

## **Study Guide #20: What About Those Pesky Questions?**

### **Introduction**

There are several difficult and pesky big-picture questions that are frequently asked by non-Christians and even by Christians themselves. In this Study Guide we will address many of these questions as concisely as we can.

### **Question #1: Do human beings have free will, or is everything determined for them?**

**Answer:** This question concerns the old debate between free will and determinism. An atheist claims that we are actually nothing more than molecules in motion, and if that's true, then it's the random motions of those molecules that give us our thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and "choices" that we have or make. In this case, free will is an illusion.

However, if God exists and He is infinite Love—and we have laid out good philosophical reasons in this series to believe that this is true (see Explorer I, Study Guide #3)—then since love seeks love from others, and love requires free will (a robot cannot love), then human beings do indeed have free will. Given his belief that mankind has no free will, one wonders why the atheist believes in scientifically established facts since that belief (if he's consistent) must also have been determined by the random motion of one's molecules. Yet the atheist always believes in science. Thus, the atheist's position is self-contradictory because in his worldview, all belief is a person's opinion, and no objective truth, reality, or fact actually exists. Furthermore, if everything we do is determined by random natural forces, then no one can be held accountable for his actions. Yet even the atheist wants a criminal to be held accountable for his actions.

### **Question #2: If God is perfectly good and omnipotent, why is there so much evil in the world?**

**Answer:** A variation of that question is, "Why did God create an imperfect world?". The answer is that a perfectly good God could not have created an imperfect world or either moral or natural evil. Therefore, all forms of evil must have been introduced by a free-will created being who chose to live contrary to God's will. The Christian answer is that an angel in heaven (dwelling place where God projected a form into time and space) introduced evil into the universe and turned himself into Satan (or the Devil)—see Revelation 12:7-9. Then after he



*Evil Eyes*

was cast out of heaven to the earth, this planet became the focal point of his continuing rebellion against God (Revelation 12:12). Now mankind is caught up in the great controversy between God and Satan.

It's only logical to conclude that a loving and just God will not tolerate evil forever. The real question is, "Why has God allowed evil to continue?". The answer is that when Satan challenged God's authority in heaven, the infinitely loving and just God knew He must give Satan time to demonstrate to the universe that his principles only lead to chaos, death, and destruction. If God had simply destroyed Satan and his angelic followers in heaven, then the chances were high that the other angels (and other possible intelligent creatures in the universe) would serve God from fear. But a God of love desires a love relationship from His intelligent creatures, not one based on fear. Therefore, the great controversy gives humans the opportunity to show by our words and deeds that we have taken God's side in this conflict between good and evil. Furthermore, a God of love would surely want to save as many people as possible from their predicament in evil (II Peter 3:9). Although He will not wait forever, these are the logical (and Biblical) reasons that God has allowed evil to continue thus far.

### **Question #3: How can God be perfectly loving when the Bible says that He is a jealous God?**

**Answer:** Several Scriptures tell us that God is a jealous God, including Exodus 20:5; 34:14, Deuteronomy 4:24, Joshua 24:19, and Nahum 1:2. We customarily think of jealousy as an evil character trait. But if you discovered that your spouse was showing romantic interest in someone else, would your jealousy be evil? No, it would be the natural positive reaction precisely because you love your spouse. God is Love personified and thus desires a love relationship with us. If we make a spiritual commitment to Him, and then start "flirting" with a different kind of spiritual relationship, it's perfectly normal for God to be jealous for your affections. In fact, the Bible does speak about His relationship with His people as being like a marriage. And He accuses His people of being adulterous when they depart from His revealed will. See Isaiah 54:5; Jeremiah 3:1, 6, 8; 5:7; 23:14; 31:32; Ezekiel 16:15-16, 28, 31, 35, 41; 23:25-27, 37, 44; Hosea 3:1; 4:15; Ephesians 5:23-27; and James 4:4. Therefore, the fact that God is a jealous God for His people is not evil at all, but another expression of His infinite love for them.

### **Question #4: Why does the Bible say that God hates the wicked? And why do some of the Psalms contain curses against the wicked if we are supposed to love our enemies?**



*People in the Popular View of Hell*

**Answer:** Romans 9:13 quotes from Malachi 1:2-3, citing the Lord as saying, "**Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated**" (NKJV). Yet Deuteronomy 23:7 commands that the Israelites should not "**abhor**" (or hate) an Edomite (descendant of Esau). Texts such as Psalms 5:5 and 11:5 tell us that God hates evil people. What does all this mean? Regarding Esau, the context in Romans 9:13 is that God chose Jacob rather than Esau to fulfill His special purpose; it does not mean God hated Esau as we use that word today. Moreover, it's well

known that ancient writers frequently used hyperbole (exaggeration) to emphasize a point, without intending it to be taken literally. Sometimes it's used to express preference of one person over another, such as when Jesus stated that we ought to hate our family members and our own lives if we are a true follower of Him (Luke 14:26). Several of the Psalms are called imprecatory psalms because an *imprecation* is defined as a "curse." Scholars don't agree on the exact number, but the following are usually considered imprecatory psalms: Psalms 5-7, 11-12, 35, 37, 40, 52, 54-59, 69, 79, 83, 94, 109, 137, 139, and 143. Not only did ancient writers often use hyperbole in order to emphasize a point, but that is particularly true in ancient poetry, which the psalms represent. These imprecatory psalms are given in the legal context as in the curses for violating the covenant with God (see Deuteronomy 28). As such, the curses are the natural consequences of removing oneself from the protective care of God. Thus, they are not sinful cries for personal vengeance. Moreover, a God whose very nature is Love would not hate the way sinful beings hate. And Jesus told people to love their enemies rather than hate them (Matthew 5:43-44; cf. Luke 6:27-28, 35).

### **Question #5: Why would a perfectly good God command the Israelites to commit genocide against the Canaanites, including their women and children?**

**Answer:** It's true that God commanded the Israelites to "**utterly destroy**" every living person in the land He promised to them (Deuteronomy 20:16-18, NKJV). An example of Israel doing that is retold by Moses in Deuteronomy 2:33-34, where men, women, and children were said to have been "**utterly destroyed.**" But to other nations outside this territory that they went to war against, they were first to offer peace, and if they accepted to give Israel tribute, they were to spare them (Deuteronomy 20:10-11). It's important to note that God had told Abram that He would not give the promised land to him directly but to his descendants in the fourth generation because "**the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete**" (Genesis 15:16, NKJV). That means that when the Israelites took these severe actions, God had by then determined that the Canaanites had already closed their own probation by their actions. Even though God's orders were to kill every single person in the land, this was an act of divine punishment because these people had gone too far in Satan's spiritual direction to ever hear the Spirit of God and be saved. As for their children, God must have known that they would all grow up and follow the same spiritual direction as their parents. Therefore, given all this evidence, none of this justifies any person, group, or nation committing genocide today—nor was what God ordered then really genocide, but divine justice.



*Skulls from Genocide*

### **Question #6: Why is the God of the Old Testament so different from the God of the New Testament?**

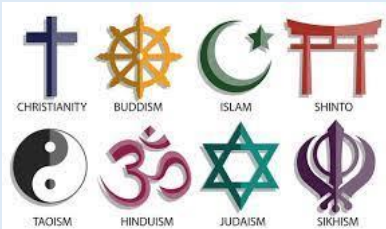
**Answer:** People often believe that God in the Old Testament was harsh and full of wrath, while God in the New Testament is all about love—as if they are two different gods. But it is the same God in both testaments. His Hebrew name is Yahweh, usually spelled as LORD (all capital letters) in most English translations. This name occurs more than 6,800 times in the Hebrew Old Testament, more than 2 ½ times than the title "God" appears. In John 8:58 Jesus identified Himself as this "**I AM**" (the meaning of YHWH,

cf. Exodus 3:13-15). Also, I Corinthians 10:1-4, 9 identifies Christ (Jesus) as the One who dealt directly with the nation of Israel in the Old Testament.

Beyond that, a careful reading of the Bible reveals that there is much of God's grace and love in the Old Testament (Genesis 6:8; Deuteronomy 4:37; 7:8; 23:5; I Kings 10:9; II Chronicles 9:8; Isaiah 43:4; Jeremiah 31:3) and much of God's wrath in the New Testament (John 3:36; Romans 1:18; 2:5, 8; 4:15; Ephesians 5:6; Colossians 3:6; I Thessalonians 2:16; Hebrew 3:11; 4:3; Revelation 6:16-17; 11:18; 14:10, 19; 15:1, 7; 16:1, 19; 19:15). Therefore, there is no dichotomy between the God of the Old and the New Testaments.

### **Question #7: Don't all religions essentially teach the same things? And don't they all really lead to the same place?**

**Answer:** Almost all the major world religions teach *some* truth. For example, they nearly all teach some version of the Golden Rule (treat others the way you want to be treated). There is also a common fundamental moral value that views murder, rape, and theft as wrong (at least when committed against someone of your own nation). But the followers of all the religions will not reach the same eternal destination because they are not all looking for the same goal. Hindus and Jains are seeking moral perfection through their own works during numerous reincarnated lifetimes. Buddhists are seeking release from all suffering. Believing Jews are seeking for an earthly utopia through efforts toward social justice.



Christians and Muslims are seeking for a sudden, brand new world through supernatural intervention. So if they are not all looking for the same thing, why would we expect they will all end up at the same place? Christianity is unique among all world religions in teaching that the resolution of the problem of evil is through the person of Jesus, a divine-human Substitute who lived a perfect life and died the atoning death for

sin—for which all who accept His salvation receive credit for having done themselves. Since there is very good evidence that He indeed rose from the dead, the religion named for Him must be the *right* religion, despite the various differences in interpreting what God exactly wants us to believe and do among the different denominations.

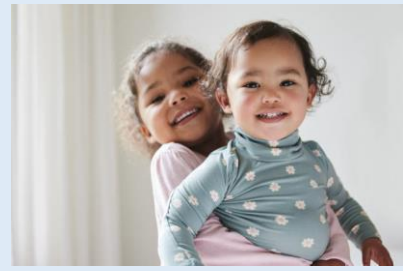
### **Question #8: How can those who have never heard about Jesus be saved? Or can they?**

**Answer:** Acts 4:12, speaking of Jesus, declares that **“there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”** Many interpret this verse to mean that salvation requires explicitly knowing Jesus. However, those who trusted in the future Messiah before He came historically were saved without knowing the name of Jesus. The cross is retroactive in its saving effect. It's also possible for those who live after the cross to be saved without knowing His name. Romans 2:14-16 teaches that God's law is written in the hearts/consciences even of those who don't know the law explicitly, and they will be held accountable for their response to their consciences. John 1:9 (cf. v. 14) says that Jesus is **“the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world”** (NKJV). That implicitly means that those who sincerely and persistently attempt to follow the spiritual light that they have are credited by God as being

true followers of Jesus. The unfortunate fact is that very few who have never heard Jesus' name and story seem to follow the light in their consciences (as far as imperfect human understanding can tell). This is because they—and many Christians also—are not really earnest seekers of truth, but of happiness. Thus, most people choose to believe what they think will make them happy, or at least what will not interfere with what they think will make them happy. Therefore, the chances are much better if people actually hear the gospel.

### **Question #9: How will God save babies, small children, and the mentally challenged?**

**Answer:** The first thing to note is that any babies, small children, or mentally challenged who are saved will not be saved because they are innocent, because the Bible says that all are conceived in sin (Psalm 51:5). The Bible doesn't provide a clear answer to this question. It might be that such people will be eternally saved or lost according to their parents' eternal destiny. But what if one parent is saved and the other is lost? That seems to be an inadequate answer. Or it might be that God will judge such people according to His foreknowledge of what they would do if they lived long enough or were otherwise mentally capable of making their own choice. The fact that God's command that the Israelites should kill all of the Canaanites, including babies and children, suggests that this was probably because He knew they would follow in their parents' footsteps (see under Question #5). Therefore, it's probable (but not certain) that God will judge babies, small children, and the mentally challenged according to His foreknowledge of what they would have chosen if they had lived long enough or were otherwise capable of making a free-will choice. We just don't know for certain. But since Scripture makes it clear that God is infinitely fair with the rest of us, we can trust Him to do the right thing in this area as well. [NOTE: Some argue that II Samuel 12:23 means that David and Bathsheba's first son, who died, would be reunited one day in heaven. But it might simply mean that David would one day join his son in the grave. The text is not sufficiently clear.]



*Young Children*

### **Question #10: Why does the Bible teach that God punishes children for their parents' sins?**

**Answer:** Exodus 20:5 says that God will visit **“the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations”** (cf. Exodus 34:7). Yet Ezekiel 18:20 explicitly states that **“the son shall not bear the guilt of the father.”** The only reasonable way to reconcile these passages is to conclude that children usually do as their parents *do*, even when parents *say* something different.

### **Question #11: Why will God send some people delusions?**

**Answer:** According to II Thessalonians 2:9-12, God will send a strong delusion to some because they **“did not believe the truth”** (v. 12) or **“receive the love of the truth”** (v. 10). Therefore, God will delude them so **“that they should believe the lie”** (v. 11, all verses from NKJV). Romans 1:24, 26, 28 teaches the same thing when it states that God gave the wicked up or over to their own lusts, passions, and minds when they



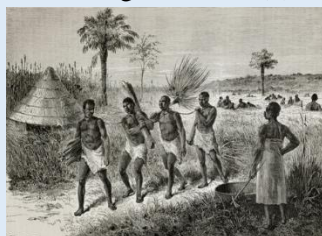
refused to obey the law revealed to them in nature (cf. vv. 18-21). Moreover, it's for the same reason that God hardens certain hearts (Romans 9:15, 18)—which is sometimes called “judicial hardening,” a hardening that is an act of divine judgment resulting from a person's own choices. None of these actions by God are arbitrary, but all result from people's own decisions.

### **Question #12: If God permitted polygamy, divorce, and slavery in the Bible, why do Christians forbid the first, discourage the second, and denounce the third today?**

**Answer:** It's true that men like Jacob, Elkanah, David, and Solomon had more than one wife at the same time. But God's ideal is represented by the first marriage which He Himself instituted, where one man (Adam) had one wife (Eve) in Genesis 2. These men obtained more than one wife without God directing them to do so, partly because it was part of the culture around them. Acts 17:30 states that in times past God sometimes winked at ignorance, but with the first coming of Jesus, **“now commands all men everywhere to repent”** (NKJV).

The same Biblical counsel applies to divorce. Jesus declared in Matthew 19:3-9 that it was because of His people's hardness of heart that God permitted divorce in Moses' day for almost any excuse a husband might have (Deuteronomy 24:1-4). However, He declared that this was not God's original intent and cites the account of the first marriage in Eden as representing God's ideal (Matthew 19:4-6, 8; cf. Genesis 2:24). Jesus then said that divorce was permissible only in case one spouse was guilty of adultery (Matthew 19:9). The lesson is that God seems to take His people where they are and slowly moves them toward His ideal. Therefore, God does not *approve* everything that He has *permitted* in the past.

This principle applies to slavery too. Although God permitted Israel to practice slavery, He limited it by certain regulations: (1) No one could be kidnapped and forced into slavery ((Exodus 21:16); (2) If a slaveholder permanently injured his slave, that slave was to be set free (Exodus 21:26-27); (3) All Israelite slaves were to be freed every seventh year (Deuteronomy 15:12); and (4) When a slave was freed, the slaveholder was required to provide him with an abundance of food to help get him started in his new life (Deuteronomy 15:12-15). Finally, the apostle Paul urged a runaway slave to return to his Christian master (the book of Philemon), probably because he wished to avoid more major slave revolts (horrendous upheaval) and also for the sake of the gospel proclamation. But God's ideal, expressed in Galatians 3:28, is that there should be no human slavery.



Slaves

### **Question #13: How can an omniscient God repent and change His mind?**

**Answer:** Genesis 6:6, Exodus 32:14, and Jonah 3:10 all state that God repented or relented something that He had done or promised to do. Since God knows the end from the beginning, He doesn't actually change His mind. The Bible was written from our perspective because we can't comprehend God's perspective. God knew what people would do, so He is showing us how He reacts to our behavior. He doesn't literally change His mind.