

God and the Individual

Exodus 17:8-16 HCSB At Rephidim, Amalek came and fought against Israel. (9) Moses said to Joshua, "Select some men for us, and go fight against Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the hilltop with God's staff in my hand." (10) Joshua did as Moses had told him, and fought against Amalek, while Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. (11) While Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed, but whenever he put his hand down, Amalek prevailed. (12) When Moses' hands grew heavy, they took a stone and put *it* under him, and he sat down on it. Then Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side and one on the other so that his hands remained steady until the sun went down. (13) So Joshua defeated Amalek and his army with the sword. (14) The LORD then said to Moses, "Write this down on a scroll as a reminder and recite it to Joshua: I will completely blot out the memory of Amalek under heaven." (15) And Moses built an altar and named it, "The LORD Is My Banner." (16) He said, "Indeed, *my hand is lifted up* toward the LORD's throne. The LORD will be at war with Amalek from generation to generation."

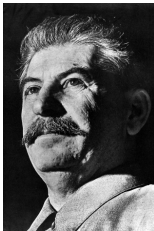
Since the dawn of time, every generation of man; every culture in every clime; no matter the level of education or sophistication, education, or technological advancement; EVERY generation has believed in the supernatural. Unfortunately, many have not believed in the real God, preferring the gods of their own making.

However, the fact remains that deep down every man knows in his bones that God exists. In part this may be because subconsciously we understand that even if we are completely surrounded by evil and violence, it would still make more sense to believe in God than not if only for this one thing –

Theism (belief in God) – more answers

Atheism (disbelief in God) – more questions

Questions and answers. Theism (belief in God) answers more questions than atheism (disbelief in God) does. If the believer struggles with the issue of evil, the unbeliever struggles with it even more.



A. Inherent sin. For instance - the believer understands that evil comes as a result of man's freely chosen rebellion against God's moral law. The believer looks at the "Stalins" of the world and nods with comprehension. "There goes a man who is in rebellion to God's moral law."

The unbeliever, after stating that man is basically good and need only be sufficiently educated to make wise choices, is again and again bitterly disappointed when his students choose wrongly. The unbeliever looks at wicked men like Joseph Stalin and sees only an accidental clash of atoms, a chaotic mix of genes and environment. That is no answer! That is tacit assent to total confusion. It is an unspoken statement – "I don't know what the heck made him kill 40 million of his own people!"

Woody Allen once said, "If only God would give me some clear sign - like making a large deposit in my name at a Swiss bank!" Atheists and agnostics read passages like the one before us today and (like Woody Allen) mock, because they don't have a similar sign provided for them. But ask them to explain:

B. Order in natural law. the existence of natural law, or order in nature that should be nothing more than chaos.

C. Insect behavior. Ask them to explain the instinctive cunning of the lowest insect or

D. Genius. the brain of an Einstein or

E. Passionate vision. the passionate vision and heart of a prophet – they cannot. There are no sufficient explanations for these things to be found by mere evolutionary process without the powerful hand of God impelling things toward the beautiful, the orderly and the useful.

Atheists are surrounded by miracles and (as they squeeze their eyes closed and jam their fingers in their ears) they complain about lack of evidence! In the final analysis, for the believer there are no questions and for the non-believer there are no answers.



The truth of the matter is that it would not matter if they were present to see God's miracle as it was wrought through Moses' hands.¹ When the rich man in Sheol begged that Lazarus be raised from the dead and sent back to the rich man's brothers to warn them of the torments awaiting them if they did not change our father Abraham told the rich man;

- **Luke 16:29-31 HCSB** "... 'They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.' (30) "'No, father Abraham,' he said. 'But if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' (31) "But he told him, 'If they don't listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be persuaded if

someone rises from the dead.'"

The inkblot and the carbon chain. Would you like a miraculous sign of God's existence? Let me give you one. Don't you realize that if you were to spill ink across a sheet of paper, it would be impossible that proper writing would result, or legible lines such as would be written by a conscious mind? If you would find it impossible to reconcile yourself to the idea that a novel of Shakespeare's or Hemmingway's caliber can accidentally form itself, how is it that people can look at something far more subtle and difficult to create, something that is as complex as the basic carbon chain, the very foundation of life here on Earth, and say "Behold! An accident!"

# Carbons	Name	Structure
1	methane	
2	ethane	
3	propane	
4	butane	
5	pentane	
6	hexane	
7	heptane	
8	octane	

God's chosen people. Would you like another miraculous sign of God's existence? I find ample evidence of the existence of a magnificent and loving God in the existence of the people of Israel. In all the world's history only the Jews

- have survived for nearly four thousand years with their culture intact.
- Only the Jews have had their homeland destroyed (twice),
- been dispersed throughout the world for two thousand years,
- endured hatred wherever they have lived,
- survived the most systematic attempt in history to destroy an entire people,
- and been expelled from nearly every nation among whom they have lived.

Yet, the Jews STILL live, studying about their ancestors who lived around 1600 BC, have the same homeland they did in 1000 BC, and speak there the same language as their ancestors did over three thousand years ago.

Faith doesn't mean passively waiting. In today's passage, we see that God performed a great miracle to rescue our people from the wanton attack of a tribe that considered killing, raping and pillaging to be a national sport. However, I would like to remind you that at the bottom of the mountain, Joshua and many, many others were fighting for their lives.

¹ Moses with hands upraised; image source: imagecache2.allposters.com

Our God is a mighty God. He is capable of speaking a universe into existence. He doesn't NEED us. However, He chooses to work in and through us. Isn't that marvelous? He is willing, like a great Father who stoops down to the level of His child, to work alongside us and consider us His co-laborers in the great task of reestablishing justice between God and Man and between men. Just as Joshua had to overcome his natural fear of death and fight for the safety of his people, so we cannot sit around waiting for God to simply zap justice and righteousness into existence.

Faith means wisely choosing sides. God is patient and merciful. He has given Mankind a free will and (for a time) He will not force Man to do what is right. Some will choose to do what is right. Some will choose evil's way.

This "yetzer hara war", the war against sin, means good people face a vicious struggle against evil. To those who decide to fight on the Lord's side He gives this promise: glory, honor and immortality (Romans 2:7).

The yetzer hara war means wicked people face short term pleasures but long term destruction. To those who choose that path God gives this promise:

- **Proverbs 1:24-31 HCSB** Since I called out and you refused, extended my hand and no one paid attention, (25) since you neglected all my counsel and did not accept my correction, (26) I, in turn, will laugh at your calamity. I will mock when terror strikes you, (27) when terror strikes you like a storm and your calamity comes like a whirlwind, when trouble and stress overcome you. (28) Then **you** will call me, but I won't answer; **you** will search for me, but won't find me. (29) Because **you** hated knowledge, didn't choose to fear the LORD, (30) were not interested in my counsel, and rejected all my correction, (31) **you** will eat the fruit of their way and be gluttoned with **your** own schemes.

Along with free will came responsibility. There are some things that only God can do. God COULD instantly stop evil but He won't. Furthermore, there are some tasks that God has given US to do so He absolutely WON'T do those things. A wise man knows where he is required to work and where he is allowed to rest in his faith in God's grace.

Faith realizes that both God and man have assigned roles. An old tzaddik once asked his disciples, "Where does God exist?"

"Everywhere" they responded, surprised.

"No" the old teacher responded. "God only enters where man lets Him in."

I understand the doctrine of omnipresence, which is undoubtedly what the old tzaddik's disciples thought he was referring to. However, the teacher was making a remarkable statement about the power God has ceded to people, the ability either to keep Him out of our lives or to let Him in. There are consequences to either decision – but the decision is ours.

Faith doesn't use "there's evil in the world" as a cop out. Some of you here may have chosen to keep God out because of evil that you have seen. Joshua could have looked at his circumstances and grown bitter. He could have asked, "How could a good God allow a wicked nation like the Amalekites to pick off our old, weak and slow?" He did not. He chose instead to pick up a sword and defend the defenseless. He chose to trust God's spiritual leader to do his part, but to also do his. Too many people use the evil of the world or what was done to them as a cop out. Rather than saying "God, there is evil in the land. How could you let this happen?" I challenge you to ask "God, there is evil in the land. What would you have me do?"

Faith fears God and acts upon it by doing good. Has evil occurred in your life? Listen to me. Wisely learn two lessons through simple hearing that I've had to learn the hard way, through many painful circumstances.

A. Adonaic Christians strive to accustom themselves to say 'Whatever God does is for the best.' A person is just as obligated to bless God for the hard circumstances that

befalls him as he is to bless God for the good. The one who hears of a death must say 'Baruch' dayan emet' – 'blessed is the true judge.'

B. Another old teacher once blessed his disciples in the following manner. He said "May your fear of God be as strong as your fear of men." He was not trying to be either coy or blasphemous. He simply acknowledged a seldom-noted truth: most humans fear other people more than they fear God. When they prepare to act unethically they are usually very careful to ensure that no human will witness their sin but they are rarely fearful that God will see what they are doing. If people feared God as much as they do other humans, they would almost never sin!

There are no true agnostics. Some of you may claim to doubt the Lord's existence. You say "I'm not sure if God exists or not!" However, if you carefully examine your lives you will see that you are actually living as one who does not believe He exists at all. You may identify yourself as an "agnostic" but you are living like an "atheist". You can be an agnostic in theory but believe me, in practice you either live a religious life or a secular life. You may use agnosticism to hide behind a mask of intellectual pragmatism, but the fact remains that you actually enjoy your sin and don't want to be held accountable for it.

It reminds me of an early 20th century Yiddish saying: "Fear only two: God, and him who fears not God."

Conclusion. You are surrounded by miracles. You have the testimony of the order and beauty of the world where by all accounts there should be only a chaotic soup. You have the testimony of the continued existence of the people of Israel in spite of countless attempts (as we've seen in today's passage) to destroy them. You cannot use the excuse of the evil in the world as a cop out. May I ask what is keeping you from submitting to your rightful king?

Others of you may say "I DO believe in God – its JESUS I'm not so sure about." May I respond with the Scriptures that were inspired by the God in whom claim to believe?"

- **James 2:19-20 HCSB** You believe that God is one; you do well. The demons also believe--and they shudder. (20) Foolish man! Are you willing to learn that faith without works is useless?
- **Psalms 2:11-12 HCSB** Serve the LORD with reverential awe, and rejoice with trembling. (12) Pay homage to the Son, or He will be angry, and you will perish in your rebellion, for His anger may ignite at any moment. All those who take refuge in Him are happy.

God is of no importance unless He is of supreme importance in your life. And God has stated,

- **Mark 9:7 HCSB** A cloud appeared, overshadowing them, and a voice came from the cloud: This is My beloved Son; listen to Him!

Altar call. I'd like to ask you to bow your heads and close your eyes. Please remain seated. I'm not going to ask you to come forward. I'm not going to embarrass you. I simply want to give you an opportunity to be honest with yourself and with God...