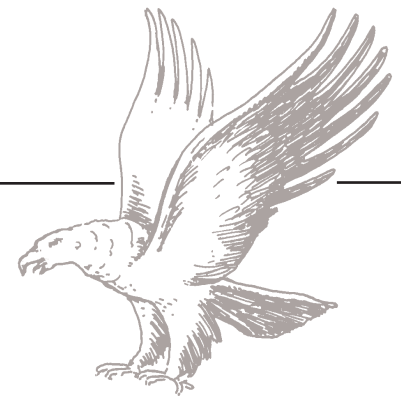


# Wings

*"Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;  
they shall mount up with wings like eagles."  
Isaiah 40:31*



June 9, 2013

## Is God a Genocidal Maniac?

A casual reading of the Old Testament seems to show God as a cruel tyrant who gets His kicks from making people suffer. A closer study reveals a much more noble character.

"But of the cities of these peoples which the Lord your God gives you as an inheritance, you shall let nothing that breathes remain alive, but you shall utterly destroy them: the Hittite and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite, just as the Lord your God has commanded you" (Deut. 20:16-18).

"Now go and attack Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, infant and nursing child, ox and sheep, camel and donkey" (1 Sam. 15:3).

Of all the modern attacks on God, one of the most serious is the depiction of the Old Testament God as a blood-thirsty tyrant who arbitrarily orders His people to exterminate their enemies. Of course, most of these critics do not believe that God exists; their point is that all these "divine commands" throughout Israel's history to destroy other nations were simply a religious cover for the same sort of ethnic hatred that has plagued the human race from the beginning of time. By declaring it to

be "God's will," Israel could satisfy their bloodlust while retaining some semblance of conscience. But in the end, it's the same old ethnic cleansing and genocide that we witness today.

Christians usually try to defend these incidents with the same "it was God's will" defense that atheists charge Israel with using. It's also the same defense that Islamic terrorists use, which is to say, it's not very convincing to a skeptical audience. We can do better.

First, we must note that the Canaanite people were marked for destruction for reasons quite independent of Israel's presence. God made it clear that the destruction was "because of the wickedness of these nations" (Deut. 9:4-5). Secular sources describe a society rife with child sacrifice, sexual depravity, and craven inhumanity toward others. In short, they were the dregs of humanity, a civilization given over to an especially brutish level of moral debauchery. Israel was God's weapon for executing judgment on these people, but it was more than mere vengeance; these people were so vile, so

rotten, it was as though "the land vomits out its inhabitants" (Lev. 18:25).

Second, Israel was herself subject to the same standard God used to judge these nations. Many years later, after the Israelites adopted many of the same practices of the earlier inhabitants of the land, God was merciless in His punishment of them (2 Kgs. 17:13-19).

The Old Testament God was not a genocidal maniac who granted Israel a license to go on a murderous rampage through quiet, peace-loving Canaanite villages. Rather, He used Israel as a tool to purge the world of a group of people who had created their own version of hell on earth. In time, when Israel herself became corrupt, God used other nations to punish her, for precisely the same reason. (For a more detailed treatment of this subject, see Paul Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster?*, ch. 15-18).

Far from being evidence of ethnic barbarism, these stories portray God as morally consistent and just. They also reinforce the age-old lesson that nations are subject to a higher moral law and will be judged for their behavior.

– David King