

## Is God cruel?

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### Basics

At a party I recently attended, I was accosted by a “proud apostate” (someone who no longer believes in God) and his “feminist” wife. Their question to me when I announced I was a servant of Christ was: “Why is God cruel”? Their answer, even with no amount of convincing from me, was this:

- **Husband** – it is all a scam, he doesn’t exist. All of them, Catholics, Buddhists everyone are believing a scam.
- **Wife** – The bible is outdated. I don’t understand this cruel God. He calls women “harlots”.

Not unlike these two, there are atheists and agnostics who argue that the God who is presented in the Bible is cruel. For example, the online *Skeptics Annotated Bible* has over 200 biblical passages that, they claim, demonstrate that God is cruel!

By labelling God as cruel, they are saying: God either doesn’t care about pain and suffering, or He actually enjoys watching His creatures suffer.

Those who claim that God is cruel have a large burden of proof. They are claiming to know the very mind of God. He however says:

*“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. ‘As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts’” (Isaiah 55:8-9).i*

But who is this God we are accusing of cruelty? Revelation 4: 1- 8 (NLT) reads:

*Then as I looked, I saw a door standing open in heaven, and the same voice I had heard before spoke to me like a trumpet blast. The voice said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must happen after this.”<sup>2</sup> And instantly I was in the Spirit,<sup>[a]</sup> and I saw a throne in heaven and someone sitting on it. <sup>3</sup>The one sitting on the throne was as brilliant as gemstones—like jasper and carnelian. And the glow of an emerald circled his throne like a rainbow. <sup>4</sup>Twenty-four thrones surrounded him, and twenty-four elders sat on them. They were all clothed in white and had gold crowns on their heads. <sup>5</sup>From the throne came flashes of lightning and the rumble of thunder. And in front of the throne were seven torches with burning flames. This is the sevenfold Spirit<sup>[b]</sup> of God.<sup>6</sup> In front of the throne was a shiny sea of glass, sparkling like crystal.*

*In the center and around the throne were four living beings, each covered with eyes, front and back. <sup>7</sup>The first of these living beings was like a lion; the second was like an ox; the third had a human face; and the fourth was like an eagle in flight. <sup>8</sup>Each of these living beings had six wings, and*



Start

Grow

Mature

*their wings were covered all over with eyes, inside and out. Day after day and night after night they keep on saying,*

*“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty—  
the one who always was, who is, and who is still to come.”*

## Examples from the bible of God’s supposed “cruelty”.

### **Example #1: God and Amalek**

#### ***A verse quoted by sceptics***

*“Thus saith the LORD of hosts ... go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass.”  
1Sam.15:2-3*

#### ***The verse in fuller context***

Samuel also said unto Saul, The LORD sent me to anoint thee to be king over his people, over Israel: now therefore hearken thou unto the voice of the words of the LORD. Thus saith the LORD of hosts, I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid wait for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt. Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass. *1 Samuel 15: 1 – 3* (KJV).

#### ***What they might not have seen***

Did you notice that the verse quoted by the sceptics eliminated part of the full context, in this case the reason for God’s punishment?

The background context for this “strange command” is this.

In about 1028 BC<sup>i</sup>, God gave the above instructions quoted in 1 Samuel 15 to the first King of Israel, a man named Saul. The command was for God to deliver his judgment on the Amalekites.

Many people think destroying an entire nation is harsh. What had they done?

In about 1,446 BC<sup>iii</sup>(400+ years before the command above), the Amalekites in an unprovoked attack described in Exodus 17: 8 – 15 had attacked the Jewish people shortly after escaping from the Egyptians, at the beginning of the exodus at a time when they (Jews) were worn out and weary, the Amalekites attacked all who were lagging behind, they had no fear of God<sup>iv</sup>.

It would seem that God took 400 years (1446 BC to 1028 BC) to act and finally bring judgement on the Amalekites. What was he doing in those 400 years? The bible is not explicit but I can only conclude that God used those 400 years to try to get the Amalekites to try to change by various means.

How can I prove this?

*Example 1: Balaam and Balak*

In Numbers 22 a king of Moab called Balak wanted a man called Balaam to curse the children of Israel before they entered the Promised Land. This man Balaam was not an Israelite but it would seem he could actually HEAR from God.

God for example told Balaam "You must not put a curse on those people, because they are blessed" (Numbers 22, verse 12) and then when Balaam persevered to go with Balak's messengers, God then said, "Go with them, but do only what I tell you" and when Balaam was on the journey, God even used a talking donkey to show him the folly of his journey. "Then the Lord opened the donkey's mouth" (verse 28), and it rebuked the prophet for the beatings. "Then the Lord opened Balaam's eyes, and he saw the angel of the Lord standing in the road with his sword drawn" (verse 31).

*Example 2: Jonah*

Jonah "fled from God" when God sent him to preach to the city of Nineveh. He took a ship to Tarshish (Spain) but eventually God sent a storm, the sailors called to their "gods" and it was revealed that Jonah was the guilty one. He was thrown overboard and then he was swallowed by a Big Fish. In the belly of the fish, he prayed to God, who then caused the fish to vomit him on land and he heeded God this time, so he went to Nineveh and preached to it. The bible says:

*Jonah began by going a day's journey into the city, proclaiming, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown." The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth. <sup>v</sup>*

When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and he did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened. <sup>vi</sup>

Jonah was mad at God! This is what he told God (Jonah 4: 2):

*Isn't this what I said, Lord, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.*

In the above two examples of Balaam and Jonah, we see that a man like Balaam was somehow able to hear from God. We can also see that God will go to a great extent to pass on a message, including to save an entire city, perhaps even a country. Nineveh for example had over 120,000 people but in their favour, when God threatened disaster, they repented!

It can only mean God is indeed merciful and does a lot to prevent us from doing evil, he tries as much as possible to get us to turn from evil.

**So the logical conclusion is that, God is not cruel, for he does not want anyone to be destroyed and every time he is slow to act (as he was for the Amalekites), he is giving them a chance to repent. <sup>vii</sup>**

### **Example #2: God crashing babies and women being raped**

Here is another bible example of “cruelty” such sceptics might show you:

#### **A verse quoted by sceptics.**

*“Anyone who is captured will be cut down— run through with a sword. Their little children will be dashed to death before their eyes. Their homes will be sacked, and their wives will be raped.”  
Isaiah 13:15-16 NLT*

#### **The context**

The verse is taken from a chapter describing a future prophesy about Babylon. It was describing what would happen including on the “Day of the Lord” - typically taken to mean the Last days when all humanity has rebelled and God is passing final judgment for evil and in fact just before the above verse, the bible explains why children get dashed and women raped:

*“I, the Lord, will punish the world for its evil and the wicked for their sin. I will crush the arrogance of the proud and humble the pride of the mighty.” Isaiah 13:11 NLT*

So the people who are being punished are those who have refused to repent and the army of God (instruments to carry out his punishment) are inflicting the judgment above. It is unclear from the bible if this judgement will be physical or spiritual or both.

### **Example #3: God “hates” the Muslims – the Egyptians and Assyrians (Iran)**

Here is a 3<sup>rd</sup> verse of so called cruelty against other nations.

*A prophesy against Egypt (Isaiah 19). One verse says (verse 2):*

#### **The verse**

*I will stir up Egyptian against Egyptian—  
brother will fight against brother,  
neighbor against neighbor,  
city against city,  
kingdom against kingdom.*

#### **The context**

God is using this punishment in prophesy to cause something greater. He explains as follows in the same chapter (verses 22 – 25).

*The Lord will strike Egypt with a plague; he will strike them and heal them. They will turn to the Lord, and he will respond to their pleas and heal them. 23 In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria. The Assyrians will go to Egypt and the Egyptians to Assyria. The Egyptians and Assyrians will worship together. 24 In that day Israel will be the third, along with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing[b] on the earth. 25 The Lord Almighty will bless them, saying, “Blessed be Egypt my people, Assyria my handiwork, and Israel my inheritance.”*

## What does this mean for us and those accusing God of cruelty?

We need to be humble in this matter, first, we cannot fully know why something happens, what God might have done in the past (for example to warn people), why he is bringing disaster (for example short term pain to cause long term healing) and what he will do in the future and neither do we know the full mind of God (his reasons for something) for his thoughts are much higher than ours, as high as the heavens and from what we can see in the bible, nevertheless, from the bible revelation, these are some of the reasons for what is seemingly cruel actions by God:

1. **To mete out just punishment.** If a punishment is just, can it be said to be cruel?
2. **To bring about greater good.** Pain and suffering that produce a greater good sometimes can be brought about by no other means.
3. **To glorify himself.** God is glorified by the exhibition of His attributes. We all agree that He looks pretty good to us when His love and mercy are on display, but since each and every attribute is holy and perfect, even the exhibition of His wrath and anger bring Him glory. <sup>viii</sup>

## Our generation's concern: "What about those other people"?

A related matter for a lot of people today, even Christians in indirectly accusing God of cruelty, often seem to use "those other people" as a comparison.

**For example, if God is merciful, why are Muslims, Buddhists, [fill in the blank] perishing when they haven't heard the gospel?**

Jesus actually addressed this in an interesting way. Here is a story in the bible from Luke 13: 1-5 (NIV).

*Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. Jesus answered, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish."*

Having seen the pattern from the Old Testament and the clarification by Jesus in the New Testament, I can conclude (by the Spirit) from reading the bible that the principles are this:

1. First, understand the full context of the so called cruelty.
2. Next assume God is merciful and knows the full picture, he is God and you are not. He has most likely already spoken to everyone in a different way and continues to do so every day. He even uses creation as a witness – Creation clearly shows his invisible qualities. <sup>ix</sup>
3. Worry most about your own sins. Are your right with Him? Have you repented?
4. Once you are right with God, then He will give you a new duty.

It is critical that if you are not right with God, I suggest that first you repent, lest you also perish. If you are right with God, then let's see what God is doing for those other people!

## Evangelism 101: What is God doing about the other people?

Before we understand what God is doing for others, we need to understand God's model for evangelism (taking the good news to others). It is summarised like this:

*"The Lord gives the word, and a great army brings the good news." Psalms 68:11 NLT*

God's model is to use ambassadors (born again believers) - starting with one person. We are representatives of his work and in fact the bible says it this way in 2 Cor 5: 20 (NIV):

*So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, "Come back to God!"*

One man can have 1,000 fall on one side. Two can have 10,000 fall on the other side<sup>x</sup> so imagine the power of partnership in evangelism!

This model of one being able to reach others has been proven by social researchers. An article in Forbes quotes that:

*The most introverted of people will influence 10,000 others in an average lifetime.<sup>xi</sup>*

So one person, in this case a believer can reach a large number of people for Christ.

So how do you start? The way to reach your 10,000 others is to use the model set forth in the Great Commission:<sup>xii</sup> Acts 1: 8 sets forth the model for Jesus' commission to the disciples as this: But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

SO:

**First, Call those who are near** (your family and friends). Are all in your family saved? Are all your friends with a Christian upbringing saved? Do they know Jesus not just know about him? Are there no friends/acquaintances of yours (for example on Face Book) who are Muslim, Buddhist? Hindu? Start there, use your FB feed to evangelise – this is your Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria.

**Next, Call to those who are far.** For this become a missionary or support ministries devoted to worldwide evangelism for example:

- [Biblica](#) – the International bible society sends bibles (as translated) in places where Christian can facing persecution for example China, Russia and Korea.
- [Christ for all Nations \(CFAN\)](#) – Started by Reinhard Bonnke they hold large evangelical crusades (over 75m salvation cards) and these have covered 34 African countries including in "Muslim Africa" – places like Nigeria and Mali.
- [Global Frontiers Mission](#) focusses on reaching the gospel message to the least reached people groups in the world including 3.16 billion people who it estimates have never heard the gospel of Jesus Christ. They meet this need for example through short term missionary trips.
- **Media missionaries** - TV channels like [God TV](#) broadcast to 200 nations and territories and so can reach people in Muslim and other countries where they physically couldn't go. It for example [can reach 92 million homes in India](#).

Support is not just money, how about prayer? Prayer is the foundation for any breakthrough.

There are websites like [christar.org](http://christar.org) of where you would be encouraged to find a missionary (working for example with Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, refugees, the deaf) and he/she becomes “your missionary” - you pray for them every day, every week. You check on their blogs and mission updates for the work they are doing. So if you can’t give money, make it a point to identify ministries you can support through prayer. In this way, you are partnering in spreading the news and this is a biblical pattern. For example, the Philippian church was a partner to Paul (over 10 years) when he went on missionary journeys <sup>xiii</sup>so do the same!

If you want to give money, that is excellent, as the late Rev Laban Bombo, the school chaplain of my boarding school used to say:

“Where you cannot go, your money goes”.

### Conclusion of the matter

If it is any comfort to you, you can see that the message of Christ goes out to the whole world. Day and Night God calls to us. For those who respond, they pass from death to life and God’s wrath doesn’t fall on them, but for those who are rebels, perhaps these are those who call him cruel and yet he says to them as he said to a city past in Matthew 23: 37 (NIV):

*Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing.*

*Prayer: Oh Lord our God, may you turn our evil cruel hearts of stone into hearts of flesh and enable us to repent and turn to you, that you may heal us, that you may save us from the day of your wrath. In Jesus’ mighty power and authority I pray. Amen.*

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## Notes

<sup>i</sup> Extract from: <https://www.gotquestions.org/is-God-cruel.html>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://biblehub.com/timeline/>

<sup>iii</sup> <https://biblehub.com/timeline/>

<sup>iv</sup> See Deuteronomy 25: 17 - 18

<sup>v</sup> Jonah 3: 4 – 5 (NIV)

<sup>vi</sup> Jonah 3: 10 (NIV)

<sup>vii</sup> See 2 Peter 3: 9 (NLT)

<sup>viii</sup> <https://www.gotquestions.org/is-God-cruel.html>

<sup>ix</sup> See Romans 1: 19- 32.

<sup>x</sup> Adopted from Deuteronomy 32: 30 (NIV): How should one chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight, except their Rock had sold them, and the LORD had shut them up?

<sup>xi</sup> <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbescoachescouncil/2017/10/16/what-is-your-impact/>

<sup>xii</sup> Acts 1: 8 sets forth the model for Jesus’ commission to the disciples: But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

<sup>xiii</sup> <https://discipleallnations.wordpress.com/2014/02/12/partners-in-mission-the-example-of-the-philippian-church-and-the-apostle-paul/>