

LifeGroup Questions

Based on: 1 Samuel 15:1-35

March 17, 2019

Overview

Richard Dawkins, well-known, outspoken atheist once said: “The Bible is a blueprint of in-group morality, complete with instructions for genocide, enslavement of out-groups, and world domination.” Here we have an unbeliever who has taken sections of the Old Testament and made an argument for the cruelty of God. In 1 Samuel 15 we have King Saul being commanded to completely destroy the Amalekites. How do we reconcile a loving God with one who orders the destruction of an entire people group?

An issue as complex as this certainly will not be answered in this lesson. Dr. Heath Thomas once wrote: “A ‘divine war’ is not concerned with genocide or ethnic cleansing but rather with eliminating false worship. Divine war represents a focused attack upon sinful and idolatrous religion rather than simply an attack on people (Deuteronomy 7:3-5, 12:2, 3; compare Exodus 34:12, 13). But to get at the religious ideals of an ancient people, you had to address more than just—let’s say—their spiritual lives. This is because they did not separate secular from sacred as we do in the modern world. This is hard for our modern ears to hear, but ancient peoples saw their national identities tied to their particular place, their particular god, and their particular people group. For the Moabites, their land was the region south-east of the Jordan River, and their patron god was Chemosh. Their god ruled the Moabites from that particular place. For the Canaanites, it was Baal, who governed them in the land of Canaan. For the Hebrews, their particular place was the land of Israel, where God ruled them from Jerusalem.”

God was eliminating false worship. I am glad I am not the filter through which God has to run His decisions. Sometimes we read these Old Testament passages and decide whether it is right or wrong based on our own code of morality. We are not the author of life. We want a God who is both fully just and full of grace. But we usually want the grace for ourselves and the justice for others. Passages like 1 Samuel 15 are difficult because from our understanding we see the innocent getting swept up in God’s justice. This is not just an Old Testament issue. This happens today. When wars happen both the guilty and innocent pay a price. Reading this Old Testament passage should highlight for all of us how detestable sin is to God.

Bible Study: 1 Samuel 15:1-35

Instead of writing several questions:

Discuss as a group how you would explain God’s command to wipe out the Amalekites.

Richard Dawkins also said: “The God of the Old Testament is ... a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully.”

How would you explain the whole picture of God to someone who doesn’t believe?