

Trends

According to a recent poll, most Americans — 54 percent — say they don't spend much, or any time thinking about their own death. Fourteen percent say they spend a lot of time thinking about it, while another 31 percent say they spend some time thinking about it. Three in four Americans believe in the existence of heaven or hell, including 66 percent who think both exist. Eleven percent believe only heaven exists. Seventeen percent of Americans don't think either place exists. Among those who do believe in heaven or hell, 82 percent expect to wind up in heaven at the end of their lives; two percent says they expect to end up in hell. Nine percent don't think they will be in either place.

- via CBS News

Hebrews 9:27: "And it is appointed for men to die once, then the judgment."

Sentence Sermons

"Death is a friend of ours; and he that is not ready to entertain him is not at home." —Sir Francis Bacon

Psalm 8:48: "What man can live and not see death? Can he deliver his life from the power of the grace?"

News & Notes

Pray for one another: "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." (Jas. 5:16)

Please consider donating funds to Zach & Taya Martin. Zach is a medical student and he and his wife Taya are planning to assist Ron Halbrook on one of his preaching trips to the Philippines. The Martins are worthy of our support. You can contact Zach at: zcmartin30@gmail.com.

Please pray for one another! "comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing." 1 Thessalonians 5:11

Please pray for Ryan & Jennifer and the brethren of the Northern Michigan church of Christ. They will be having a gospel meeting Aug. 24-26 with J.R. Bronger.

Please keep sisters Virginia Brown and Wilma Cardwell in your prayers. Their faithfulness sets a great example and gives encouragement to all! Ditto for Al (our Barnabas!).

Pray for all the lost souls, especially those in the greater Bloomington area. Pray that Westside might be an influence for good in this community.

Pray for the all of our students: elementary, secondary and college. School begins very soon and o

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"Lord, to whom shall we go? You
have the words of eternal life."

John 6:68



God, Abraham, & Child Sacrifice

Dave Miller, Ph.D.

Apologetics Press

The usual ploy of atheists in their efforts to discredit the inspiration and integrity of the Bible is to attempt to pit one passage against another, claiming they have pinpointed a discrepancy. Typical of these attempts is the refusal to evaluate the textual data objectively and fairly. In his debate with *Apologetics Press* staff writer Kyle Butt on the campus of the University of South Carolina, atheist Dan Barker insisted that God endorsed human sacrifice by His alleged morally irresponsible act of ordering Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac. In his first speech, Barker stated:

"Does he [God] accept human sacrifice? In some verses yes, in some verses no. Remember the thing about when Abraham, he asked Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac. By the way, Abraham should have said, 'No way, I'm better than you, I'm not going to kill my son.'" (1)

Ironically, due to the aimless, subjective nature of atheistic "ethics," atheists have no objective basis or absolute standard by which to evaluate the taking of life—even animal or plant life. Yet, even very liberal thinkers have conceded circumstances under which it might be appropriate to terminate the life of a fellow human being (e.g., if a person were guilty of mass murder). The Bible quite properly identifies a variety of circumstances under which the taking of human life is moral and rational—including God's own execution of large numbers of people throughout history (e.g., the Flood in Genesis 6-9). The Law of Moses included a minimum of 16 capital crimes. (2) If at least one instance of taking human life is morally justifiable in the mind of the atheist, God cannot rightly be indicted for stipulating the instance. It becomes merely a matter of determining the ethical appropriateness of any given instance. It is no longer a matter of if it is morally right to require the death of a person, but simply when it is right to do so.

Another factor to consider in ascertaining whether God can rightly order the death of a person pertains to the very nature of human life itself in the great scheme of things. If humans possess an immortal soul, a spirit, then killing the

body does not extinguish that life. As Jesus declared: *“And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him!”* (Luke 12:4-5). If there is an afterlife, terminating physical life on Earth is not actually a termination of that life, since conscious existence continues in the afterlife. Hence, again, the question is not whether human life may be terminated in this life, but only the conditions under which life may be taken and who is authorized to do so.

The passage in question is found in Genesis 22. The stated purpose of the incident pertains to God’s desire to “test” Abraham (Genesis 22:1), i.e., enable Abraham to recognize and demonstrate the level of his own faith in God. God’s instruction to Abraham is found in these words: *“Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you”* (Genesis 22:2). A series of events then transpire over a period of three days—giving Abraham sufficient time to assess in his own mind the depth of his faith and commitment to God. James spotlights this very feature:

“Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.’ And he was called the friend of God. You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only” (2:21-24, emp. added).

Observe that James wrote as if Abraham actually completed God’s directive (“offered”), which shows that the objective was to test Abraham’s willingness to obey—without actually completing the deed.

The Bible clearly affirms that God would never require an immoral act—including child sacrifice (Leviticus 18:21; 20:2). In the book of Kings, God condemned the Israelites for mimicking the abominable practice of the Amorites who offered their children as sacrifices to their pagan gods. He vehemently insisted: *“I did not command them, nor did it come into My mind that they should do this abomination”* (e.g., Jeremiah 32:35; cf. 19:5). It did not enter God’s mind to actually have Abraham kill his son. Here, then, is the salient question: is it morally wrong for God to test a person’s faith and commitment by ordering him to perform an act, (3) while not actually intending to require (or allow) the person to do so?

The Bible is its own best interpreter, and if one honestly desires to arrive at the truth (John 7:17), and will do what the Bible itself insists is necessary to achieve that goal, i.e., apply oneself diligently to studying, examining, and weighing the biblical evidence (Acts 17:11; 2 Timothy 2:15), one can ascertain whether the Bible actually contradicts itself and whether God is morally irresponsible. The inspired writer of the book of Hebrews solves the dilemma posed by Dan Barker. Read carefully his assessment of Abraham’s action regarding his son:

“By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, ‘In Isaac your seed shall be called,’ concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense” (Hebrews 11:17-19).

Observe that in Abraham’s mind, Isaac was as good as dead, i.e., he fully intended to sacrifice his son as directed. However, one cannot successfully maintain that Abraham was guilty of agreeing to commit an immoral act—since he fully believed that the death of his son would be immediately reversed. The strength of this conviction (which is the central feature of Abraham’s great faith) is further seen in the fact that he informed the servants: *“Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you”* (Hebrew plural, *nasucach*, Genesis 22:5). Abraham fully recognized that the moral nature of deity would not sanction child sacrifice. God’s prior declaration, that Isaac would be the one through whom He would fulfill His promises to Abraham, was sufficient proof that God would circumvent his action by raising Isaac from the dead.

After a careful evaluation of the textual data, we are forced to conclude that, though God instructed Abraham to offer his son as a sacrifice, the purpose of the command was merely to enable Abraham to manifest the strength of his faith and trust in God, and that it did not enter God’s mind actually to have Abraham kill his son. Isaac was, in fact, a foreshadowing of the coming Christ. Incredibly, the perfect nature of God required that He sacrifice Himself in the person of His Son in our behalf: *“He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all...demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us”* (Romans 8:32; 5:8).

ENDNOTES

1. Kyle Butt and Dan Barker (2009), *The Butt/Barker Debate*, Apologetics Press, http://www.apologeticspress.org/catalog/product_info.php/products_id/952.
2. Dave Miller (2002), “Capital Punishment and the Bible,” <http://www.apologeticspress.org/articles/1974>.
3. i.e., an act that is not morally wrong; physical altercations and taking human life are not inherently morally wrong (cf. 1 Kings 20:37).

“By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, 18 of whom it was said, ‘In Isaac your seed shall be called,’ 19 concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense.”

Hebrews 11:17-19