**Is God from the Old Testament (OT) the same as the God of the New Testament (NT)?**
Why does God in the OT seem to be a God of wrath while the God of the NT is a God of love? This is a great question during Lent. At the very heart of this question lies the true meaning of God’s mercy and justice and our understanding of human responsibility in Salvation.

The title question is one of the most powerful arguments for atheists, together with the existence of evil, to reason the nonexistence of God. In atheist words, the question is dramatically formulated as follows: “How can rational human beings believe in a god that commanded his people to commit genocide, killed little children, wiped out the entire world population in a flood or sent plagues and devastation?

It would be easier for us to say that the obscure and difficult passages of the Scriptures were narrated for personal gain of the author, or just neglect those passages by stating that the NT replaces the OT. But any such approach would be a heresy that dates to the year 144 A.D. formulated by Marcion of Sinope at Rome, who rejected the Hebrew Bible and the God of Israel and believed that the wrathful Hebrew God was a separate and lower entity than the all-forgiving Jesus.  Marcianism goes clearly against Jesus’ teachings: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.” (Matthew 5:17,18).

So, if we believe that Jesus is fully God, and God is immutable, and the Scriptures are correct, then Jesus is the same as the God of the OT and we, as Christians, have some explanation to do, and as St. Peter told us, we have to be able to “give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect” 1 Peter 3:15. So, let’s use Faith and Reason in our answer.

Do YOU have a good answer? I am going to share with you my personal answer based on the facts that: 1) Human actions have consequences, 2) God will exercise all mercy and all justice at any time of His own choosing, and 3) God has a good reason (what is called “Objective Morality”) to justify His actions, a reason we might never understand in this life.

I would start saying that in both testaments, God is incredible love and compassion; and also, a God of justice and righteous wrath against sin.

1. God’s mercy in OT: “But You, o Lord, are a God compassionate and merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness” (Psalm 86:15). Book of Jonah and the conversion of Nineveh.
2. God’s mercy in NT: “Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing” (2 Timothy 4:8). All Jesus works on earth.
3. God’s justice in the OT: Adam and Eve (Genesis 3), The corrupt people of Noah’s day (Genesis 6-8), Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18-19), Egyptian slave masters (Genesis 15:14, Exodus 7-12), Extermination of Amalekite by Saul. The annihilation of the Canaanites by Joshua.
4. God’s justice in the NT: “Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord” (Romans 12:19). “But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead” (1 Peter 4:5). Death of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-10).

Finally, I like to explain that the process of justice by God is not random or capricious as it always follows the same five steps:

1. God judges sin (2 Peter, 3,5-7)
2. God exercises patience (Sometimes for hundreds of years)
3. God provides opportunity for repentance and means for forgiveness and means for salvation. (All prophets and even today 2 Peter 3, 9)
4. God’s mercy is endless but He exercises justice when dim necessary
5. God gives a new better and bigger life after exercising justice (for example, eternal life after death)

Going back to the title question, the answer you choose to provide will be connected to your own spirituality: Do you believe that your actions have consequences? Do you accept both God’s mercy and God’s justice? Do you believe in heaven and hell? Do you believe that the gate to heaven is narrow or do you believe that there is a highway to heaven?

And always remember that God only wants the salvation of every creature: **Ezekiel 18:23:** “Do I actually delight in the death of the wicked, declared the sovereign Lord? Do I not prefer that he turn from his wicked conduct and live?”

I am sure you would agree that these are great questions to reflect during this lent season!

Thanks

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(If you want to read more on this subject, and other articles on “Faith & Reason”, please visit www.Lumen-Fidei.com)