

The Troubling Acts of God in the Old Testament:

Noah's Flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, the Egyptian Firstborn, the Destruction of the Canaanites

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Introduction: Questioning the Character of God in the Old Testament

In the Old Testament, God responded to certain human choices by taking human life. Those acts include the flood of Noah (Gen.7 – 8), the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen.18), the slaying of the Egyptian firstborn (Ex.12), the death of Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu (Lev.10:1 – 3), the slaying of disobedient Israelites (Num.11:1 – 2), the earth opening under Korah and his rebellion (Num.16), the battle with the Midianites and Moabites (Num.22 – 25; 31), the conquest of Jericho and the Canaanites (Gen.15:16 – 21; Josh.1 – 7), and the slaying of Uzzah who touched the ark of God (2 Sam.5). I have written about God's treatment of Israel elsewhere, so here I will limit my comments to the general category of God taking human life, especially in the flood of Noah, Sodom and Gomorrah, the Egyptian firstborn, and the Canaanites.

Any time we see human injustice and evil, we must ask, 'What kind of god do we expect?' What are the alternatives? There are three main options:

1. A god who does nothing and looks the other way
2. A god who is actually part of the evil and mischief, like Zeus stirring up the Trojan War
3. A god who responds to human evil and injustice by stopping it in some way

In general, I would rather have a god who responds to human evil by stopping it in some way. But that opens up more questions about how and why this particular God stopped human evil in the Old Testament narratives.

Many readers of the biblical record respond to God's acts of destruction with confusion, hesitation, and outright rejection of a God who would act this way. Skeptics claim that the portrayal of God in the Old Testament is totally inconsistent with the portrayal of God in the New. Some Christians – primarily those who believe that God is a western lawgiver – claim that this portrayal reveals a God of meritocratic and punitive justice, whose mercy becomes all the more merciful when understood against the backdrop of God's absolute right to act this way. To them, the resolution to this issue is quite straightforward.

Other Christians, including myself, believe that there is an underlying unity in God's character from Old Testament to New, but struggle to understand how these acts of God align with the claim that Jesus reveals the full character of a loving God. For if God is at the fundamental level a God of meritocratic-punitive justice, then there is a certain consistency in that explanation. After all, God did not have to show love, mercy, and grace at all; He could have wiped out humanity and creation at the fall. But if strict meritocratic justice is the core characteristic of God, then love, mercy, and grace are *accidental* to who God is. How then is it possible to say that God is *love*? The challenge arises when we as Christians say that love is the core characteristic of God, that love is not accidental to God but *fundamental*. If we say *that* about God, how can we make sense of these Old Testament episodes? From my experience, skeptics and non-Christians object to these because they sense an inconsistency between the apparent portrayal of God in the Old Testament and the Christian claim that God is love.

Response #1: God Had to Protect the Chosen People

First, we must understand that God's overall objective from the Fall of humanity was to undo the corruption of sin which Adam and Eve introduced into human nature. The root cause of human evil behavior is the corruption of sin within each one of us. Ultimately, God wants to offer the healing of human nature to each person, respecting their free will to define ourselves by what we truly love, ultimately. But humanity en masse was in denial that they were corrupted and diseased with sinfulness. Humanity normalized the corruption: We blamed others ('other people are evil, but not us'), blamed 'god' ('god is both good and evil, and so are we') or blamed the universe ('good and evil are human fabrications anyway, so the distinction is meaningless'). So God as a doctor wishing to heal humanity had to call together a focus group. This was God's purpose for Israel.

God gave Israel a challenging health regimen. He brought them into a new garden land so they would not be able to blame their 'environment' for their bad behavior; and He commanded them to receive His treatment so deeply into themselves that they would 'circumcise their hearts' (Dt.10:16) – that is, that they would engage Him in a spiritual

partnership and fix the problem within their human nature, cutting something unclean away from themselves. They responded by partially following it, as they discovered that the 'image of God' in them was still present, but it was ultimately too challenging for them, as it would be for all of us, because of the universal human problem of the disorder within human nature. Along the way, however, they gained genuine insight into true human health and the nature of their internal corruption which contributed to their resistance to God's treatment. They also documented the nature of the corruption, and yearned for God to 'circumcise their hearts' (Dt.30:6), or give them a 'clean heart' (Ps.51:9 – 10), or inscribe His laws irrevocably on their hearts (Jer.31:31 – 34; cf. 4:4; 9:28 – 29; 17:1 – 10), or replace their 'heart of stone' with a 'heart of flesh' (Ezk.11:18; 36:26 – 36).

Ultimately, God was setting the stage for His Son to take on human nature and live a genuinely human life, as Jesus of Nazareth. This meant that Jesus – although he was supernaturally conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of Mary of Nazareth without a human male sperm – really did have to be a human fetus and helpless infant. He had to learn how to turn to his heavenly Father by the Spirit as a human being, because he was turning his human nature back to love the Father as one of us. Jesus resisted the corruption, ultimately defeated the disease by dying himself, emerged with the antibodies to the disease in his resurrected and renewed and purified human nature, and shares himself with us by his Spirit so he could renew the human love for God in us, and fight the disease in us, with our partnership.

If our human problem required a physical, new humanity in Jesus, then Jesus needed a physical human family in which to be born. That physical human family needed to be part of a larger human community which would help his real human brain form and learn how to express genuine reliance on God as a human. That physical human community needed to be physically located somewhere, and have some relationship with a physical land. They needed some physical protection, especially when their lives were threatened and endangered. Otherwise, if God did not protect His focus group, Israel, then there would be no Jesus, and there would be no undoing the damage in human nature. A God of goodness and love for human beings could not permit this. Hence, God needed an Israel. And hence, God needed to protect Israel at strategic times. This is why we have God protecting Noah and his family from being killed by the violence of their peers, why God protected Sodom and Gomorrah from dominating the new garden land, why God battled the Egyptians, Midianites, and Canaanites.

Response #2: God Pushed a Pause Button on Their Lives

But when God did take human life, was He simply 'casting them into hell'? No. A number of often unexamined assumptions lie behind the claim that He was. Although the scope of this essay does not cover the nature of hell and the nature of the human heart, those questions must be examined more closely, for the view of hell as 'locked from the inside' as articulated by C.S. Lewis and the entire Eastern Orthodox communion is different from the view of hell among Western Catholics and Protestants, where God throws people into hell against their will to punish them eternally for offending his honor and justice. So the question must be phrased rather precisely: In the Old Testament, did God's sudden taking of human life remove all possibility of those people choosing Jesus/God? I do not believe so. I believe God pushed a pause button on their lives, and took them into His care until the time of Jesus. I do not believe that when God took human life in the Old Testament, that He was also taking away their ability to choose Jesus. In fact, He was preserving their last possible real free choice.

An examination of 1 Peter 3:19 and 4:6 helps us understand at least one such incident in a way that the original Old Testament text does not explain to us.

^{3:17} For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong. ¹⁸ For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; ¹⁹ in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison, ²⁰ who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water.

Some exegetes argue that Jesus' self-presentation before the dead was only to condemn them and not to offer them salvation. To support this idea, the case is made that the phrase 'made proclamation' carries a different meaning from 'preached.' However, Peter is clearly capable in this very letter of using a variety of words and phrases to communicate the same concept (e.g. announced, preached, proclaimed), thus strongly suggesting that the semantic distinction is meaningless. Furthermore, Luke uses the two words synonymously, sometimes in the same sentence

or two (cf. Acts 4:2; 8:4; 9:19 – 20; 10:37; 13:5; 13:24; 13:38), and Paul uses the verb form ‘proclaim’ synonymously with ‘preach’ (Col.1:23; 1 Th.2:9; 1 Tim.3:16) and the noun form ‘the proclamation’ synonymously with ‘the preaching’ (2 Tim.4:7; Ti.1:3), which supports the idea that Peter can do the same. Finally, it must also be noted that Peter refers a second time to the same event:

^{4:6} For the gospel has for this purpose been preached even to those who are dead, that though they are judged in the flesh as men, they may live in the spirit according to the will of God.

In 4:6, the intended result of Jesus’ descent into ‘Hades,’ as it were, is explained: that those human beings who died in the flood, might nevertheless choose spiritual life upon meeting Christ. In other words, Jesus’ proclamation to the dead was not simply to condemn them. He offered them a real choice to respond to him, and to ‘live in the Spirit.’ While we should not assume that all did, for reasons I offer below, the fact that Jesus did appear to them and preach to them is important for understanding the character of God.

The thematic and conceptual ties are important to the overall argument of 1 Peter. Peter parallels the proclamation that happened among the dead and the proclamation that happens among the living. He makes this parallel because he is reminding the suffering Christians that their proclamation must continue. Holding Jesus up as the example of one who proclaimed his gospel even unto his death means that God can certainly call Christians to do the same. Interestingly, Peter also has in mind the parallel between the effective ministry of the dying Christ and that of the Christians. Christ’s suffering led to death, but his death only enhanced his ability to preach, this time to a new audience: the dead! Similarly, the Christians’ suffering could lead to their death as well, but if they die virtuously, their death will further advance their proclamation among the living. Christians fearful of death might have argued that their removal from the world of the living would eliminate their testimony, thus making death a potential weakness in Peter’s argument. Rather, virtuous death strengthens the argument. This is a challenging perspective for the suffering Christian, but a useful one if we ask God for the courage and strength to live in it!

The insight in 1 Peter serves a secondary role in our ability to extrapolate further about other incidents, about all who died before Jesus, and indeed, the character of God. The answer to the primary question of those killed by the flood is: No, God did not immediately consign them to hell. No, God was not taking away all possibility of choice. Yes, they still had a choice to receive Jesus, which was offered when Jesus descended into Hades after his death to make his proclamation there to them. I believe this idea can be extended to others who were slain by God in the Old Testament time period. This direction is suggested, but by no means settled, by 1 Peter 3:19 and 4:6. When God took away people’s lives in the Old Testament generally, He did so punitively, yes, but also in part to *preserve* their ultimate choice. Perhaps He took their lives before they were fully hardened against Him.

Why would any Old Testament person held in this ‘holding tank’ reject Jesus? Only for irrational reasons of their own, because they resisted God so much in life that they conditioned themselves to reject Him in eternal life. As God loves us, He loves the true self that He created and knows. This frustrates those who want to deny their need for Jesus. If C.S. Lewis and the Eastern Orthodox understanding of the human heart is correct, then human beings are capable of experiencing torment in the very love of God because we choose lies, sin and false selves. So God cannot be other than Who He is. He cannot help but continue to love the unbeliever and call to them continually, even in hell. But to the unrepentant, the very love of God has become an annoyance, a repugnant presence, and a terror. God Himself will be an unwanted stalker. This view preserves the possibility of asserting that God is love at the core of His character, which is consistent with God’s very nature as a Triune being where loving relations exist prior to all other actions of God. If all of God’s actions (theodicy) must logically flow out from God’s nature (theology), then here we have a way forward.

Response #3: God Revealed What Human Beings Were Already Doing

When God interacted with those people who opposed Israel, He developed a pattern of protecting Israel as minimally needed, and including others who wanted to join Israel. *The broader pattern in Scripture is that, on the one hand, when God says that He was making a judgment on others because of their posture towards Old Testament Israel, He was revealing and naming something; He is calling out a self-destructive outcome that has become certain because of human choices* (e.g. Rom.1:24, 26, 28). I believe this is the case with those killed by the Flood, the residents of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the Canaanites. People before the flood were very violent, as indicated by the type of human culture that started with Cain in his city (Gen.4:17 – 24), suggested by God’s label of ‘mighty men’ who were ‘wicked’ whose heart-level thoughts were ‘only evil continually’ (Gen.6:4 – 5), and indicated by

God's warning against human bloodshed after the flood and His permission of and limitation on human vigilante justice (Gen.9:6). The flood was necessary to wipe the blood of humanity off the earth, since human blood polluted the land. Thus, human beings before the flood, with their violence, might have destroyed themselves. In particular, they would have killed Noah and his family, cutting off the lineage of Jesus and their own hope for redemption. God's judgment on their violence merely makes apparent what was happening already. If there was no family of faith, there would be no Israel. If there were no Israel, there would be no Jesus. If there were no Jesus, there would be no healing of human nature. And that would be unacceptable from God's perspective, and wholly incompatible with God's love.

Consider also Sodom and Gomorrah and the other Canaanites: God brought fire down on Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen.19), and eventually brought Israel against the military cities of Jericho, Ai, and Hazor, because those Canaanites threatened the existence of Israel. Coordinating the background information is important. Canaanite civilization and culture had several significant problems related to sex and violence. They had orgies to ask their gods to fertilize the earth with rain. The residents of Sodom and Gomorrah used rape as a way to express their dominance over conquered people or strangers (Gen.19:5), the very opposite of hospitality. It is possible that a significant portion of the population were children born of incest. Moses told Israel that the Canaanites practiced all kinds of activities for which the land was spewing them out (Lev.18:3, 24 – 30). Most of those activities were sexual activities: incest of all different types (Lev.18:4 – 14), sex with an in-law (Lev.18:15 – 19), adultery (Lev.18:20), homosexuality (Lev.18:22), bestiality (Lev.18:23). But my guess is that the more important issue was that they practiced child sacrifice (Lev.18:21). There is some debate among archaeologists about this, but that is because some of them are not sure how to interpret the physical evidence among the Carthaginians, who were related to the Canaanites (6,000 jars, filled with baby bones)¹, because they're unsure about the literary evidence. The literary evidence is significant, coming from biblical sources,² Jewish rabbinical sources outside the Bible,³ and Greek literary sources,⁴ which says that the Canaanites and cultures related to them practiced child sacrifice. What this represents is an evolution in the idolatry of children. All traditional, communal cultures that I know of – like Asian cultures – idolize children. Children represent status, security, prestige, success. So, parents always felt like they needed to control their children. But child sacrifice takes that to another level. It means that people literally and physically suck the life out of children to keep their civilization going. *If they suffered a setback, they would sacrifice more children; this is self-destructive.* It was the development of something that began in Genesis 4, with the fairly villainous characters Cain and Lamech, who perverted both sexuality and justice. So God's judgment on the Canaanites was not arbitrary.

When God took the lives of the Egyptian firstborn in the Passover, He was also revealing what Egypt was doing to itself. When the Egyptian Pharaoh tried to kill the firstborn males in Israel, and then throughout all Egypt (Ex.1:22), they were destroying their own future. In particular, Jesus' lineage would pass through Israel, and to endanger Jesus' future was to endanger the future of all humanity. Thus, eighty years later, when Moses confronted a new Pharaoh who was stubbornly set on keeping Israel enslaved and oppressed, God took the firstborn of Egypt (Ex.12:30) as a symmetrical expression of both judgment and revelation. What Pharaoh did previously to Israel was

¹ Jon D. Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), p.21

² The story of the binding of Isaac (Genesis 22) is commonly understood to be a comment on the practice of child sacrifice more common at the time. The king of Moab sacrifices a child in 2 Kings 3:27. An Israelite adopted this practice, showing Canaanite influence, earlier in 1 Kings 16:34. Similarly, Micah records the question, 'Shall I present my firstborn for my rebellious acts, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?' and appears to be refuting child sacrifice in his response, 'He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you, but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?' (Micah 6:7 – 8).

³ The Jewish scholar Rashi (12th century), commented on Jeremiah 7:31, 'Tophet is Moloch, which was made of brass; and they heated him from his lower parts; and his hands being stretched out, and made hot, they put the child between his hands, and it was burnt; when it vehemently cried out; but the priests beat a drum, that the father might not hear the voice of his son, and his heart might not be moved.'

⁴ Plutarch (ca. 46–120 AD) mentions the practice in Carthage, as do Tertullian, Orosius and Diodorus Siculus. Some of these sources suggest that babies were roasted to death on a heated bronze statue. According to Diodorus Siculus, 'There was in their city a bronze image of Cronus extending its hands, palms up and sloping toward the ground, so that each of the children when placed thereon rolled down and fell into a sort of gaping pit filled with fire.' Some modern historians and archaeologists dispute this evidence, but several large statues ('Tophets') have been identified, including a large one in Carthage. Archaeological sites within Carthage and other Phoenician centers have unearthed large numbers of infants and children.

revealed for what it was. While God took the Egyptian firstborn into His own safekeeping, despite the sorrow of many an Egyptian parent, God made clear that Pharaoh had threatened their own future – in fact, everyone’s future.

When Israel was attacked by the Midianites in the wilderness (Num.22 – 25; 31), God led Israel in a response which eliminated the hostiles among the Midianites, and left the younger Midianite women and girls who had not been part of the plan to seduce Israel into sexual immortality (Num.31:15 – 17). This may sound like Israel took war captives, forced their conversion, and either married them or reduced them to sex slavery immediately. But there are some very important considerations which prevents us from concluding that. First, when God says to ‘spare for yourselves’ the virgin young women of Midian (Num.31:18), this is related to their innocence, not simply their sexual status per se, because the older women of Midian had engaged in seduction – weaponizing sex in order to cause God to judge Israel, and subvert Israel’s purpose, at the counsel of Balaam the seer. Second, such a statement does not mean that Israelite men immediately took these young women and girls of various ages immediately to wed and to bed. It only means that they were eventually eligible to be married, from God’s perspective. There was no sex slavery in Israel, so that possibility is flatly impossible. Third, based on how the Gibeonites under Joshua were later given a very honorable task as a community (Josh.9 – 11), it is possible and likely that the Midianite young women were treated well, and cared for as a community, because they did not pose a threat to Israel. Fourth, they were incorporated into Israel because Israel was a multi-ethnic faith community united by a hope that God would work through them now and especially in the future. Israel was not a biological ‘ethnicity,’ so there was no ethnic hostility towards Midianites per se which would render these survivors into second-class citizens. Moses had married a Midianite woman (Num.12); Caleb was a Canaanite (‘Kenizzite’ in Num.32:12); Egyptians and Hittites came with Israel out of Egypt (Ex.12:46), more Canaanites would later join Israel; etc. Fifth, the incorporation of these Midianite females into Israel has to be compared to the leading alternative: leaving them to die in the wilderness. The morality of that option has to be compared with the morality of incorporation. Sixth, we must remember that the ancient world had an overwhelming cultural value on childbearing and continuing one’s family. The Midianites, as reportedly descendants of Abraham through Keturah (Gen.25:2), were distant cousins of the Israelites. So they were not ‘alone’ as ethnic outcasts – again, we recall that Israel was a multi-ethnic faith community. Remarkably, their stories as Midianites were not erased, minimized, or submerged – in fact, this story is one of many which became part of Israel’s sacred literature so as to be remembered. The same can be said of the Canaanite wives of the sons of Jacob (Gen.38), the Egyptian wife of Joseph (Gen.41:45), the ‘mixed multitude’ from Egypt (Ex.12:46), the Canaanite Rahab and her household, who eventually married a man from the tribe of Judah named Salmon (Ruth 4:21; Mt.1:5), the Moabitess Ruth would marry Salmon’s son Boaz (Ruth), and so on. So given that the Midianites and Moabites attacked Israel while Israel was a vulnerable caravan trying to journey through the wilderness, posing no threat to them, one must consider the other moral options available to God and the Israelites for the innocent among the Midianites.

Joshua attacked not civilian cities, but Canaanite military compounds: Jericho, Ai, and Hazor.⁵ Note that when Joshua claimed to slay ‘men and women, young and old’ (Josh.6:12), he was using heightened hyperbolic language to refer to a military victory in much the same way we speak of ‘annihilating’ an opponent at a sporting match.⁶ Such language was standard throughout the Ancient Near East, and Joshua was simply following rhetorical convention. Joshua did not actually kill Canaanite women, children, and elderly.⁷ The settlement of Israel in Canaan was in fact a gradual displacement or incorporation, with minimum loss of life and fighting (Dt.6:10 – 11).⁸

⁵ Richard S. Hess, ‘The Jericho and Ai of the Book of Joshua’ in *Critical Issues in Early Israelite History*, ed. Richard S. Hess, Gerald A. Klingbeil, and Paul J. Ray Jr. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2008), p.29 – 30.

⁶ Paul Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster? Making Sense of the Old Testament God* (Downers’ Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), p.172 quoting from K.A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), p.173 – 174.

⁷ For a fuller treatment of this, see my paper, *The Troubling Acts of God: The Destruction of the Canaanites*.

⁸ Paul Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster? Making Sense of the Old Testament God* (Downers’ Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), p.183 – 184 notes that archaeological study confirms this gradual infiltration. ‘Archaeologists have discovered that by 1000 BC (during the Iron Age), Canaanites were no longer an identifiable entity in Israel... [Israel] had gradually occupied the territory, and had eventually become dominant... The same kind of gradual infiltration took place by the Amorites, who had moved in Babylonia decades before 2000 BC. (Hammurabi himself was an Amorite who ruled Babylon.) They eventually occupied and controlled key cities and exerted political influence, which is attested by changes in many personal names in the literature and inscriptions. Babylonia’s culture didn’t change in its buildings, clothing, and ceramics, but a significant social shift took place. Likewise, we see the same gradual transition taking place in Canaan based on the same kinds of evidence archaeologists typically utilize.’

But why did God not also bring a judgment against the Shang Dynasty in China, since they too committed human sacrifice, as did the Aztec Empire in the Americas? The answer is that only the Canaanites were specifically opposed to Israel. While Israel was in the wilderness and vulnerable, the Canaanite king of Arad attacked them (Num.21:1). Sihon, king of the Amorites, refused to grant Israel passage through his land and instead attacked them (Num.21:21 – 23). Og, king of Bashan, similarly attacked Israel (Num.21:33). Then when Israel entered the land of promise, the Canaanites continued to oppose them.

Furthermore, I repeat that the entrance of Israel into Canaan was not ‘ethnic cleansing.’ It was a kind of moral or theological judgment on their religious practice, yes. But sometime while Israel was in Egypt, Caleb the Kennizzite, a Canaanite, joined Israel (Num.32:12; cf. Gen.15:19), probably because there were Canaanite peoples in the Egyptian Nile delta region. He was probably not the only Canaanite to do so. For at least as early as when Jacob’s twelve sons had to find largely Canaanite women to marry, Canaanites were incorporated into the family of Israel. The tale of Judah and Tamar highlights this (Gen.38) and almost certainly served as a warning to the Israelites against excluding the Canaanite women in their families. In addition, a ‘mixed multitude’ left from Egypt with Israel (Ex.12:38). This demonstrates that the destruction of the Canaanites was not ethnic or racial, because the composition of ‘Israel’ was not actually ethnic or racial, but confessional. Rahab the Canaanite defected from Jericho and came over to Israel, along with her household, and was welcomed, even to the point of marrying an Israelite man and becoming an ancestor of Jesus (Mt.1).

Conclusions

It is difficult to read about God’s acts of destruction in the Old Testament. But it is even more difficult for us today to fully grasp the violence and corruption of humanity in ancient times. We must do so, however, when we read the Old Testament, because that helps us to understand the historical and cultural context in which God took those actions.

Furthermore, a theological choice is important to make. Given that we would probably not prefer to have a god who sits by and does nothing, and certainly not a god who participates and instigates the evil to begin with, we are left with the third category: Is there a god who judges and stops human evil? The biblical portrayal of this God is that He certainly does intervene in some ways to judge and stop human evil, *as it was directed at His human partners, Israel, who would help bring forth Jesus and proclaim him as God’s deepest response to the problem of human evil universally*. If this troubles us, perhaps it is because we live in a therapeutic culture that has difficulty pinpointing why human nature is corrupted by evil, and imagining how human violence from outside and inside Israel threatened to undermine its very life and purpose. Jesus was God’s way of judging the ultimate source of human evil at its source: in every single one of us. This was also God’s way of healing humanity by respecting our free will. This God not only stops human evil; He seeks to undo it, redeem it, and transform it. As 1 Peter 3:18 – 20 and 4:6 reflects, God offered that same choice to every human being who died before Jesus came, and in that sense, He treats all people the same.

This raises questions about the role of Israel, both in terms of the duration of Israel’s history and God’s judgments on Israel. I have explored those questions in considerable depth in other papers: *Why Choose a Chosen People?*⁹ and *Suffering and the Roles of Job, Israel, and Jesus*.¹⁰ Suffice to say here that God’s judgments on behalf of Israel were unique to the period before Jesus came. Even God’s judgments *on Israel* foreshadowed God’s judgment *on the flesh of Jesus*. Thus, all the other incidents in the Old Testament pertaining to both the protection and chastisement of Israel are not generalizable to anyone else. Jesus has fulfilled Israel’s role in God’s plan.

Finally, other biblical passages tell us that God will not repeat those specific actions which He took in the Old Testament. So natural disasters like hurricanes, earthquakes, and tsunamis cannot be interpreted now as ‘God’s wrath,’ but simply the natural results of a creation that is not what it was meant to be (Rom.8:18 – 25). Nor will fire from heaven fall again. But there will be a final judgment on human evil and revealing of its true nature when Jesus comes again to earth to consummate his kingdom. He will defeat evil when he comes. That is covered in this paper: *Hell as the Love of God*.¹¹

⁹ <http://www.newhumanityinstitute.org/resources.who.is.god.israel.why.htm>

¹⁰ <http://newhumanityinstitute.org/pdfs/article-suffering-&-the-role-of-job,-israel,-jesus.pdf>

¹¹ <http://newhumanityinstitute.org/pdfs/article-hell-as-the-love-of-god.pdf>

