

Violence and Polygamy

Does the story of David introduce us to a God who commands violence and delights in the destruction of his enemies?

Why does the Bible record David’s having multiple wives without a negative comment? Is the Old Testament a story that portrays women as possessions for men to accumulate?

Richard Dawkins, one of the most prominent New Atheists, argues that God in the OT is “... arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction ... a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully.” (The God Delusion, 51.)

Violence

Why can’t a man of war and bloodshed build the temple?

The temple represents:

1. God’s presence with his people.
2. God’s holy requirements for people to meet with him.
3. The sacrificial system which points to Jesus.

The temple shows us God’s ultimate heart.

The Bible is clear on God’s desire for mankind.

- 1 Timothy 2:4 “[God] desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”
- 2 Peter 3:9 “The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.”
- John 3:17 “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”

Why is David’s violence in line with God’s will? Three reasons:

1. His duty as a king to punish criminals.

2 Samuel 4:11 “How much more, when wicked men have killed a righteous man in his own house on his bed, shall I not now require his blood at your hand and destroy you from the earth?”

2. His duty as king to defend the nation from its enemies.

1 Samuel 14:47-48 “When Saul had taken the kingship over Israel, he fought against all his enemies on every side... and delivered Israel out of the hands of those who plundered them.”

3. His duty as warrior to exercise God’s judgment upon the wicked.

Conclusion

The violence is not ethnocentric. Luke 19:41, Joshua 7, Deut. 30:18

Judgment is not God’s ultimate desire for us. Matthew 25:41.

The violence is a necessary consequence of God’s judgment on evil. His heart is shown on the cross.

Matthew 25:41 “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire **prepared for the devil and his angels.**” (emphasis added)

Polygamy

David has a problem with women

Eight wives: *Abigail, Ahinoam, Maacah, Adonijah, Sephatiah, Ithream, Michal, Bathsheba*

Failure as a husband: 2 Samuel 11-12

Failure as a father: 2 Samuel 13-18, stories of Amnon and Absalom

OT prohibition of many wives for kings: Deuteronomy 17:17

Polygamy’s disastrous effects

Lamech: a vengeful, boastful man whose actions are associated with murder.

Abraham: his polygamy is a result of not trusting the promise that he would have a son. God protects and saves Hagar.

Jacob: God blesses Leah, the one who is less loved.

Solomon: His many wives draw his heart away from God.

God’s original intention reaffirmed by Christ

Matthew 19:4 “He answered, “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female,⁵ and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh?’⁶ So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.”

Christ’s love for the sexually broken, discarded, and used

John 4: a woman who has been married five times and is living with a man not her husband.

Luke 7:36-40: Jesus forgives a prostitute.

The church was a haven for women in a brutal ancient world.

Questions for Study and Reflection

1. Why is it, according to the Bible, OK for the government to use violence in certain situations, but not OK for us to be violent in our personal conduct?
2. How does the Bible show that God’s judgment was not ethnocentric, that God judged Israelites too?
3. The Bible clearly records polygamy among many of its characters. How does it undermine its practice?
4. How does Jesus show God’s design for male-female relationships? Why is this good for women (and men)?