

Trinity Home Teams

Sermon Notes / Nov. 16, 2025

Unnecessarily Harsh or Unequivocally Holy?

Joshua 6:15-21

1. Read **Exod. 34:6-7**. Who is speaking? How is God described? Personally, do you know Him this way?
2. Read **Jonah 4:2**. What exactly is Jonah's complaint against God? Can you describe it?
3. Read **Rom. 2:4-5**. What hardness exists in your heart that needs examination and repentance? What unconfessed sin is creating barriers between you and God, or between you and others?
4. How or why does the Lord "harden hearts"? See **Josh. 11:19-20**. Does he make you sin?

Can you accept biblical accounts like these where cities or people were "devoted to destruction"? Do you struggle to reconcile the God of the OT with the God of the NT?

Famed atheist Richard Dawkins casts the Old Testament God as *"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.)

Ultimately, we cannot understand God's righteous condemnation of sinners because we do not rightly understand God and we do not rightly understand our sin.

Devoted to destruction

Was God's command of "*herem*" a righteous and holy command? [Hebrew root *hrm*...occurs in the Old Testament both as a verb 51 times, as a noun 29 times. The verb can be rendered "to devote to the Lord" or "to devote to destruction" or "to completely destroy," and the noun can be rendered as "devoted things" or "destruction..." ']

Leviticus 27:29 -- *No one devoted, who is to be devoted for destruction from mankind, shall be ransomed; he shall surely be put to death.*

Deuteronomy 20:16-17 -- *But in the cities of these peoples that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance, you shall save alive nothing that breathes, ¹⁷ but you shall devote them to complete destruction...*

Debased in their thoughts and actions

Men fail in their thinking. Maybe the people of Canaan were no saints, but they weren't *that* bad (!) Anyone who argues that Yahweh was unnecessarily harsh to Canaan must affirm this. Sins of **Lev 18:6-23** are particularly heinous. The evidence outside the Bible

confirms the biblical picture of a particularly debased culture in Canaan. These included engaging in incest, adultery, child sacrifice, homosexual activity, and bestiality." This is Romans 1 stuff!

Deuteronomy 9:4-5 -- *Do not say in your heart, after the Lord your God has thrust them out before you, 'It is because of my righteousness that the Lord has brought me in to possess this land,' whereas it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord is driving them out before you. ⁵ Not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart are you going in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations the Lord your God is driving them out from before you, and that he may confirm the word that the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob."*

See also **Gen. 15:15-16**

Deuteronomy 18:9 -- *When you come into the land that the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not learn to follow the abominable practices of those nations.*

Determined to reject Yahweh

This is where the idea of Yahweh being exclusively or primarily a God of wrath in the OT goes awry. There is no doubt that the wrath of God is evident in the OT, just as it is in the NT. However, to say that he is only or primarily characterized by wrath in the OT proves one either ignorant or disingenuous. Even a cursory examination of Scripture proves this to be true.

Jonah's complaint against Yahweh: *"...I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster"* (Jonah 4:2)

Consider Yahweh's kindness and patience to the people of Canaan. 1) Amorites given 400 years to turn from their wicked ways and return to Yahweh (Nineveh was given 40 days). They were terrified of what was going to happen, but they were unwilling to surrender to and worship this most powerful God.

Exodus 34:6-7 -- *...The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, ⁷ keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty...*

Romans 2:4-5 -- *Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? ⁵ But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.*

Romans 11:22 -- *Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness.*