

# Richard Dawkins: "The Bible itself is as toxic as the Quran"

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**Richard Dawkins said: "The Bible itself is as toxic as the Quran but most Christians are not taught to believe it literally. Most Christians are taught to believe it metaphorically or allegorically."**

He thus seems to be assuming that both contain passages mandating warfare against unbelievers, but Christians spiritualize or allegorize those passages, while Muslims do not.

This question is important whether or not one believes in the Bible, for it may help determine how one views the magnitude of the jihad threat, and how resolved one may be to resist the jihad imperative. And so it warrants close examination.



In the Bible, there are passages that certainly appear to be "toxic." The Book of Numbers recounts that after the Israelites defeated the Midianites, they presented the captives and spoils of war to Moses. But the prophet "was angry with the officers of the army, the commanders of thousands and the commanders of hundreds, who had come from service in the war. Moses said to them, "Have you let all the women live?" He reminded them that these women had earlier caused the Israelites to "act treacherously against the LORD." Consequently, Moses told his men: "Now therefore, kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman who has known man by lying with him. But all the young girls who have not known man by lying with him, keep alive for yourselves" (31:14-18).

Later this command was extended to other enemies of the Israelites: "When the LORD your God brings you into the land which you are entering to take possession of it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than yourselves, and when the LORD your God gives them over to you, and you defeat them; then you must utterly destroy them; you shall make no covenant with them, and show no mercy to them" (Moses 5, 7:1-2).

God also tells the Israelites: "When you approach a city to fight against it, you shall offer it terms of peace. If it agrees to make peace with you and opens to you, then all the people who are found in it shall become your forced labor and shall serve you. However, if it does not make peace with you, but makes war against you, then you shall besiege it. When the LORD your God gives it into your hand, you shall strike all the men in it with the edge of the sword. Only the women and the children and the animals and all that is in the city, all its spoil, you shall take as booty for yourself; and you shall use the spoil of your enemies which the LORD your God has given you. Only in the cities of these peoples that the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, you shall not leave alive anything that breathes" (Moses 5, 20:10-17).

Likewise, besieging Jericho, Joshua announces that the city is "devoted to the LORD for destruction" (Joshua 6:17). When it falls, Joshua and his men "utterly destroyed all in the city, both men and women, oxen, sheep, and asses, with the edge of the sword" (6:21). And Joshua warned: "Cursed before the LORD be the man that rises up and rebuilds this city, Jericho" (6:26).

Later God tells Joshua: "You shall do to Ai and its king as you did to Jericho and its king," except that this time they shouldn't kill all the animals: "its spoil and its cattle you shall take as booty for yourselves" (8:2). Joshua complied: "When Israel had finished slaughtering all the inhabitants of Ai in the open wilderness where they pursued them and all of them to the very last had fallen by the edge of the sword, all Israel returned to Ai, and smote it with the edge of the sword. And all who fell that day, both men and women, were twelve thousand, all the people of Ai. For Joshua did not draw back his hand, with which he stretched out the javelin, until he had utterly destroyed all the inhabitants of Ai. Only the cattle and the spoil of that city Israel took as their booty, according to the word of the LORD which he commanded Joshua" (8:24-27). Joshua similarly kills all the inhabitants of a number of other cities: Makkedah (10:28); Libnah (10:29-30); Lachish (10:31-2); Eglon (10:34-5); Hebron (10:36-7); and Debir (10:38-9); as well as Madon, Shimron, Achshaph, and Hazor (11:10-11).

Nowhere in all this is there a hint of any disapproval on the part of the writer or anyone in the book. Instead, we are told that in carrying out these massacres Joshua was just being obedient to God: "So Joshua defeated the whole land, the hill country and the Negeb and the lowland and the slopes, and all their kings; he left none remaining, but utterly destroyed all that breathed, as the LORD God of Israel commanded" (10:40).

Besides passages apparently celebrating warfare and ethnic cleansing as sanctioned by almighty God, the books of Moses also contain other passages jarring to modern sensibilities. God commands, for example, that Sabbath-breakers be put to death: "And the LORD said to Moses, 'Say to the people of Israel, You shall keep my sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the LORD, sanctify you. You shall keep the sabbath, because it is holy for you; every one who profanes it shall be put to death; whoever does any work on it, that soul shall be cut off from among his people'" (Exodus 31:12-14). So are idolaters. God tells Moses: "If there is found among you...a man or woman who does what is evil in the sight of the LORD your God, in transgressing his covenant, and has gone and served other gods and worshiped them, or the sun or the moon or any of the host of heaven, which I have forbidden, and it is told you and you hear of it; then you shall

inquire diligently, and if it is true and certain that such an abominable thing has been done in Israel, then you shall bring forth to your gates that man or woman who has done this evil thing, and you shall stone that man or woman to death with stones" (Deuteronomy 17:2-5).

There is more. The Book of Exodus contains some brief guidelines for occasions in which "a man sells his daughter as a slave" (Exodus 21:7). And there is more, here and there, that has raised eyebrows not only in modern times but throughout history.

But is the Bible really enjoining violence, both against nonbelievers and believers who commit sins deemed worthy of capital punishment? This question cannot be answered by an evaluation of the text alone, for that text does not now and has never in history stood apart from the way believers have understood it and acted upon it. From that perspective, Dawkins is correct: when confronted with a passage such as one of those I have quoted above, "most Christians are taught to believe it metaphorically or allegorically."

Biblical scholars have posited several ways in these passages that appear to depict God transgressing against his own goodness can be understood by people of faith who believe that this material is divinely inspired. Some Biblical scholars have suggested that the Bible depicts a process of moral evolution — a gradual advance out of barbarism to the precepts of the Gospel. Others have adopted a posture of cultural relativism, arguing that what was acceptable for, or even incumbent upon, the Israelites in their particular time and place only applied to that time and place, not to all believers for all time. There are weaknesses in those and other such interpretations, but they reflect the fact that throughout history, rather than celebrating such biblical passages, Jews and Christians have regarded them as a problem to be solved. While interpretations of these passages differ widely among Jews and Christians, from the beginnings of rabbinic Judaism and Christianity one understanding has remained dominant among virtually all believers: these passages are not commands for all generations to follow, and if they have any applicability at all, it is only in a spiritualized, parabolic sense.

However, Dawkins' moral equivalence founders primarily upon one central fact: none of these passages direct believers to act in similar ways. They're not presented as giving the believer examples to be imitated, and they have never been understood as exemplary by Jews or Christians at any point in Jewish or Christian history.

**These passages, for all the exegetical problems they present to believing Jews and Christians, are descriptive, not prescriptive. They nowhere give the impression to believers that God wishes them to act as his instruments of judgment in any situation today.**

In short, the consensus view among Jews and Christians for many centuries is that unless you happen to be a Hittite, Gergashite, Amorite, Canaanite, Perizzite, Hivite, Jebusite, etc., these Biblical passages simply do not apply to you. The Scriptures records God's commands to the Israelites to make war against particular people only. However this may be understood, and however jarring it may be to modern sensibilities, it does not amount to any kind of marching orders for believers. That's one principal reason why Jews and Christians haven't formed terror groups around the world that quote these Scriptures to justify killing civilian non-combatants.

Meanwhile, the Qur'an is loaded with material that is "toxic." A sampling:

2:191-193: "And slay them wherever you come upon them, and expel them from where they expelled you; persecution is more grievous than slaying. But fight them not by the Holy Mosque until they should fight you there; then, if they fight you, slay them — such is the recompense of unbelievers, but if they give over, surely Allah is All-forgiving, All-compassionate. Fight them, till there is no persecution and the religion is Allah's; then if they give over, there shall be no enmity save for evildoers."

4:34: "Men are the managers of the affairs of women for that Allah has preferred in bounty one of them over another, and for that they have expended of their property. Righteous women are therefore obedient, guarding the secret for Allah's guarding. And those you fear may be rebellious admonish; banish them to their couches, and beat them. If they then obey you, look not for any way against them; Allah is All-high, All-great."

4:89: "They wish that you should disbelieve as they disbelieve, and then you would be equal; therefore take not to yourselves friends of them, until they emigrate in the way of Allah; then, if they turn their backs, take them, and slay them wherever you find them; take not to yourselves any one of them as friend or helper."

5:33: "This is the recompense of those who fight against Allah and His Messenger, and hasten about the earth, to do corruption there: they shall be slaughtered, or crucified, or their hands and feet shall alternately be struck off; or they shall be banished from the land. That is a degradation for them in this world; and in the world to come awaits them a mighty chastisement."

5:38: "And the thief, male and female: cut off the hands of both, as a recompense for what they have earned, and a punishment exemplary from Allah; Allah is All-mighty, All-wise."

8:12: "When thy Lord was revealing to the angels, "I am with you; so confirm the believers. I shall cast into the unbelievers" hearts terror; so smite above the necks, and smite every finger of them!—

8:39: "Fight them, till there is no persecution and the religion is Allah's entirely; then if they give over, surely Allah sees the things they do."

8:60: "Make ready for them whatever force and strings of horses you can, to terrify thereby the enemy of Allah and your enemy, and others besides them that you know not; Allah knows them. And whatsoever you expend in the way of Allah shall be repaid you in full; you will not be wronged."

9:5: "Then, when the sacred months are drawn away, slay the idolaters wherever you find them, and take them, and confine them, and lie in wait for them at every place of ambush. But if they repent, and perform the prayer, and pay the alms, then let them go their way; Allah is All-forgiving, All-compassionate."

9:29: "Fight those who believe not in Allah and the Last Day and do not forbid what Allah and His Messenger have forbidden — such men as practise not the religion of truth, being of those who have been given the Book — until they pay the tribute out of hand and have been humbled."

9:111: "Allah has bought from the believers their selves and their possessions against the gift of Paradise; they fight in the way of Allah; they kill, and are killed; that is a promise binding upon Allah in the Torah, and the Gospel, and the Koran; and who fulfils his covenant truer than Allah? So rejoice in the bargain you have made with Him; that is the mighty triumph."

9:123: "O believers, fight the unbelievers who are near to you; and let them find in you a harshness; and know that Allah is with the godfearing."

47:4: "When you meet the unbelievers, smite their necks, then, when you have made wide slaughter among them, tie fast the bonds; then set them free, either by grace or ransom, till the war lays down its loads. So it shall be; and if Allah had willed, He would have avenged Himself upon them; but that He may try some of you by means of others. And those who are slain in the way of Allah, He will not send their works astray."

That's three verses about slaying polytheists, apostates, etc. wherever they are found, one about beating disobedient women, two about beheading, two mandating amputation as a punishment, and more. What's more, the literal understanding of these passages is mainstream. There is no widespread understanding of these passages and others like them as allegorical or metaphorical or referring to the struggle against sin. Many Islamic spokesmen in the West maintain that the Qur'an's passages about jihad warfare apply only to Muhammad's time, but this is belied not only by the status of the Qur'an in Islamic theology as being the perfect book that is valid and applicable for all time, but also by the fact that jihad groups worldwide, aided and abetted by innumerable Muslim clerics, quite obviously believe that the violent passages are very much applicable to today.

**Unlike the Biblical passages, the Qur'anic passages are open-ended and addressed to all believers, giving believers marching orders that Muslims throughout the history of Islam have taking as applying to their time and place, as all too many Muslims are doing now. That alone establishes the Qur'an, contrary to Dawkins' claims, as quite considerably more "toxic" than the Bible.**

"Atheist Richard Dawkins Claims 'Bible as Toxic as Quran,' but 'Christians Don't Believe the Bible Literally,'" by Samuel Smith, Christian Post, October 16, 2015: British evolutionary biologist and best-selling author Richard Dawkins asserted in a recent interview that the Bible is just as "toxic" as Islam's holy book, the Quran, but reasoned that the difference between Muslims and Christians is that most Christians are taught to believe the Bible "metaphorically."

In an interview with Fox News Radio's Alan Colmes earlier this week, the 74-year-old Dawkins, a zealous atheist who authored the 2006 book *The God Delusion*, was asked a number of questions on topics such as the 2016 presidential race, America's "secular" founding and the "toxicity" of religions. When Colmes asked Dawkins if he believes one religion is "sicker" or "more toxic" than the others, **Dawkins stated that it is not unfair to say that in the today's world, Islam is to blame for the "maximum toxicity in religion."**

Dawkins asserted that "it's partly that [Muslims] are taught to believe that the Quran is literally true."

Colmes responded by saying that many Christians are also taught that the Bible is literally true. Dawkins agreed but further argued that there are not as many Christians who take the Bible as literally as Muslims view the Quran. "There are but they are not that numerous," Dawkins stated. "The Bible itself is as toxic as the Quran but most Christians are not taught to believe it literally. Most Christians are taught to believe it metaphorically or allegorically."...

