

Responding to the New Atheists' attacks on the God of the Old Testament-19: "Child Abuse"(Part 8: Immoral command?)

We have noted by an extended look at the context, near and far, that it was never God's intent for Abraham to kill Isaac. Let's consider *from a philosophical point of view* the charges of child abuse against God by the New Atheists in the command for Abraham to murder of Isaac.

1. God's commandment to do X obligates person Y to do X.
2. It is wrong to kill innocent human beings.
3. God commanded Abraham to take an innocent life.

Can we hold all three of these statements with logical consistency? We can accept statement 1—that we should do what a good God commands; after all, God's commands are rooted in His good nature and purposes. On the other hand, statement 2 *normally* holds, but does it *always* hold true? I think not! There are instances when the killing of innocent people is justified. Take the September 11 terrorist attacks. When four planes were hijacked, putting many more lives at risk than those of the innocent passengers, the president gave orders to shoot down the planes, which had suddenly become weapons. While tragic, most people would believe it was justified in that it was an attempt to stop the killing of many more innocent victims. There are exceptional cases that permit the taking of innocent life; taking an innocent life, is sometimes morally permitted, even though it is a violation of the sixth commandment of the Mosaic Law.

Let's dig a little deeper at the prohibition against murder. Why is murder so horrible? Why is it that murder is viewed throughout all of the generations, whether the people had the Mosaic Law or not, as so horrible? Why does man intuitively recoil at the thought of murder? If you dig deep, you will discover that the reason that it is so horrendous is because dead people stay dead. As far as our temporal earthly world, when someone is murdered, it is all over. There is a finality to it. A temporal life is lost—to some people the person is gone "forever." That is just the way things are in our world.

Now suppose that we lived in a world in which when an innocent person was murdered, he came back to life and even in robust or perfect health. In that case, the murder of innocent people wouldn't be that big of a deal—it might even be preferred if it resulted in perfect health of an otherwise ailing person. In such a world, the moral principles would be different with regard to murder of the innocent. Suppose we lived in a world that hitting people in the head helped improved their health rather than causing harm and pain, instead of being immoral, such actions would be encouraged. These thought experiments show that the command not to murder or the laws against hitting people in the head depend on certain givens in the world. If certain facts about the world were different, then morals would be different.

The point here is that in the story of Abraham and Isaac *we do have a very different world*, a world where there was no intention of killing Isaac, and even if Isaac was killed, he

would be immediately resuscitated so that God's covenant promise would be fulfilled. What we do *not* have in this story is an arbitrary command for Abraham to end Isaac's life on this earth. It was through Isaac that all of the promises of the covenant would be fulfilled. Abraham knew very well that even if he sacrificed his son, his son would not remain dead,

"And Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go yonder; and *we* will worship and *we* return to you" (Gen. 22:5)

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac; and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; 18 it was he to whom it was said, "In Isaac your descendants shall be called." 19 He considered that God is able to raise men even from the dead; from which he also received him back as a type (Heb. 11:17-19).

The critic not only ignores the context and background, he is ignorant of a supernatural being who is able to bring people back from the dead. He rejects the fact that God acts in history, makes promises, makes good on them, and has morally sufficient reasons for doing what He does. Statement 2 applies in a world in which dead people do not come back to earthly life after being killed. Given the fact that God's command for Abraham to kill his son was but a test (never intended to be carried out) and that the world was a world in which God would raise Isaac from the dead on the spot (even if he was killed) means that God's command was neither immoral nor contradictory. It would only be so if God simply told Abraham to murder his innocent son in a context void of promises or any hope of resuscitation. Certainly, anyone can see this was not the case. Moreover, while the critics attempt to paint a picture of an Old Testament God who commands and intends His people to murder innocent people for no apparent reason, there is not a single case in the Bible where God does this. This is not even true in the case of Abraham. Again, context is everything! What a comfort to see God vindicated once again! What a blessing to have answers for those who question this command—instead feeling a bit embarrassed by the whole thing. What an opportunity to be able to turn the tables and use this event as a springboard to its Christological significance as it points to Jesus as the Second Isaac! Think maybe God planned it that way?

In Esse,

Pastor Don

Exodus 3:14 And God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM" [אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה='EHYEH, ESSE]; and He said, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"