the Old Testament was sometimes treated like the crazy uncle who shows up at family reunions. Nobody really knows how to interact with him or explain him to others.

A number of years ago I decided I could not avoid that part of the Bible any longer. The Bible is supposed to reveal something about God's nature and his purpose for the world, and as such needs to be understood, not avoided. I can't say I was excited about the task, but I have found that a careful reading of the texts reveals a God very different from the image I had before.

From a Christian apologetics standpoint, this is important. I think many Christians remain as confused as I was. But this is an crucial topic to address because those outside the faith aren't letting this one slide - and rightly so. How could God be "good" if he commanded so much evil? This is the question we must be prepared to answer.

This series is not the definitive answer. This series is meant to be an entry level presentation, and as such I hope it can at least bring about a sincere re-thinking of God as He is often portrayed. This is also a separate topic from the difficulties of understanding Old Testament Law or some of the more gruesome Old Testament stories. (I will get to those eventually...)

Here's a question before [I move on to the actual war texts](#): Have you ever struggled to reconcile biblical portrayals of God's actions with the Biblical description of God's nature? And if so, has there been resolution to your conflict?