

## God's Killing Of Children In Old Testament Judgments

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The apostle Paul asked, *"What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part?"* He then answered, *"By no means!"* (Romans 9:14). Paul's question continues to be asked today, but too often it is not answered as Paul answered it. Some of us have examined and accepted the internal and external proofs of the Bible and we have concluded that it is what it claims to be: the inspired and infallible revelation of God. We thus accept the description given by Moses of God: *"He is the Rock, His works are perfect, and all His ways are just. A faithful God Who does no wrong, faithful and just is He"* (Deuteronomy 32:4, 5). Sadly, *"not all men have faith"* (2 Thessalonians 3:2). Some are unbelievers, and among these unbelievers there are some who do not want to be hampered by a rigid moral standard. They want freedom of conscience to do as they please without guilt or restraint. They don't bother believers, and they wish to not be bothered by believers. Of course, the respectful Christian will honor the wishes of those who have no interest in learning the gospel, and he will "leave them alone" (Matthew 10:14; 15:14).

Other unbelievers are not so passive. Rather than just ignore the teaching of the Bible, they feel compelled to attack the Bible and its claims. Their objective is to discredit the Bible and disprove the existence of God. One of the more common areas of attack has to do with God's judgments as they have impacted *children*. Bible critics and skeptics often cite God's killing of children as a basis for discrediting God's nature and denying His existence. To make their case, these skeptics must focus exclusively upon certain biblical texts and they must ignore all related support texts. I will expand upon the following points throughout the course of the study, but here is a brief synopsis of the things that the skeptic must do in order to make his case against God:

- The skeptic must assume that the premise that he challenges is a scriptural premise. He must assume that the position of the particular opponent that he is answering is biblical and not erroneous. I say this because some so-called "Bible scholars" actually hold false views. For example, the tentacles of Calvinism run far and deep into many so-called "Christian religions." Among its legion of errors is an erroneous view of *predestination*. The Calvinistic notion is that of direct divine manipulation and control of events. It is the theory that God regulates and controls even the minutest details of our existence. I must sadly confess that even among my own brethren there exists rampant error on this subject, particularly in the area of prayer and providence. To

the Calvinist, every child that dies does so as the result of some direct interference by God. If a car crash results in two fatalities and one survivor, the Calvinist will claim that it was "God's will" that the one survived and that the two others died. They say this with absolutely no scriptural support for their position whatsoever. It is rank speculation on their part. I have observed that many of the skeptics' responses are to those who hold such unbiblical views of predestination and providence. *More on this later...*

- The skeptic must ignore the fact that God is Creator, and as such, God has *sovereign* rights over the lives of all of His creatures and creation.
- The skeptic must ignore the fact that God made man *mortal*. If God is evil for killing children along with adults in certain direct judgments, then why was He not already evil for having designed those children in such a way that they would eventually die? (If the skeptic is allowed to make an ad hominem argument, then so am I!)
- The skeptic must ignore the fact that God is *perfectly just*, and that His judgments are perfectly balanced by His perfect justice.
- The skeptic must ignore the fact that infants and children are *unaccountable* before God, and are therefore spiritually *safe* in the event of death.
- The skeptic must ignore the fact that in the case of national judgments, like in the story of the Amalekites, the children would have been left to suffer slow and agonizing deaths had they survived the deaths of their parents. What would the skeptic be saying about God, had he killed the adults and left the infants and small children to starve or to be ravaged by wild animals? Would they have charged Him with being "cruel and ruthless?" They most likely would.
- The skeptic must ignore the fact that even "young children" can be so indoctrinated by their evil parents and culture that they have no hope of escaping that influence (Micah 2:9; Isaiah 59:5).
- The skeptic must ignore the fact that God knows the thoughts and intentions of human hearts, and is thus able to make perfect judgments in His dealings with men.

### **Logical Fallacies And Errors Of The Skeptic**

There are several logical and other fallacies, errors and inconsistencies in the arguments of the skeptics. Ironically, the skeptic often prides himself in his elevation of *reason* over *faith*. However, we shall see that the methods and arguments of at least some skeptics are far from reasonable. Their

arguments are often based upon faulty premises and misinformation. Several points should be considered:

1. It is disingenuous and contradictory for one to reject the Bible as the word of God, while attempting to use the Bible to attack the existence and nature of God. Those who reject the Bible are ill equipped to make well-reasoned arguments from it, for they admit that they do not believe its claims to be true. Skeptics and atheists rarely demonstrate the degree of objectivity that is required in order to properly interpret and apply Scripture. Those who take a prejudicial approach to the Scriptures are seldom likely to represent them accurately. Rather than attempting to make rational arguments from a book that the skeptic considers irrational, perhaps the skeptic's time would be better-spent examining Bible *evidences*. If evidence for the Bible is lacking or faulty, then let the Bible be rejected. Conversely, if the evidence is sufficient and credible, then let the Bible be embraced. Thus, while it is profitable to discuss the question of God's rights relating to His treatment of His creatures, such is not the primary discussion. The skeptic's time should first be devoted to a critical examination of the vast array of internal and external evidences supporting the authenticity of the Bible. Taking the present topic as an example: One cannot fairly and accurately represent God by citing *only* the parts of the Bible that describe His punishments, while completely ignoring all of the passages that explain God's reasons for giving those punishments. Skeptics are quick to cite Noah's flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, the plague of the firstborn and the smiting of the Amalekites for their proof against God, but they rarely cite any of the Bible passages or principles that *explain* God's judicial decisions. A brief analysis of the context of these passages reveals more than the skeptic wants people to know.
  - a. **The Flood:** Skeptics are fond of citing God's killing of men, women and children in the flood of Genesis 6-9, but they conveniently ignore the fact that God gave the people 120 years to stop their violent and sinful practices (Gen. 6:3). Throughout this time, God was calling upon the people to repent of their violent and evil ways. Noah was more than just an ark builder; he was also a "*preacher of righteousness*" (2 Peter 2:5), and as such, he warned people of the dangerous consequences of their actions. Skeptics emphasize God's punitive actions in such cases, but they fail to mention God's patience, love and mercy in trying to lead sinners to repentance. There are clear and good reasons why children were killed along with their parents in the deluge, but the skeptic's bias often prevents him from considering those reasons (addressed elsewhere in this article).

- b. **The Firstborn of Egypt:** Skeptics also cite God's killing of the firstborn in Egypt (Exodus 12). Some appear to miss the fact that the tenth plague killed all "firstborn," even of the livestock, and was not just the killing of "babies." Babies and young children would certainly have been killed by the plague, but it was not limited to them. In his effort to discredit God, the skeptic cites the plague. He ignores, however, the 80 years of *infanticide* that had been practiced by the Egyptian government against the Hebrews. Some scholars estimate that as many as 2.7 million Hebrew babies may have been killed during that time. Based upon the best available population estimates in Egypt between 1500 and 1400 B.C., far fewer Egyptians were killed by the plague of the firstborn than Hebrew babies that were killed by the Egyptians. God's killing of the Egyptian firstborn appalls the skeptic, but he fails to consider the Egyptian sin and rebellion that resulted in that final plague.
- c. **The Amalekites:** One of the skeptic's most frequently made arguments is from 1 Samuel 15:3. God instructed Saul and the Jews to "smite Amalek," killing "*men, women, children and infants.*" Skeptics make the charge that the God of the Bible is a cruel, sadistic and ruthless kind of God for calling for the killing of the "children" and "infants" along with the adults. They fail to consider what would have been the fate of those children and infants had they survived the deaths of their parents. Skeptics also ignore the history of the Amalekites' earlier treatment of God's people at Rephidim. The intensity of God's punishment was directly linked to the degree of the Amalekite's cruelty. The Amalekites attacked the Jews while they were yet "faint" and "weary" from their travels from Egypt. This was cruel, but far worse was the fact that they attacked "from the rear" in order to kill the easiest targets. According to Deuteronomy 25:17-19, the Amalekites attacked those who "lagged" behind. The "weak" and "weary" that "lagged" behind were the aged, the infirm, the women and the children! By ordering the killing of all Amalekites, God's punishment matched the Amalekites' crime.
- d. **Elisha and the 42 Lads:** 2 Kings 2:23-25 tells us that after being taunted and ridiculed by 42 "lads," Elisha called upon them a curse from God. As a result, 2 female bears came out of the woods and mauled them. Skeptics would have us believe that these "lads" were just little toddlers or very young and unaccountable children. This, however, was not the case, as seen both from the Hebrew word and from the context. They were "young men," not "kids" or "children," and they operated as a *gang*. They threatened the

venerable prophet of God, and God punished them for their threats and disrespect. This story in no way supports the efforts and claims of the skeptic.

2. The Bible depicts God as sovereign over all creation. God (the Godhood) created all things. As Creator, God possesses the sovereign right to take the life that He created. A homeowner may plant a tree in his front yard then later decide to cut it down. This is his right to do, for the tree is his property. He does not have the right to cut down his neighbor's tree, but he does have the right to cut down his own tree. God is in the unique position of having sovereign control over His creation, which gives Him the power and right to take life as He sees fit. *{Incidentally, the skeptic has no viable explanation as to why a parent has no right to kill his own children. This explains why atheists have practiced so many acts of genocide, and why humanists practice so many abortions. The Bible believer has the moral conviction that GOD is sovereign over all life, including the life of children. However, the atheist, having rejected the divine standard, sees himself as sovereign, and he has no moral basis upon which to conclude that it is wrong for a parent to kill his own children. The argument based upon "societal norms" is specious, for it ignores the fact that many "societies" have practiced genocide and other atrocities.}* What is truly irrational is the notion that man has no moral standard higher than himself. The regimes of Mao Tse Tung, Pol Pot, Stalin, Hirohito and Hitler have well demonstrated what happens when such anti-God models are followed.
3. Skeptics are quick to point to God's killing of children, but they completely ignore the fact that the same God that killed some children also *designed* children [humans], and He designed them in such a way that they would eventually *die*. God made man mortal. Death has been divinely "appointed" for man (Heb. 9:27). Scientists describe humans as "carbon-based life forms" for a reason. According to the Bible, "God formed man of the dust of the ground" (Gen. 2:7). Later, after man's sin and subsequent expulsion from the garden, God punished man saying, "...from dust you are, and to dust you shall return" (Gen. 3:19; see also *Eccl. 12:7*). This expression describes *death*. God announced to Adam that all humans eventually die. While Adam and other early humans had vastly longer life spans than we today, they all eventually died. Whether it was the result of genetic change, environmental change or something else, by God's design, man is subject to death. Why does the skeptic reject the principle of God's sovereignty with respect to the lives of children, yet accept His sovereignty with respect to mortality and death? This is hypocritical on the part of the skeptic.

4. I realize that many skeptics are *materialists*, and as such, they reject the concept of the immortal soul. However, the same Bible that contains the judgment stories [that are so cited by the skeptics] also contains teaching about the eternal soul. It is dishonest to use the biblical texts that speak of the *physical* fate of children that were affected by God's judgments, but then disallow the texts that speak to their *spiritual* fate. No one denies that infants and children would have experienced the same *physical fate* as adults in the waters of the flood and in the fires of Sodom and Gomorrah. However, their *spiritual fate* would have been quite different. According to Isaiah 7:16, there is a period of time during which humans are unable to "discern between right and wrong." This is precisely one's situation as an infant or young child. The young child is unaccountable before God because he lacks the physical, mental and emotional ability to make moral choices and connections. He doesn't yet comprehend the terrible nature and consequences of sin. He hasn't yet developed the capacity for genuine *godly sorrow* (2 Cor. 7:10). In order to be accountable one must have a working conscience. Paul described the function of the conscience as being to either "accuse" or "excuse" one's own behavior (Romans 2:15). It was a sting of conscience that prompted Pentecostians to ask, "*Men and brethren, what shall we do?*" Acts 2:37 tells us "*they were pricked in their hearts.*" To be able to perform this function the conscience must be properly educated (Acts 23:1). To be accountable to God one must have the capacity for learning and the ability to process and apply the information that he acquires. The principle of *accountability* is set forth in Paul's statement to the Romans when he said, "*I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died*" (Romans 7:9). He went on to describe how, by learning God's law, he eventually learned of the exceeding terribleness of sin. Unlike the accountable adults that were targeted by God's judgments, the *unaccountable* "infants and children" would not have suffered beyond the grave. Speaking of "little children," Jesus said, "*...of such is the kingdom of heaven...*" (Matt. 19:14). They are cited as icons of kingdom character. His analogy works only if children are innocent and pure in some way. Since it does not serve the purposes of his argument, the skeptic ignores the impact of the accountability principle. All unaccountable children that were killed by God's judgments would have lost only their physical lives. Their spiritual lives were saved.
5. Another mistake of the skeptic is his failure to consider who was actually responsible for child deaths in the above-cited judgments. The actual targets of God's judgments were not the *unaccountable*

*children*, but the *accountable adults*. The children died as a consequence of the actions that God took against the wicked adults. Noah's flood was sent against those who practiced "*corruption*" and "*violence*" (Gen. 6:11-13), and whose "*thoughts and intentions were only evil all of the time*" (v. 5). As noted in the previous point, this could not have included children. The same is true with regard to Sodom and Gomorrah. While they were both "young and old," the targets of God's judgment upon Sodom and Gomorrah were "men" who were old enough to commit *rape* and *sodomy* (Genesis 19:4, 5). The tenth plague of Egypt did kill children [along with adults], however, the plague was designed to finally break the resistance of the obstinate Pharaoh, and to punish him and his godless supporters for their defiance of God and their inhumane treatment of God's people. Pharaoh's reaction to the plague proves that the actual targets were the adults, not the children.

6. The skeptic cites 1 Samuel 15:3 in an attempt to prove that the "children and infants" were as much targets of God's judgment as were the men and women. While it is true that God there ordered the killing of children and infants along with adults, points 4 & 5 above prove that the adults were the ones who were culpable. The children and babies were killed for other reasons:
  - a. Had God ordered the killing of only the adult Amalekites, the infants and small children would have been left to die painful, slow and agonizing deaths. They would have eventually died from starvation, privation or wild animal attacks. Given the circumstances, would it have been more merciful of God to kill the babies, or to allow them to suffer slow deaths? From a purely human and logical perspective, most would say that it was best for God to do what He did. It was more "humane" for the children to die with their parents than for them to survive the deaths of their parents. Of course, those of us who fear God wish to be careful about the use of human wisdom in assessing divine actions. We are to speak "as the oracles of God" (1 Peter 4:11).
  - b. Another factor in the equation is that God knows the thoughts and intentions of the human mind (Gen. 6:5; Rev. 2:23; Psalm 139:2; Prov. 15:3; Heb. 4:13). Combined with His absolute sovereignty and perfect justice, God's omniscience enables Him to execute perfect judgments. Whereas humans are limited to knowing men "by their fruits" [words and deeds, Matt. 7:16], God is able to know also *what they think*. We can know what people *do* and *have done*, but God is able to know what they *will do*. Some obvious Bible examples of this are Pharaoh, Cyrus and Judas. The book of

Isaiah contains pronouncements of God's judgments on many nations. These prophecies were given decades prior to their fulfillment. This means that God knew that these nations would continue in their sin and rebellion, and He foretold their fate upon that basis. It was also upon this basis that God repeatedly told Jeremiah to stop praying for Judah (Jer. 7:16; 11:14; 14:11). He knew that they would not repent. Interestingly, God gave the people of Nineveh 40 days to repent, which they did in response to the preaching of Jonah. The skeptic denies the very existence of God, so he obviously denies Bible affirmations of God's *foreknowledge*. However, as noted earlier, the sword cuts both ways: If the skeptic intends to use the Bible as the basis of his criticisms of God's nature, then honesty demands that he consider *all* Bible teaching related to God's nature. When combined with His sovereignty, God's omniscience and prescience enabled Him to execute perfect judgments, both of individuals and of nations. Finite humans are ill equipped to question the judgments of such a God.

7. Reading the arguments of the skeptics reminds me of reading the Quran. Mohammed's characterizations of "Christians" were based upon his own perceptions and preconceptions of what a "Christian" is. They were not based upon the Bible standard. By the time of Mohammed, apostasy had transformed New Testament Christianity into something entirely different. Mohammed's idea of a "Christian" was actually that of a *Catholic*, not of a simple New Testament Christian. This is seen from the fact that Mohammed criticized "Christians" for worshipping images and relics. This was a Catholic tradition, not a New Testament tradition. In like manner, too many Bible skeptics base their objections upon the false views and premises of their misguided opponents. For example, fatalists and Calvinists say that God *personally* and *directly* sustains and protects each and every human life. This leads them to conclude that human deaths are actually caused by God. When someone dies they will say, "God took him." Of the survivor of my aforementioned car crash they will say, "it just wasn't his time to go." Of those who died they will say, "it was their time to go." Their only explanation as to why God would "take" the one and not take the other is that, "the Lord works in mysterious ways." This may be a neat sound bite, but it doesn't address the issue. The Bible nowhere teaches that God arbitrarily and in "mysterious ways" kills babies or any other humans. It teaches that "*time and chance happen to them all*" (Eccl. 9:11). It teaches that God made man mortal and destructible, and He allows humans to be physically affected by

their environment. They are vulnerable to potentially fatal birth defects, injuries, sicknesses, diseases and infections. Being mortal, humans are also vulnerable to the ravages of aging. According to Ecclesiastes 12, various organ functions gradually diminish and even cease over time, resulting in death of the body. The fact that God allows humans to live in an environment that poses dangers to his physical existence does not mean that God *causes* the deaths of those who die. Some people die because they do *dangerous* things. Some people die because they do *foolish* things. Some die because others kill them. As free agents, we are free to do as we please. Of course, there are consequences for our actions. Skeptics prove absolutely nothing about God when they base their arguments upon the misguided speculations of religious theorists and errorists. God does not arbitrarily and capriciously *kill* people. Now, if the skeptic wishes to charge Calvinists and fatalists with holding a position that makes God unjust, *then I will side with the skeptic*. However, I strongly disagree with the skeptic when he attacks God as He is portrayed in the Scriptures.

### Conclusion

If we were for a moment, to lay aside the reasons of Scripture, and resort to our own human reasoning, we still find fault with the skeptic's position. When considering the skeptics' arguments, one can't help but wonder how many skeptics are "pro-choice" in their abortion stance. It is a simple fact that most humanists and atheists do favor abortion rights. How can a pro-choice [pro-abortion] skeptic fairly criticize God for killing children? If the killing of unborn children is just, right and honorable when practiced by humans, why is it then "ruthless, cruel and sadistic" when practiced by God? Obviously, I am making another *ad hominem* argument, which proves nothing except the hypocrisy of the pro-abortion skeptic. The Scriptures make a clear distinction between divine judgments and the practice of abortion. As we have seen, several special and mitigating factors were involved in God's judgments as they impacted children. The skeptic rejects the Scriptures, claiming human reasoning to be the highest standard. Let him then consider the question.

By objectively examining Bible passages that define both human and divine nature, the judgment passages that are cited by skeptics are shown to not support their claims. Yes, children and infants died alongside adults in divine judgments, but *why did they die?* Not because God was "*cruel,*" "*unjust*" or "*sadistic,*" as alleged by the skeptics. While we cannot know all of God's particular motivations and purposes for enacting various judgments, we can know what the Scriptures explicitly and implicitly teach. There are viable and sensible explanations for why God killed children, or allowed them to be killed, in various judgments. We can either accept

those explanations, or we can reject them. Many people choose to dismiss the explanations so they can continue to live their lives as they please, unfettered by any fixed moral standards. Such people would do well to at least take a minute to ponder this one question, *what if the Bible is right?*

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