

Yahweh Wars and the Canaanites

Divinely-Mandated Genocide or Corporate Capital Punishment?

Responses to Critics

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Of the various Old Testament (OT) ethical issues, Yahweh's command that Israel kill the Canaanites strikes us as the weightiest. In this issue of *Philosophia Christi*, Wes Morriston and Randal Rauser highlight this theme in reply to my earlier essay, "Is Yahweh a Moral Monster?"¹ I am grateful for their comments and for the opportunity to respond to the key questions they raise. Since their objections overlap somewhat, I shall simply list and respond to the major concerns as I see them. In doing so, I shall touch on the contributions made by comrades-in-arms, Clay Jones and Joseph Buijs, whose supportive essays also appear in this issue.²

(1) *Incorrigibly Wicked?* Morriston challenges the claim that the Canaanites were really *that* wicked or that they were *incorrigibly* so and thus deserving God's judgment: "the evidence of *incorrigible* wickedness is non-

ABSTRACT: The divine command to kill the Canaanites is the most problematic of all Old Testament ethical issues. This article responds to challenges raised by Wes Morriston and Randal Rauser. It argues that biblical and extrabiblical evidence suggests that the Canaanites who were killed were combatants rather than noncombatants ("Scenario 1") and that, given the profound moral corruption of Canaan, this divinely-directed act was just. Even if it turns out that non-combatants were directly targeted ("Scenario 2"), the overarching Old Testament narrative is directed toward the salvation of all nations—including the Canaanites.

1. Paul Copan, "Is Yahweh a Moral Monster? The New Atheists and Old Testament Ethics," *Philosophia Christi* 10 (2008): 7–37; Wesley Morriston, "Did God Command Genocide? A Challenge to the Biblical Inerrantist," *Philosophia Christi* 11 (2009): 7–26; and Randal Rauser, "Let Nothing that Breathes Remain Alive": On the Problem of Divinely Commanded Genocide," *Philosophia Christi* 11 (2009): 27–41.

2. Joseph A. Buijs, "Atheism and the Argument from Harm," *Philosophia Christi* 11 (2009): 42–52, and Clay Jones, "We Don't Hate Sin So We Don't Understand What Happened to the Canaanites: An Addendum to 'Divine Genocide' Arguments," *Philosophia Christi* 11 (2009): 53–72.

existent.”³ However, Clay Jones’s essay documents and reinforces my point that this was indeed a wicked people. God was willing to wait over 400 years because “the sin of the Amorite was not yet filled up” (Gen. 15:16). In Abraham’s day, no reason yet existed for dispossessing them. The land was not ready to “vomit them out” (Lev. 18:25). Only after Israel’s lengthy enslavement in Egypt would the time finally be ripe for the Israelites to enter Canaan—“because of the wickedness of these nations” (Deut. 9:4–5).⁴ Meredith Kline reminds us that the judgment on the Canaanites is an “intrusive phenomenon” of eschatological ethics into the period of common grace, anticipatory of a final judgment when God finally establishes justice on a cosmic scale.⁵

Now, I am *not* arguing that the Canaanites were absolutely the worst specimens of humanity that ever existed, nor am I arguing that the Canaanites were the worst specimens of humanity in the ancient Near East (ANE). However, the evidence adduced by Jones sufficiently reveals a profound moral corruption, and we are not surprised to read that they are ripe for divine judgment in keeping with God’s salvation-historical purposes. Nor are the Canaanites uniquely singled out for divine judgment in the Scriptures; prophetic oracles abound concerning Yahweh’s threats of judgment on nations that had also crossed the moral threshold. Furthermore, we should not think that God no longer judges nations today—even if we may not be able to determine this precisely.⁶ However, I shall say no more on this topic but shall let Morrision direct any remaining objections to Jones!

(2) *Morally Culpable?* Morrision wonders if the Canaanites were really “morally culpable.”⁷ After all, they were just practicing their religion, which was passed on to them from the previous generation. Surely the Canaanites “deserve . . . enlightenment about the true nature of God and about His requirements for human beings.”⁸ However, history shows that nations and civilizations *have* been capable of moral reforms and improvements. This suggests that humans are not necessarily cut off from all moral ideals and insights through general revelation to help improve upon what was handed down to them. Furthermore, a passage such as Amos 1–2 suggests that moral “enlightenment,” though suppressed, was available to Gentile nations surrounding Israel. There, God threatens judgment against the nations sur-

3. Morrision, “Did God Command Genocide?” 25.

4. Thanks to John Goldingay, who sent me a draft of chap. 5 (“City and Nation”) from his forthcoming third volume, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 3 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009). Any unreferenced quotations from Goldingay are taken from this work.

5. See Meredith Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1997), 158.

6. See historian Stephen J. Keillor’s suggestive book, *God’s Judgments: Interpreting History and the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007).

7. Morrision, “Did God Command Genocide?” 25.

8. *Ibid.*

rounding Israel not because they were merely “practicing the religion of their parents,” but because they stifled compassion, suppressed their conscience, and carried out particularly heinous acts. They should have known better. The Canaanites were “disobedient” (Heb. 11:31)—a term indicating a moral awareness of wrongdoing but a refusal to turn from it.⁹ Paul affirms that those without special revelation still have the capacity (through conscience) to distinguish right from wrong (Rom. 2:14–15). Paul’s point is nicely illustrated in the appendix to C. S. Lewis’s *Abolition of Man*: moral codes of many cultures across the ages are strikingly similar at key points—honoring parents, being faithful in marriage, not stealing, not murdering, not bearing false witness, and so on.¹⁰ Furthermore, despite their immersion in Canaanite ways, Rahab and her family (Josh. 2) are a clear sign that other Canaanites could have preserved their lives *if* they had humbled themselves before Israel’s God, who had convincingly delivered his people from Egypt with signs and wonders and demonstrated his reality and surpassing greatness (Josh. 2:9–11).

Speaking of Rahab, we can reject Morrision’s claim about what the text “plainly” says (that Rahab was being “prudent rather than pious”). Joshua’s literary strategy, in fact, devotes much attention to Rahab’s responsiveness to Yahweh, including her assisting the spies (chapter 2). In chapter 6, the number of words mentioning her and her family’s being spared (86 words) are roughly the same as those devoted to describing Jericho’s destruction (102 words)—an indication of Yahweh’s willingness to receive any who turn to him.¹¹ Contrary to Morrision’s charge that Rahab would “sell out her own city in order to save her own skin,”¹² she simply realized that God was with the Israelites, and she aligned herself with reality. Rahab is no more “selling out” than those Germans disenchanting with Hitler who joined the Allied cause.

Rahab’s embracing Yahweh and finding salvation illustrates the theme of Exodus 34:6: Yahweh’s gracious, compassionate character extends salvation to all and relents from judging, whether Canaanite or—much to Jonah’s dismay—Ninevite (Jon. 4:2) or those from any “nation” that “turns from its evil” (Jer. 18:7–8). Yahweh desires that the wicked turn rather than die (Ezek. 18:31–32; 33:11). And when Israel and Judah reached a point of no moral and spiritual return (“until there was no remedy”), God judged them severely (2 Chron. 36:16; cp. 2 Kings 18:11–12; 1 Chron. 5:23).

9. Christopher Wright, *The God I Don’t Understand* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 93.

10. Appendix to *The Abolition of Man*, by C. S. Lewis (1944; San Francisco: Harper, 2001).

11. Richard S. Hess, *Joshua: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 146–7; also, Aaron Sherwood, “A Leader’s Misleading and a Prostitute’s Profession: A Re-examination of Joshua 2,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 31 (2006): 43–61.

12. Morrision, “Did God Command Genocide?” 14.

Yahweh's ban (*herem*), then, was not absolute. Carrying out *herem* did not entail the refusal of mercy, as we see in Rahab's case. The possibility of salvation was not a violation of the ban.¹³

(3) *Standards for Irredeemability?* Rauser objects to the killing of the "wicked Canaanites" since "we have no guidelines to determine when a culture is irredeemable."¹⁴ Rauser's point calls to mind Israeli psychologist Georges Tamarin's 1966 study involving 1,066 schoolchildren ages eight to fourteen. Presented with the story of Jericho's destruction, they were asked, "Do you think Joshua and the Israelites acted rightly or not?" Two-thirds of the children approved. However, when Tamarin substituted "General Lin" for Joshua and a "Chinese kingdom 3,000 years ago" for Israel, only 7 percent approved while 75 percent disapproved.¹⁵ So, though we condemn the killing of an ethnic group when carried out by Nazis or Hutus, Israel seems to get a pass when doing the "same thing" to the Canaanites.

Rauser suggests that we need something more than mere mortal assessments regarding a culture's ripeness for judgment. Such matters are too weighty a matter for humans to judge. Indeed, these determinations ought to be left up to God—namely, *special revelation*. And this is precisely what we have! In John Goldingay's words, "It takes a prophet to know whether and how a particular war fits into Yhwh's purpose."¹⁶

(4) *Ethnic Cleansing and Genocide?* Both Rauser and Morrision utilize the term "genocide," and Rauser mentions "ethnic cleansing." However, ethnic cleansing suggests a racial hatred, which just is *not* behind the injunctions to kill Canaanites. Consider how Rahab and her family were welcomed into the Israelite fold. Visions of ethnic and moral superiority are not part of the picture.¹⁷ In the Mosaic Law, Yahweh repeatedly commands Israel to show concern for strangers and aliens in their midst (for example, Lev. 19:34; Deut. 10:18–19), since the Israelites had been strangers in Egypt. Moreover, prophets later view the nations once singled out for judgment (for example, the Jebusites—a Canaanite people [Deut. 7:1]) as the ultimate objects of Yahweh's salvation. For example, in Zechariah 9:7, the Philistines—on whom God pronounces judgment in 9:1–6—and the Jebusites (who came to be absorbed within the fold of Judah) are both to become part of God's

13. Hess, *Joshua*, 48, 49, 146. Furthermore, Deut. 20:10–11 offers peace with servitude for the fortified towns that do not resist Israel.

14. Rauser, "Let Nothing that Breathes Remain Alive," 32.

15. Michael Shermer, *The Science of Good and Evil* (New York: Henry Holt, 2004), 39–40.

16. Goldingay, "City and Nation."

17. Wright, *The God I Don't Understand*, 92.

redeemed “remnant.” This theme is reinforced in Psalm 87, where the Philistines and other enemies are incorporated into the people of God.¹⁸

Yahweh’s evident concern for the nations in the OT hardly supports a Gentile-hating, arrogant ethnocentrism. Rauser notwithstanding, the Israelites did not determine themselves to be the in-group, who in turn demonized the out-group and then destroyed them. Yahweh pointedly reminds his people that their taking the land is not due to their intrinsic superiority (“righteousness,” “uprightness of heart”), but because of the “wickedness” of the Canaanites. Indeed, the Israelites are “a stubborn people” (Deut. 9:4–6).

(5) *Herem and Human Sacrifice?* Regarding the Hebrew term *herem* (“ban,” “dedication to destruction”), Rauser correctly observes the *religious* dimension to Israel’s wars. Indeed, this was true of ANE wars in general—sacred or holy endeavors.¹⁹ Israel’s defeating its enemies was an indication that Yahweh the “warrior” (Exod. 15:3) was ruler over all the nations and their gods. Is Rauser correct, though, in claiming that the slaughter of all men, women, and children was a “religious act of *worship*”?

Not quite. Susan Niditch’s study, *War in the Hebrew Bible*, affirms that the “ban” in the early texts (for example, Deut. 20) refers to the total destruction of warriors and the consecration to God of everything that was captured:

The dominant voice in the Hebrew Bible condemns child sacrifice as the epitome of anti-Yahwist and anti-social behavior . . . the dominant voice in the Hebrew Bible treats the ban not as sacrifice in exchange for victory but as just and deserved punishment for idolaters, sinners, and those who lead Israel astray or commit direct injustice against Israel.²⁰

Furthermore, Hess contends that human sacrifice to Yahweh was *not* behind *herem*; no evidence in the early texts suggests this.²¹ *Contra* Morrision, there is a “subversive attitude to human sacrifice” in the OT. According to Hess,

18. *Ibid.*, 102. Cp. Josh. 16:53; 2 Sam. 5:6–10. Wright says that the Jebusites moved from the “hit list” to the “home list”—an indication that these enemy nations could be incorporated into God’s people.

19. Nicholai Winther-Nielsen, *A Functional Discourse Grammar of Joshua: A Computer-Assisted Rhetorical Structure Analysis*, Coniectanea Biblical Old Testament Series (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1995). This work points out that the textually-unified book of Joshua emphasizes the presence and significance of theological and cultic themes (e.g., Rahab’s faith, the priestly role in the Jordan crossing).

20. Susan Niditch, *War in the Hebrew Bible: A Study in the Ethics of Violence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 45, 46.

21. Richard S. Hess, “War in the Hebrew Bible: An Overview,” in *War in the Bible and Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Richard S. Hess and Elmer A. Martens (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 25.

there is “little suggestion that war is an act of human sacrifice to a god who demands it.”²²

Now, Morrision suggests that certain passages, if not implicitly endorsing the acceptability of human sacrifice, seem to diminish divine displeasure towards it.

The first is 2 Kings 3:27, where Mesha, king of Moab, (apparently) sacrifices his firstborn son on the wall of Kir Hareseth (in Moab), after which the Israelite army withdrew. Morrision’s suggestion is mistaken here for several reasons. First, it is at odds with what the author of Kings declares in subsequent passages (cp. 2 Kings 16:3; 17:7; 21:6). Second, the Mosaic Law clearly condemns child sacrifice as morally abhorrent (Lev. 18:21; 20:2–5; Deut. 12:31; 18:10). Third, the word *fury* (*qetseph*) is wrongly assumed to be divine wrath.²³ Its cognate is used elsewhere in 2 Kings, clearly referring to *human* fury (5:11; 13:19). Fourth, typically, commentators suggest several plausible interpretations—and Morrision’s is not one of them! (i) Perhaps there was *fury against Israel* among the Moabites because their king Mesha, forced by desperation, sacrificed his son (in order to prompt Moab’s renewed determination to fight).²⁴ (ii) Another possibility is that the Israelites were so horrified or filled with superstitious dread—which came “upon Israel” (RSV)—at this human sacrifice that they abandoned the entire venture.²⁵ (iii) A final alternative is that because of Mesha’s failed attempt to break through the siege (perhaps to head north for reinforcements), he was still able to capture the king of Edom’s firstborn son, whom he sacrificed on the wall, which demoralized Edom’s army. Their “wrath” ended the war because they withdrew from this military coalition of Israel, Judah, and Edom.²⁶

What of Jephthah’s rash vow and sacrifice (Judg. 11:30–40)? While some strongly argue against the claim that Jephthah literally sacrificed his daughter,²⁷ most OT scholars believe the text asserts this.²⁸ Let us then assume the worst-case scenario. Morrision informs us that Jephthah the “Judge of Israel . . . would surely have known” that child sacrifice was wrong and

22. Hess, “War in the Hebrew Bible,” 29.

23. Iain W. Provan, *1 and 2 Kings*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 186.

24. See Baruch Margalit, “Why King Mesha Sacrificed His Oldest Son,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 12, no. 6 (1986): 62–3.

25. John J. Bimson, “1 and 2 Kings,” in *The New Bible Commentary*, 4th ed., ed. Gordon Wenham, et al. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994), 365; see also T. R. Hobbs, *2 Kings*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Thomas Nelson, 1986), 38.

26. Anson Rainey in *The Sacred Bridge: Carta’s Atlas of the Biblical World*, ed. Anson Rainey and R. Steven Notley (Jerusalem: Carta, 2006), 205.

27. E.g., John Sailhamer, *The NIV Compact Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 211.

28. Gordon J. Wenham, *Story as Torah* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2000), 63; David Janzen, “Why the Deuteronomist Told the Sacrifice of Jephthah’s Daughter,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 29 (2005): 339–57.

that it was because of such acts that Yahweh judged the Canaanites. Why then this human sacrifice?

Morrison too hastily concludes that Israel assumed human sacrifice as morally acceptable before Yahweh. We can apply Morrison's statement to Samson. As a "Judge of Israel," he "would surely have known" that touching unclean corpses and consorting with prostitutes were forbidden by Yahweh. Precisely because we are talking about the time of the Judges, Morrison should be all the more cautious in suggesting what he does.

But didn't "the Spirit of the Lord" come on Jephthah (Judg. 11:29)? Yes, but we should not take this as a wholesale divine endorsement of all Jephthah did—no more so than the Spirit's coming on Gideon (6:34) was a seal of approval on his dabbling with idolatry (8:24–7)—or Ehud (3:26), for that matter.²⁹ Yes, these "Judges of Israel" would "surely have known" this was wrong. Indeed, "the Spirit of the Lord" came upon Samson to help Israel keep the Philistines at bay (14:6, 19; 15:14). Yet his plans to marry a Philistine woman, cavorting with a prostitute, and getting mixed up with Delilah all reveal a judge with exceedingly poor judgment! (No doubt there is a moral in here somewhere about how God often works *despite* humans rather than *because* of them!)

The theology of Judges emphasizes the nadir of Israelite morality and religion—with two vivid narratives at the book's end to illustrate this (chapters 17–21). In light of the repeated theme "everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (17:6; 21:25; cp 2:10–23), we could say that Morrison is expecting too much moral uprightness from characters in a book depicting Israel's moral nosedive. Not only did the Mosaic Law clearly prohibit child sacrifice—something known to the judges; Scripture itself reminds us that not all behavioral examples in Scripture are good ones (cp. 1 Cor. 10:1–12). We do not have to look hard for negative exemplars in Judges of Israelites in the moral basement. No explicit statement of Yahweh's obvious disapproval is needed.

(6) *Total Annihilation and "Bludgeoning Babies"?*

(a) "*All that breathes.*" I observed in my previous essay that the language of total obliteration ("all that breathes") is an ANE rhetorical device, an exaggeration commonly associated with warfare. For example, in Deuteronomy 2:34 ("we captured all his cities at that time and utterly destroyed the men, women and children of every city. We left no survivor.") and 3:6 ("... utterly destroying the men, women and children of every city"), we come upon what is a standard expression of military bravado in ANE warfare. In 7:2–5, alongside Yahweh's command to "destroy" the Canaanites is the assumption they would not be obliterated—hence the warnings not to make political alliances or intermarry with them. That is, we have stock ANE

29. Wenham, *Story as Torah*, 60.

phrases referring to a *crushing defeat* and *utter obliteration* in my earlier article, but this is what Goldingay calls “monumental hyperbole.”³⁰ After all, the books of Joshua and Judges themselves make clear that many inhabitants remained in the land.³¹ “While Joshua does speak of Israel’s utterly destroying the Canaanites, even these accounts can give a misleading impression: peoples that have been annihilated have no trouble reappearing later in the story; after Judah puts Jerusalem to the sword, its occupants are still living there ‘to this day’ (Judg. 1:8, 21).”³²

OT scholar Richard Hess has written on the Canaanite question, offering further insights on the entire discussion.³³ (Following Hess here, I shall present “Scenario 1,” which argues that *the Canaanites targeted for destruction were political leaders and their armies rather than noncombatants*.)³⁴ Hess’s research has led him to conclude that the ban (*herem*) of Deuteronomy 20:10–18 refers to “the total destruction of all warriors in the battle,”³⁵ not noncombatants.³⁶ But does not Joshua 6:21 mention the ban—“every living thing in it”—in connection with “men and women, young and old, cattle, sheep and donkeys”? The stock phrase “men and women [lit. ‘from man (and) unto woman’]” occurs seven times in the OT—Ai (Josh. 8:25); Amalek (1 Sam. 15:3); Saul at Nob (1 Sam. 22:19 [only here are children explicitly mentioned]); Jerusalem during Ezra’s time (Neh. 8:2); and Israel (2 Sam 6:19 = 2 Chron. 15:3). Each time—except at Nob, where Saul killed the entire priestly family, save one (1 Sam. 21:20)—the word “all [*kol*]” is used. Hess contends that “the phrase [‘men and women’] appears to be stereotypical for describing all the inhabitants of a town or region, without predisposing the reader to assume anything further about their ages or even their genders.”³⁷

30. Goldingay, “City and Nation.”

31. See also Wright, *The God I Don’t Understand*, 88. Furthermore, Gordon McConville observes that Joshua reveals not “a simple conquest model, but rather a mixed picture of success and failure, sudden victory and slow, compromised progress” (“Joshua,” in *Oxford Bible Commentary*, ed. J. Barton and J. Muddiman [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001], 159).

32. Goldingay, “City and Nation.”

33. See Hess, “War in the Hebrew Bible,” and Hess, *Joshua*.

34. For a fine overview of a range of related questions, see Richard S. Hess, “Early Israel in Canaan: A Survey of Recent Evidence and Interpretations,” *Palestinian Exploration Quarterly* 125 (1993): 125–42.

35. Hess, “War in the Hebrew Bible,” 25.

36. For instance, Gordon Mitchell mentions a certain flexibility regarding how Joshua understands *herem* (e.g., Rahab, the Gibeonites, and others are spared) (*Together in the Land: A Reading of the Book of Joshua* [Sheffield, England: JSOT, 1993]).

37. Hess, “Jericho and Ai,” 39. By “stereotypical,” Hess says that *herem* with its attendant “all”-language involves not an exaggeration (which we *do* see in the hyperbolized “totally destroyed” and “everything that breathes” language), but a “means of describing something by detailing a ‘checklist’ of what it could include (but not necessarily must include in every case). So the terms (and these are the only ones in Joshua) ‘men and women’ (6:21; 8:25) and ‘young and old’ (6:21) need not require that there really were children, senior citizens, or women there who were put to death” (Hess, personal correspondence, April 5, 2009).

(b) *The military forts of Jericho and Ai.* As we look specifically at Joshua's language concerning Jericho and Ai, it appears harsh at first glance: "They devoted the city to the Lord and destroyed with the sword every living thing in it—men and women, young and old, cattle, sheep and donkeys" (6:21); and again, "[t]welve thousand men and women fell that day—all the people of Ai" (8:25).³⁸ As we shall see below, this stereotypical language describes attacks on military forts or garrisons—not a general population that includes women and children. Jericho and Ai were military strongholds guarding the travel routes from the Jordan Valley up to population centers in the hill country. That means that Israel's wars here are directed toward government and military installments. So the mention "women" and "young and old" turns out to be *stock ANE language that could be used even if "women" and "young and old" were not living there.* The language of "all" ("men and women") at Jericho and Ai is, in Hess's words, a "stereotypical expression for the destruction of all human life in the fort, presumably composed entirely of combatants."³⁹ The text just does not require that "women" and "young and old" *must* have been in these cities.

The term "city" (*ir*) reinforces this theme.⁴⁰ Regarding Jericho, Ai, and other cities in Canaan, Hess writes: "we know that many of these 'cities' were used primarily for government buildings, and the common people lived in the surrounding countryside."⁴¹ Archaeological evidence points to the lack of civilian populations at Jericho, Ai, and other cities mentioned in Joshua. That "cities" were fortresses or citadels is made all the more clear by an associated term, *melek* ("king"), which was used in Canaan during this time for a *military leader*. What is more, the battles in Joshua do not mention noncombatants (women and children). Hess adduces inscriptional, archaeological, and other such evidences that Jericho was a small settlement of probably 100 or fewer soldiers. This is why all of Israel could circle it seven times in one

38. On the exaggeration of numbers in the ANE/OT, see Daniel M. Fouts, "A Defense of the Hyperbolic Interpretation of Numbers in the Old Testament," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40 (1997): 377–87. In military contexts in the Bible, *'eleph* (the Hebrew word for "thousand") can also mean "unit" or "squad."

39. 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), 46.

40. Canaan was comprised of towns and city-states—smaller versions of roughly contemporary cities such as Ugarit. The Amarna letters also show that citadel cities/fortresses such as Jerusalem and Shechem were distinct from (and under the control of) their population centers. Such cities could form military coalitions as well as cooperate politically (cp. Josh. 10–11). Archaeological evidence (such as the Amarna letters) reveals that these were not population centers but often fortresses or citadels (e.g., Rabbah in 2 Sam. 12:26; Zion in 2 Sam. 5:7; 1 Chron. 11:5, 7). Evidence of a civilian population at, say, Ai is lacking (e.g., no prestige ceramics or artifacts). The same can be said for Jericho, which happened to be strategically located at the junction of three roads leading to Jerusalem, Bethel, and Orpah in the hill country (Richard Hess, personal correspondence, April 5, 2009); see also Hess, "Jericho and Ai," 33–46; and Hess, *Joshua*.

41. Hess, "Jericho and Ai," 29–30.

day and then do battle against it.⁴² So if Jericho was a fort, then “all” those killed therein were warriors—Rahab and her family being the exceptional noncombatants dwelling within this militarized camp.⁴³ The same applies throughout the book of Joshua. All of this turns out to be quite the opposite of what many have been taught in Sunday school classes!

(c) *Rahab in a tavern.* What, then of Rahab? She was in charge of what was likely the fortress’s tavern or hostel rather than a brothel, though these were sometimes run by prostitutes.⁴⁴ Such overnight places for traveling caravans and royal messengers were common during this period.⁴⁵ The Code of Hammurabi (§109) parallels what we see in Joshua 2: “If conspirators meet in the house of a tavern-keeper, and these conspirators are not captured and delivered to the court, the tavern-keeper shall be put to death.” As Moshe Weinfeld notes, such reconnaissance missions were a “widespread phenomenon in the east.” Such an innkeeper’s home would be “the accustomed place for meeting with spies, conspirators, and the like.” In light of such potential security threats, the Hittites prohibited the building of any such inn or tavern near fortress walls.⁴⁶

We could add here, *contra* Morrision, that the author of Joshua goes out of his way to indicate that no sexual liaison took place: the spies “stayed there” (2:1)—not “stayed with her,” which *would* imply something sexual. Consider Samson, by contrast, who “saw a harlot, and went in to her” (Judg. 16:1). The OT does not shrink from using such language; we just do not have any sexual reference here. Rather, as observed above, the book of Joshua depicts Rahab as a true God-fearer. Yes, such taverns in the ANE would draw people seeking sexual pleasure, but this just does not apply to the Israelite spies, who visited there because it was a public place where they could learn about the practical and military dispositions of the area and could solicit a possible “fifth column” of support.⁴⁷

(d) *Israel’s warfare methods.* When we examine Israel’s warfare, we should consider a number of features that help minimize the notion that Israel’s army consisted of bloodthirsty, maniacal warmongers. First, the aftermath of Joshua’s victories are featherweight descriptions in comparison to those found in the annals of the major empires of the ANE—whether Hittite and Egyptian (second millennium), Aramaean, Assyrian, Babylonian, Per-

42. *Ibid.*, 35, 42.

43. *Ibid.*, 38, 39.

44. Richard Hess, personal correspondence, January 28, 2009.

45. Hess, *Joshua*, 91–2. See Hess’s comments here in light of Morrision’s musings about the spies’ visiting with a harlot. Note the laws of Eshnunna regarding the role of innkeepers (§15, §41). See D. J. Wiseman, “Rahab of Jericho,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 14 (1964): 8–11.

46. Moshe Weinfeld, *The Promise of the Land: The Inheritance of the Land of Canaan by the Israelites* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 141–3.

47. Hess, *Joshua*, 91–2; Richard Hess, personal correspondence, April 3, 2009.

sian, or Greek (first millennium).⁴⁸ Unlike Joshua's brief, four-verse description of the treatment of the five kings (10:24–27), the Neo-Assyrian annals of Assurnasirpal (tenth century) take pleasure in describing the atrocities which gruesomely describe the flaying of live victims, the impaling of others on poles, and the heaping up of bodies for display.⁴⁹

Second, a number of battles that Israel fought on the way to and within Canaan were defensive: the Amalekites attacked the traveling Israelites (Exod. 17:8); the Canaanite king of Arad attacked and captured some Israelites (Num. 21:1); the Amorite king Sihon refused Israel's peaceful overtures and attacked instead (Num. 21:21–32; Deut. 2:26); Bashan's king Og came out to meet Israel in battle (Num. 21:3; Deut. 3:1); Israel responded to Midian's calculated attempts to lead Israel astray through idolatry and immorality (Num. 31:2–3; cp. Num. 25 and 31:16); five kings attacked Gibeon, which Joshua defended because of Israel's peace pact with the Gibeonites (Josh. 10:4). Furthermore, God *prohibited* Israel from conquering other neighboring nations: (i) Moab and Ammon (Deut. 2:9, 19); (ii) Edom (Deut. 2:4; 23:7)—*despite* the fact that Edom had earlier refused to assist the Israelites (Num. 20:14–21; cp. Deut. 2:6–8).

Third, all sanctioned “Yahweh battles” *beyond* the time of Joshua were *defensive* ones, including Joshua's battle to defend Gibeon (Josh. 10–11).⁵⁰ Of course, while certain offensive battles take place in Judges and under David and beyond, these are not commended as ideal or exemplary.⁵¹

(e) “*Driving them out.*” We should carefully note the language of “driving out” and “thrusting out” the Canaanites (Exod. 23:28; Lev. 18:24; Num. 33:52; Deut. 6:19; 7:1; 9:4; 18:12; Josh. 10:28, 30, 32, 35, 37, 39; 11:11, 14) or “dispossessing” them of their land (Num. 21:32). “Driving out” is not at all the same as the “wiping out” or “destroying” passages found in these same contexts. Upon examination, the former references are three times as numerous as the latter.⁵² When a foreign army might pose a threat in the ANE, women and children would be the first to remove themselves from harm's way—not to mention the population at large: “When a city is in danger of falling,” observes Goldingay, “people do not simply wait there to be killed; they get out. . . . Only people who do not get out, such as the city's defenders, get killed.”⁵³ Jeremiah 4:29 suggests this:

48. Hess, “War in the Hebrew Bible,” 29.

49. *Ibid.*

50. See chap. 18 in Paul Copan, “*That's Just Your Interpretation! Responding to Skeptics Who Challenge Your Faith*” (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001).

51. Hess, “War in the Hebrew Bible,” 30. Also, though I shall not pursue this matter further, we should not forget that fighting was simply a way of life and survival in the ANE.

52. See Glen Miller, “How Could a God of Love Order the Massacre/Annihilation of the Canaanites?” <http://www.christian-thinktank.com/qamorite.html>.

53. Goldingay, “City and Nation”; also Hess, “War in the Hebrew Bible,” 30.

At the sound of the horseman and bowman every city flees;
 They go into the thickets and climb among the rocks;
 Every city is forsaken, and no man dwells in them.

Hess draws the following conclusions: “There is no indication in the text of any specific noncombatants who were put to death.” Indeed, the “justified wars” of Joshua “were against combatants.”⁵⁴ We read in Joshua (and Judges) that, despite the “obliteration” language, there are plenty of Canaanite inhabitants who are not “driven out” but rather are living in the areas where Israel has settled. Joshua himself refers to “these [nations] which remain among you” (Josh. 23:12–13; cp. Josh. 15:63; 16:10; 17:13; Judg. 2:10–13). The process of driving them out would be a gradual one, as even Deuteronomy 7:22 anticipates and is reaffirmed in Judges 2:20–23.⁵⁵

Israel’s occupation of Canaan involved not simply military activity, but also infiltration and internal struggle.⁵⁶ In my previous article, I note that the text of Deuteronomy 7:2–5, Joshua, and Judges suggests that we have the language of (i) *obliteration* as well as (ii) *acknowledgment* of Canaanites as future neighbors. Goldingay comments that Israel knew how to read Torah: “It knew it was not to assume a literalistic understanding” of destroying the Canaanites. That is, Moses did not mean for this to be taken literally. Rather, as Goldingay notes, “Israel was to dispossess the Canaanites and destroy their forms of religion and have nothing to do with them.” That is, Israel took this “totally destroy” command metaphorically or hyperbolically—which reflected the ANE language of bravado and exaggeration in warfare.⁵⁷

To summarize, we should distinguish between two central aspects of the Canaanite question. On the one hand, *herem* includes stereotypical language of “all” and “young and old” and “man and woman”—even if women and children are not present. So far as we can see, *herem* is carried out in particular military/combatant settings (with “cities” and “kings”); this specific combatant scenario could well apply in the Amalekite case (1 Sam. 15). In these limited settings, *herem* is thoroughly carried out (involving even livestock [for example, 1 Sam. 15:9, 14])—though it allows, and hopes for, exceptions

54. Hess, “War in the Hebrew Bible,” 30.

55. What of the killing of the Amalekites in 1 Sam. 15? Verse 3 has similar sweeping language that we find in Deuteronomy and Joshua: “man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.” The idea of *lex talionis* stands behind Yahweh’s threat in response to Amalek’s attacking vulnerable Israel—not to mention its ongoing threat to Israel thereafter (cp. Exod. 17:6–17; Deut. 25:17–19; Judg. 3:12–13): “I will punish Amalek for what he did to Israel, how he set himself against him on the way while he was coming up from Egypt” (15:2). Even so, we are not told whether the Amalekites against whom Saul was to fight were noncombatants or combatants. In any case, the “utterly destroyed” Amalekites show up again in 1 Sam. 30! According to Hess, they could simply be combatants (personal correspondence, February 26, 2009). Thanks to Bill Craig as well for discussion on this point.

56. See Paul Copan, *When God Goes to Starbucks: A Guide to Everyday Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2008), chap. 12; see also chapters 13–14.

57. Goldingay, “City and Nation.”

(for example, Rahab). The sweeping language which appears to involve only combatants is truly all-inclusive here. On the other hand, evident in Deuteronomy–Judges is the clearly exaggerated ANE language of utter obliteration and total destruction. These hyperbolic references to “totally destroy[ing]” run on parallel tracks with regular mention of many remaining Canaanite inhabitants after the “total destruction” (for example, Judg. 1). Additionally, we should take seriously the many references of “driving out” the Canaanites, to clear away the land for habitation, which does not require killing. Civilians would flee when their military strongholds were destroyed and no longer capable of protecting them.

(7) *Inefficient Means?* Morrision raises an “embarrassing” question: “Assuming that God’s desire to destroy the Canaanite religion by destroying the Canaanites was a legitimate one, why would He choose such an inefficient means of accomplishing this aim?” God could have easily removed them from the scene and avoided this “spectacularly unsuccessful” plan of allowing idolaters to remain in Israel’s midst. Wasn’t the point of killing Canaanites to prevent Israel’s being pulled down spiritually and morally?

Too much theological weight should not be given to some *efficiency* criterion—that God is the being than which nothing more efficient can be conceived! Indeed, what theological reason compels us to assume that God must necessarily operate with maximal Germanic efficiency? Just as God is not hot and bothered that a small planetary speck would be home to all the universe’s inhabitants (while the rest of the cosmos is uninhabited and uninhabitable), so God takes plenty of time and utilizes ostensibly less-than-efficient means to accomplish his purposes. For example, he gets the ball rolling with a barren, elderly couple—Abraham and Sarah—and chooses to work through a stubborn and rebellious nation. Perhaps we should think in terms of *sufficiency* rather than *efficiency*. In fact, this alleged embarrassment may actually indicate historical reliability rather than legendary fabrication; perhaps we can appeal to the “criterion of embarrassment” as an indicator of historicity/authenticity!

So why didn’t God make sure that none of the Canaanites was left to lead Israel into idolatry? God was working through often-inefficient processes to accomplish his salvation-historical ends, which did not require killing every last Canaanite, but ensuring that they were *sufficiently* driven out so as not to be an undermining spiritual and moral threat while Israel developed as a nation.⁵⁸

Israel’s failure to drive out this threat and destroy Canaanite religion indeed brought mixed results, and they paid for their compromises with an

58. God tells the Israelites that they will not quickly drive out the nations from their presence, which would leave the land empty (Deut. 7:22); on the other hand, Israel’s disobedience and idolatry would *further* slow down the process and even prove to be a snare for Israel (Josh. 23:12–13; Judg. 2:1–3).

Assyrian captivity of the northern kingdom and then a Babylonian captivity of the southern (for example, 2 Kings 17:7–41; 2 Chron. 36:15–21)—despite regular prophetic warnings and periodic kingly reforms. The theological and moral threat of foreign religion, however, did not so damage Israel as to eradicate its monotheism and covenantal awareness that would emerge with greater force in the wake of the Babylonian captivity. By the first century AD, a theological stage had been sufficiently set through the preservation of Israel's scriptures and national historical identity, the restoration of the temple and cultus, heightened messianic expectations, dedication to monotheism, and so on. Despite Israel's compromises and rebellions over the centuries, Jesus's arrival on the scene came "in the fullness of time" (Gal. 4:4). "Efficient"? Not self-evidently so. Sufficient? Certainly.

(8) *Precedent-setting?* Rausser raises questions about the killing of the Canaanites as setting a negative, brutal precedent for the nation of Israel. As a general response, one could cite Goldingay here: "the fate of the Canaanites is about as illuminating a starting point for understanding First Testament ethics as Gen 22 [Abraham's binding of Isaac] would be for an understanding of the family."⁵⁹

Here I would affirm Buijs's nuanced discussion of the alleged harm of religion. He makes the salient distinctions asking whether "religion is indeed *the cause*—or even *a cause*—of harmful acts" and whether "religion is *exclusively* harmful or at least *more* harmful than beneficial in its individual and social consequences."⁶⁰

Beyond this, let me offer two more specific responses.

First, the killing of the Canaanites was *sui generis*, limited to this particular period of time of Joshua and shortly thereafter, after whose time Israel's warranted battles ("Yahweh wars") were defensive. That the (rhetorical) language of obliteration was not intended to be precedent-setting is clear from Deuteronomy 20, which applies *herem* to cities in the land (20:16–18)—not cities far away. In the former case, we are not talking about genocide or ethnic cleansing, but a kind of *corporate capital punishment* that was *deliberately limited in scope and restricted to a specific period of time*. Was Israel's warfare in Canaan precedent-setting? In Goldingay's words, "Saul does not seek to devote the Philistines and David does not seek to devote the surrounding peoples whom he did conquer. Neither Ephraim nor Judah took on Assyria, Babylon, Persia, or the local equivalents of the Canaanites in the Second Temple period." He adds that Deuteronomy and Joshua do not set a pattern that "invites later Israel to follow, or that later Israel does follow."⁶¹

59. I address the specific question of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac in "How Do You Know You're Not Wrong?" (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005).

60. Buijs, "Atheism and the Argument from Harm," 46.

61. Goldingay, "City and Nation."

Second, what *is* puzzling is that professing Christians (during the Crusades, for instance) inspired by the killing of the Canaanites to justify their actions completely ignored Jesus's own kingdom teaching.⁶² Yet Jesus had informed Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would be fighting" (John 18:36). Again, "all those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword" (Matt. 26:52). On the other hand, we can confidently say that, precisely because of their commitment to Christ's kingdom not being of this world, the Amish and Mennonite people would most certainly not appeal to Canaanite-killing passages to engage in atrocities. The difference is that some professing Christians are far more obviously consistent in applying Jesus's teaching than others. Buijs's point that we ought to distinguish the "revelatory root of religion" from "its human appropriation in a religious tradition" is well-taken.⁶³

(9) *A Default Position ("Scenario 2")*. Readers will observe a slight shift in my approach to the Canaanite question, thanks in large part to the further input of Richard Hess's and John Goldingay's recent work. However, what if "Scenario 1" (above) fails? What if it turns out that women and children actually *were* the explicit objects of *herem* by Yahweh's command—even if we allow for hyperbole in phrases such as "everything that breathes"? I discuss the possibility of this alternative below.

(a) *"Psychologically and spiritually shattering."* Rauser and Morrison raise questions regarding the psychological damage done to combatants who brutally kill women and children (for example, the My Lai massacre). Now Rauser describes killing the Canaanites in Scenario 2 as a "morally praiseworthy" act. Certain acts may be just (for example, a just war), but describing such involvement as "morally praiseworthy" is misleading. As Confederate general Robert E. Lee affirmed, "It is well that war is so terrible; otherwise we should grow too fond of it."⁶⁴ Rather, theologian John Stott's wording regarding the killing of the Canaanites is apropos: "It was a ghastly business; one shrinks from it in horror."⁶⁵ If babies were involved, surely this was a grim task.⁶⁶ Yet the killing of the Canaanites was deliberately tempo-

62. For example, Karen Armstrong makes this Crusade-Canaanite connection in her book, *Holy War: The Crusades and Their Impact on Today's World* (New York: Anchor, 2001).

63. Buijs, "Atheism and the Argument from Harm," 48.

64. Lee made this statement during the Battle of Fredericksburg in December 1862.

65. John Stott's response in David Edwards, *Evangelical Essentials: A Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988), 263.

66. Rauser connects "bludgeoning babies" in Joshua with Psalm 137:9. Rauser mistakenly reads too much in to the anguished cry of the psalmist, which gives way to the *metaphorical* language of bashing babies against the rocks. One commentator reminds us, "Biblical poetry, like most poetry, employs graphic imagery to portray and express its ideas. . . . This imagery [in Ps. 137:8-9] is no more intended to be taken literally than elsewhere in the psalms where the psalmists speak of rivers clapping their hands and mountains singing for joy" (Sailhamer, *NIV Compact Bible Commentary*, 346; on the idea that infants represented a potential threat to

rary and *sui generis*. Furthermore, in the ANE, *warfare was a way of life and a means of survival*—a situation in which combatant and noncombatant were not always distinguished. This fact, in combination with *the hardness of human hearts (Matt. 19:8) and human moral bluntedness in the ANE*,⁶⁷ would likely render such actions considerably less psychologically damaging for the Israelite soldier.

(b) *The context of God's goodness, enemy love, and overarching purposes.* As mentioned earlier, God's overarching goal is to bring blessing and salvation to all the nations, including the Canaanites through Abraham (Gen. 12:3; 22:17–18; cp. 28:13–14). This sweeping, outsider-oriented, universally-directed covenant is utterly unique among ancient religious movements.⁶⁸ Yes, for a specific, relatively short, and strategic period, God sought to establish Israel in the land, simultaneously punishing a wicked people ripe for judgment. During this time, God was certainly willing to preserve any who acknowledged his evident lordship over the nations, which was very well known to the Canaanites (Josh. 2:8–11; 9:9–11, 24; cf. Exod. 15:14–17; Deut. 2:25). Even Israel's sevenfold march around⁶⁹ Jericho, each circumambulation serving as an opportunity for Jericho to evade the ban, was sadly matched by Jericho's sevenfold refusal to relent and acknowledge Yahweh's rule.

Furthermore, God's difficult command regarding the Canaanites as a *limited, unique salvation-historical situation* is comparable to God's difficult command to Abraham in Genesis 22 (a passage Morriston mentions in connection with human sacrifice, which we discussed earlier). Behind both of these harsh commands, however, are the clear context of Yahweh's loving intentions and faithful promises. In the first, God has given Abraham the miracle child Isaac, through whom God has promised to make Abraham the father of many. Previously, he saw God's provision when he reluctantly let Ishmael and Hagar go into the wilderness—with God reassuring Abraham

Israel during the next generation, see John Goldingay, *Psalms*, vol. 3, *Psalms 90–150* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008], 609–10). Consider the prophet Jeremiah, who had the thankless task of pleading with and warning God's hard-hearted and hard-headed people. In one instance, Pashhur the priest—a spiritual leader of the people!—had Jeremiah beaten and then placed in stocks (Jer. 20:1–2). In his distress, Jeremiah appeared much like the psalmist: he not only cursed the day he was born, but he cursed the messenger who announced his birth to his father, wishing he could have remained in his mother's womb until he died (Jer. 20:14–18). It is doubtful Jeremiah *literally* meant this. For further elaboration on the imprecatory psalms, chap. 11 in Paul Copan, *When God Goes to Starbucks*.

67. On this, see Paul Copan, "Is Yahweh a Moral Monster?"

68. Paul K. Moser, *The Elusive God: Reorienting Religious Epistemology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 91–2.

69. The Hebrew word *naqaph* "circle, march around" (Josh. 6:3) involves various ceremonial aspects in Josh. 6—including rams' horns, sacred procession, shouting (cp. 2 Sam. 6:15–16; also 2 Kings 6:14; Ps. 48:12). This word has the sense of conducting an inspection to see if the city would open its gates. Jericho, however, refused. Jericho, however, refused to do so (Hess, *Joshua*, 142–3).

that Ishmael would live to become a great nation. Likewise, Abraham knew that God would somehow fulfill his covenant promises through Isaac—even if it meant that God would raise him from the dead. Thus Abraham informed his servants, “we will worship, and then we will come back to you return” (Gen. 22:5 [NRSV]; cp. Heb. 11:19).⁷⁰ With the second harsh command regarding the Canaanites, Yahweh has already promised to bring blessing to all the families of the earth without exclusion (Gen. 12:1–3; 22:17–18). As previously observed, God is in the business of eventually turning Israel’s enemies into his friends and incorporating them into his family. As Abraham said of Isaac, it is as though ancient Israel could confidently say of its enemies like the Assyrians, Egyptians, and Canaanites (Isa. 19:25; Matt. 15:22): “we will worship together” (cp. Isa. 2:3). So while we have troubling exceptions in each of these scenarios, these should be set against the background of Yahweh’s enemy-loving character and worldwide salvific purposes.

Similarly, though blameless yet severely afflicted, Job received no clear answer to his questions, but he did receive assurances of God’s wisdom, which far surpasses ours. He learned that God’s character is trustworthy and his presence sufficient, even when we remain baffled in the face of unanswered questions.

In Jonah’s day, God did not punish the Ninevites—to the great disappointment of Jonah, who knew that *this is the sort of thing Yahweh does*—he loves his (and Israel’s) enemies: “I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity” (Jon. 4:2; cf. Exod. 34:6).

Jesus, who sees himself as the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets (Matt. 5:17), affirms that the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob is one who loves his enemies and calls on us to imitate this complete love (Matt. 5:43–48). We even see God commanding enemy-love in the OT—to show concern for the alien and stranger and enemy (for example, Exod. 23:4). The “Canaanite exception” is a glaring one in the midst of many affirmations of Yahweh’s lovingkindness and concern for his own enemies. To affirm Buijs’s general point, we can say that Jesus himself does not view the killing of the Canaanites to be an intrinsic tenet or permanent norm for Christians.

Scriptures attest to divine love, but also judgment: “Behold then the kindness and severity of God” (Rom. 11:22). Paul Moser observes:

70. Perhaps one final comment on human sacrifice is in order here. In another context in the NT, Paul speaks of God the Father, who “did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all” (Rom. 8:32). While God “sent” and “gave” his Son (John 3:16; 1 John 4:10), this giving is not to be misconstrued as “divine child abuse.” Jesus’s self-sacrifice for the redemption of human beings is not accomplished coercively but freely and willingly (John 10:14–18; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 5:2, 25). God thus makes a selfless provision for us by an act of *self*-sacrifice. Through this act, God was “reconciling the world to Himself” (2 Cor. 5:19)—an act in which God gives his very self for the sake of humanity.

It would be a strange, defective God who didn't pose a serious cosmic authority problem for humans. Part of the status of being *God*, after all, is that God has a unique authority, or lordship, over humans. Since we humans aren't God, the true God would have authority over us and would seek to correct our profoundly selfish ways.⁷¹

Despite Morriston's reference to C. S. Lewis's "wise words" about God's "gradual and graded self-revelation," he hardly negates Lewis's assertion that "Aslan" is not "safe." Elsewhere, Lewis commends "the obstinacy of faith." He asserts that trust in a personal God (as opposed to a mere proposition) "could have no room to grow except where there is also room for doubt." Lewis goes so far as to say that love involves trusting a friend beyond the evidence—even, at times, against such evidence. He reminds us that we should give the benefit of the doubt to a friend, even if the friend may display seemingly puzzling and uncharacteristic behavior. For example, if a trusted friend pledges to meet us somewhere but fails to show up, which of us "would not feel slightly ashamed if, one moment after we had given him up, he arrived with a full explanation of his delay? We should feel that we ought to have known him better."⁷² Just so.

As with Job, the full picture is not always available. We are not necessarily in the best cognitive position to discern God's purposes.⁷³ We may find ourselves left with a puzzling gap between what we clearly know of God and what seems to be a harsh exception (assuming here that Scenario 1 is false). Having tasted and seen that the Lord is good (Ps. 34:8), we should deal with such questions in the context of a loving, compassionate, and just personal God who has the long-term good of even his enemies in mind. Yet we have excellent reason for thinking that Scenario 1 is correct and that we do not need to resort to the default position.⁷⁴

71. Paul K. Moser, "Divine Hiddenness, Death, and Meaning," in *Philosophy of Religion: Classic and Contemporary Issues* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 221–2.

72. C. S. Lewis, "The Obstinacy of Belief," in *The World's Last Night* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1960), 25, 26, 27.

73. Thanks to Paul Moser for his comments on this topic.

74. I am grateful to Tremper Longman for his wise suggestions and to Rick Hess in particular for his helpful insights and detailed comments on an earlier version of this essay.