“This is the book I wish I had written myself. It is simply the best book I have read that tackles the many difficulties that the Old Testament presents to thinking and sensitive Christians and that give such ammunition to the opponents of all religious faith. Paul Copan writes in such a simple, straightforward way, yet covers enormous issues comprehensively and with reassuring biblical detail and scholarly research. Use this book to stock your mind with gracious but factual answers in those awkward conversations. Better still, give it to those who are swayed by the shallow prejudice of popular atheism without reading the Bible for themselves. I strongly recommend this book. We have wanted and needed it for a long time.”

—Christopher J. H. Wright, international director, Langham Partnership International; author of Old Testament Ethics for the People of God

“The New Atheists have attacked the morality of the Old Testament with a vengeance. In honesty, many Christians will confess that they struggle with what looks like a primitive and barbaric ethic. Paul Copan helps us truly understand the world of the Old Testament and how it relates to us today. I recommend this book for all who want to make sense of the Old Testament.”

—Tremper Longman III, Robert H. Gundry Professor of Biblical Studies, Westmont College

“Lucid, lively, and very well informed, this book is the best defense of Old Testament ethics that I have read. A must-read for all preachers and Bible study leaders.”

—Gordon Wenham, emeritus professor of Old Testament, University of Gloucestershire

“Paul Copan is the nation’s leading apologist regarding problems with the biblical text, and Is God a Moral Monster? is vintage Copan. He takes on current New Atheist biblical critics and powerfully addresses virtually every criticism they have raised. I know of no other book like this one, and it should be required reading in college and seminary courses on biblical introduction.”

—J. P. Moreland, distinguished professor of philosophy, Talbot School of Theology, and author of The God Question

“Most Christians today, myself included, are in dialogue with people we love who have been heavily swayed by the criticisms of Richard Dawkins, et al., against the morality of the Bible and its depiction of a horrific Yahweh God. What struck me in reading Is God a Moral Monster? is the degree to which we as Christians need to rethink in radical ways our reading and understanding of the sacred text if we are to have any persuasive reasoning in this ongoing exchange. Sometimes the real monster lies not so much in criticisms from ‘without’ as in our own holding to certain incorrect paradigms of thinking about the Bible. Aside from the apologetic importance of Professor Copan’s work, of far greater value for Christians is the way in which his book forces us to reevaluate the very nature of the God we worship. Read this book. It will awaken your vision of God in wonderful ways!”

“The most difficult questions that can be asked about Scripture include a list of ethical challenges to several Old Testament texts and teachings. These issues have been taken up with more fervor of late, owing to the growing popularity of radical atheism and skepticism. There’s virtually no scholar I’d rather read on these subjects than Paul Copan. Building on his earlier research, Paul launches here into a treatment of a detailed list of such challenges, including the so-called genocidal conquest of Canaan. This handbook of responses to these and other tough ethical issues is able to both diminish the rhetoric as well as alleviate many concerns. I recommend this volume heartily.”

—Gary R. Habermas, distinguished research professor, Liberty University and Seminary

“In a civil and reasoned manner, Paul Copan leads us through the wilderness of challenges to the God and the message of the Old Testament. By amassing and clearly expressing arguments with awareness of the ancient Near Eastern cultural context and of the Hebrew text of the Bible, the author presents a thorough treatment of key issues. This is essential and fascinating reading for anyone engaged in the ‘New Atheism’ debate.”

—Richard S. Hess, Earl S. Kalland Professor of Old Testament and Semitic Languages, Denver Seminary

“Paul Copan has done an outstanding job of explaining some of the most confusing and puzzling issues that emerge from the pages of the Old Testament. He engages with a myriad of serious philosophical and moral challenges to the portrayal of God in the Old Testament, and he answers these challenges adroitly with clear and easy-to-understand explanations from the biblical texts themselves. This is a very readable book, and it will be a valuable resource for all Christians who desire to understand the Old Testament in today’s context. I heartily recommend it!”

—J. Daniel Hays, professor of biblical studies, Ouachita Baptist University

“Paul Copan has written a most powerful and cogent defense of the character of God in the Old Testament in the face of vicious attacks by the New Atheists. . . . I have difficulty finding adequate superlatives to express my joy and satisfaction in the masterful accomplishments of this book. It represents a landmark study of theodicy (the justification of God) in Old Testament ethics. . . . This book not only grapples with specific Old Testament passages and issues but places them in the larger perspectives of God’s universal blessing to all nations, the revelation of God in Jesus Christ in the New Testament, and modern issues such as Islamic jihad and the divine foundation of goodness and morality (vs. the claims of naturalism). For those who struggle with the claims of the New Atheists or have difficulty coming to grips with the picture of God in the Old Testament, this user-friendly book is an indispensable resource!”

—Richard M. Davidson, chair, department of Old Testament, J. N. Andrews Professor of Old Testament Interpretation, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary
Is God a Moral Monster?

Making Sense of the Old Testament God

Paul Copan
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Introduction

Tackling Old Testament ethics is a challenge. Besides a lot of territory to cover, the ancient Near East seems so strange and even otherworldly! We need a good bit of background discussion to help make better sense of this world and of certain Old Testament texts.

Old Testament ethics is one hot topic, and it creates all kinds of reactions—from bewilderment and confusion to anger and outpourings of hostility. I’ve sensed the need for an accessible, less-lengthy book on this topic. Though I’ve done scattered writing on Old Testament ethics in various books and articles, I wanted not only to expand on these themes but also to add a good deal of new material. In this case, I’m killing two birds with one stone—not only tackling a tough subject but also using the New Atheism movement as a springboard for discussion.

As this book is supposed to be reasonably popular-level, I started out with the goal of keeping endnotes to a minimum, but to no avail. Given the nature of this topic, I didn’t want to appear to make claims without some scholarly justification! Along these lines, let me add that my research carefully follows reputable scholars in Old Testament studies. A good number of them assume a high view of Scripture’s authority, while others don’t. This book’s perspective represents a broad general agreement on the main issues I cover. The Old Testament world and literature have their share of murkiness and mystery. So while I might cite scholar X and scholar Y about this or that point in my book, an equally reputable scholar Z may quibble with them (and me!). I don’t want to get sidetracked by detailing all the reasons, pro and con, taken by all sides concerning the various Old Testament ethics topics I discuss. My chief point is this: I am basing my work on thoughtful, credible scholarship that offers plausible, sober-minded explanations and angles that present helpful resolutions and responses to perplexing Old Testament ethics questions.
Another key issue is the relevance of the Old Testament in today’s world. I’ll mention at various points how the Old Testament applies (or doesn’t apply) to Christians, although I can’t go into a lot of detail. Unlike national Israel, God’s people—the new and true Israel—are an interethnic church with a heavenly citizenship. This heavenly citizenship must be of earthly good, however. Christ’s disciples are to live out God’s kingdom values, being salt and light and doers of good. The Christian faith has this-worldly implications. If it doesn’t, it’s not Christian; rather, it’s a detached Gnosticism that ignores culture and ultimately denies reality.

The people of God are no longer national, ethnic Israel, whose homeland is in the Middle East. As the New Testament makes clear, the interethnic Christian community is the true circumcision in Christ whose citizenship is heavenly and who stand in a new relation to the Mosaic law. The law is a part of our heritage and self-understanding, even if a good deal of it doesn’t directly apply to the people of God.

Others have ably shown how the Old Testament should impact Christians: Christopher Wright, William Webb, John Goldingay, Gordon Wenham, Richard Hess, and others. So throughout the book I refer readers to their writings and insights.

I hope and pray that this book will address a vital need in the Christian community, which is often perplexed and sometimes immobilized by these difficult Old Testament texts. In order to facilitate the “digestion process” of this material, I’ve included in the back of the book a study guide for small group discussion in adult Sunday school classes, Bible study groups, and university campus groups.

I would like to thank Richard Hess, Richard Davidson, Tremper Longman, Jerome Walsh, Daniel Hays, and John Goldingay in particular for their comments. I’m grateful for their display of remarkable Christian charity as they’ve responded—sometimes at great length—to emails I’ve written over the past year or so.2 Thanks to Barna Magyarosi for furnishing me with a copy of his dissertation on “holy war.” Thanks too to my colleague Nathan Lane, who made helpful comments on the manuscript.

I’m grateful to my editor Bob Hosack at Baker for his friendship over the years. Thanks too to project editor Wendy Wetzel for her labors and graciousness in working with all of my unscheduled updates and corrections. As ever, many thanks to my wonderfully encouraging and supportive wife and children; they bring immense joy.
PART 1

Neo-Atheism
Who Are the New Atheists?

In February 2007, I was one of several plenary speakers at the Greer-Heard Forum, an annual conference held in New Orleans. This year the topic was “The Future of Atheism.” One featured speaker on the orthodox Christian side was British theologian Alister McGrath. The other far-from-orthodox speaker was Daniel Dennett, the naturalistic evolutionist and philosopher of mind from Tufts University.

This was the first opportunity I had to meet one of the “New Atheists.” My wife and I enjoyed chatting with Dan at meals, and, as his room was right across the hall from ours, we interacted during our comings and goings over the weekend. Dan is a witty, engaging conversationalist with a pleasant life-of-the-party demeanor. His Santa-like face and beard only add to the conviviality.

As a “New Atheist,” Dan is one of several God-deniers writing bestsellers these days. Some have called him one of the “four horsemen”—along with Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, and Christopher Hitchens—of the Neo-atheistic apocalypse. What’s so new about this New Atheism? Hasn’t atheism been around from ancient times? Yes. For example, the pleasure-promoting Epicurus (341–270 BC) and his later admirer Lucretius (94–54 BC) were materialists; that is, they believed that matter is all there is. If deities exist, they’re irrelevant. And when you die, that’s it—over and out.

In more recent history, we’ve had “newer” atheists across the modern and contemporary philosophical landscape—from Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Bertrand Russell to Thomas Nagel, John Searle, Keith Parsons, Graham Oppy, and William Rowe. Atheism is certainly alive and kicking. As we’ll see, the New Atheists add, shall we say, “spice” to the God discussion.
The New Face of Atheism

In the eyes of many, the Christian faith has an image problem. Many unchurched persons have been turned off to “Christianity”—though not necessarily to Jesus. They don’t like politicized religion in America, along with what they see as ample Christian arrogance, hypocrisy, judgmentalism, and disconnectedness from the real world. The perceptions of church outsiders are obviously not totally accurate, but they can often provide an illuminating corrective to help professing Christians to properly align themselves with Jesus their Master.

Due in large part to the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the Pentagon and the Twin Towers, the New Atheists have capitalized on evil done “in the name of religion” to tar all things religious with the same brush. (Of course “religion” is notoriously difficult to define, but the New Atheists aren’t into making nuanced distinctions here.) Neo-atheists are riding the crest of this new wave, capitalizing on the West’s increasingly “post-Christian” status. This current tide of emboldened opposition to the Christian faith lumps Christianity into the same category as radical Islam. Neo-atheists are the new public, popular face of atheism—a topic no longer seemingly limited to ivory tower academics.

Not that the New Atheists have convinced everyone. According to the eminent sociologist Rodney Stark, the New Atheists are making a big media splash and have had several bestsellers to their credit. Many have interpreted this as a sign that multitudes of Americans are ready to renounce God publicly. But for most people, saying they have no religion just means they have no church—not that they’re irreligious. The number of atheists in America in recent history has remained fairly consistent. According to Gallup polls, 4 percent of Americans were atheists back in 2007—the same percentage as in 1944! Rumors of God’s death have been greatly exaggerated. And when we look at the non-Western world, people are becoming Christians in record numbers. The Christian faith is the fastest-growing movement around, often accompanied by signs and wonders, as Penn State historian Philip Jenkins has ably documented.

Whether from atheists or theists, we are seeing something of an all-around consensus about the Neo-atheists’ arguments. First, for all their emphasis on cool-headed, scientific rationality, they express themselves not just passionately but angrily. Rodney Stark describes them as “angry and remarkably nasty atheists.” Christian thinker Michael Novak, author of the thought-provoking book *No One Sees God*, comments about the Neo-atheists’ writings that there’s “an odd defensiveness about all these books—as though they were a sign not of victory but of desperation.”

Dennett tends to be more measured in his criticism of religion. He thinks the jury’s still out on whether religion’s benefits outweigh its deficits—unlike other New Atheists, who insist that religion without exception is downright dangerous. But even so, he doesn’t always fairly engage the opposition by his
selective quoting. And he’s bestowed the name “brights” on the atheistically minded—with a not-so-flattering implication for theists!

The New Atheists are right to point out that manifestations of ignorance, immorality, and hypocrisy characterize professing religious believers of all stripes. In Matthew 7:15–23, Jesus himself warned about morally bankrupt false prophets; they wear sheep’s clothing to cover their wolflike interior. They do outwardly pious acts but are ultimately judged to be “evildoers” (NIV). This is tragic, though anticipated by Jesus and the lot of New Testament authors. And, of course, the discerning person will recognize that Jesus shouldn’t be blamed because of the abuses of his professed followers.

Second, the Neo-atheists’ arguments against God’s existence are surprisingly flimsy, often resembling the simplistic village atheist far more than the credentialed academician. The Neo-atheists are often profoundly ignorant of what they criticize, and they typically receive the greatest laughs and cheers from the philosophically and theologically challenged. True, they effectively utilize a combination of emotion and verbal rhetoric, but they aren’t known for logically carrying thoughts through from beginning to end. Their arguments against God’s existence aren’t intellectually rigorous—although they want to give that impression. Yes, they’ll raise some important questions concerning, for example, the problem of evil, but again, their arguments are a collage of rhetorical barbs that don’t really form a coherent argument. I’ve observed that while these men do have expertise in certain fields (biology and evolutionary theory in the case of Dawkins and Dennett), they turn out to be fairly disappointing when arguing against God’s existence or Christian doctrine. And a quick check of Dawkins’s documentation reveals a lot more time spent on Google than at Oxford University’s Bodleian Library.

Pulitzer Prize–winning journalist Chris Hedges is the author of I Don’t Believe in Atheists and certainly no friend of conservative Christians. He chastises Sam Harris for his “facile attack on a form of religious belief we all hate” and “his childish simplicity and ignorance of world affairs.” The Christian can rightly join Hedges and the New Atheists’ disgust at “the chauvinism, intolerance, anti-intellectualism and self-righteousness of religious fundamentalists” without buying into their arguments. Rodney Stark puts it this way: “To expect to learn anything about important theological problems from Richard Dawkins or Daniel Dennett is like expecting to learn about medieval history from someone who had only read Robin Hood.”

Yes, it’s easy to attack a caricature with emotionalism and simplistic slogans. So with the New Atheists “going village” on us, this makes it hard to have a decent conversation. What has amazed me is that so many have been intellectually swindled by such fallacious argumentation and blustery rhetoric.

Don’t just take it from me. The atheist philosopher of science Michael Ruse says that Dawkins’s arguments are so bad that he’s embarrassed to call himself an atheist. Terry Eagleton, an English literature and cultural theory professor,
severely criticizes “Ditchkins”—his composite name for Dawkins and Hitchens. He considers them to be both out of their depth and misrepresenters of the Christian faith: “they invariably come up with vulgar caricatures of religious faith that would make a first-year theology student wince. The more they detest religion, the more ill-informed their criticisms of it tend to be.”

In a book I coedited with fellow philosopher William Lane Craig, he wrote an essay titled “Dawkins’s Delusion,” which responds to Dawkins’s book *The God Delusion*. Craig does his best to piece together Dawkins’s argument against God’s existence, which is really “embarrassingly weak.” At the end of his essay, Craig writes:

> Several years ago my atheist colleague Quentin Smith unceremoniously crowned Stephen Hawking’s argument against God in *A Brief History of Time* as “the worst atheistic argument in the history of Western thought.” With the advent of *The God Delusion* the time has come, I think, to relieve Hawking of this weighty crown and to recognize Richard Dawkins’ accession to the throne.

**Third, the New Atheists aren’t willing to own up to atrocities committed in the name of atheism by Stalin, Pol Pot, or Mao Zedong, yet they expect Christians to own up to all barbarous acts performed in Jesus’s name.** In one debate, Dennett refused to connect Stalin’s brutality and inhumanity with his hard-core atheism. In fact, he claimed that Stalin was a kind of “religious” figure! In September 2009, I attended a debate between Hitchens and Dinesh D’Souza in Orlando. Hitchens refused to admit that Stalin killed “in the name of atheism.” Somehow Stalin, who had once attended a Russian Orthodox seminary but later came to convincingly repudiate Christianity, was still “religious” after all. Yet Hitchens insisted that a religious residue still stayed with him. So atheism wasn’t the culprit. Yet in another debate, Hitchens was pressed to make the seemingly rare confession: “It has to be said that some of my non-believing forbears seized the opportunity to behave the same way [as immoral religious persons], sure.”

I think the reason it’s difficult, if not impossible, for these New Atheists to acknowledge immorality in the name of atheism is because it would take much wind out of their sails when criticizing religion. If we’d stop to ask, “Would Jesus approve of the Inquisition or persecuting Jews?” the question answers itself. As a counterillustration, what about serial murderer and cannibal Jeffrey Dahmer? Dahmer reasoned, “If it all happens naturalistically, what’s the need for a God? Can’t I set my own rules? Who owns me? I own myself.” He wondered, if there’s no God and we all just came “from the slime,” then “what’s the point of trying to modify your behavior to keep it within acceptable ranges?”

The reverse side of the coin is New Atheists’ refusal (or great reluctance) to acknowledge the profound, well-documented positive influence of Christian
faith in the world. This list of contributions includes preserving literature, advancing education, laying the foundations of modern science, cultivating art and music, promoting human rights and providing better working conditions for persons, and overthrowing slavery. These contributions are acknowledged by atheists and theists alike. For the New Atheists, religion poisons everything, and atheism poisons nothing!

We’ll come back to this later. But for now I’m just registering my complaint.

One Unaddressed Area

Despite the strong intellectual response to New Atheism, one area left unaddressed is that of Old Testament ethics. In some ways, this topic is probably most deserving of our attention and clarification. The New Atheists commonly raise questions about strange and harsh Old Testament laws, a God of jealousy and anger, slavery, and the killing of the Canaanites—and that’s just the beginning of the list. Not only this, but they’re usually just as simplistic and uninformed here as in their general attacks on religion.

As I’ve done some writing in this area, I wanted to use the New Atheists’ critiques as a springboard to clarify and iron out misunderstandings and misrepresentations. It’s not an easy area to cover, as the ancient Near East is a world that often seems so bizarre to us. As we explore some of the main criticisms of Old Testament ethics (we can’t cover them all here), hopefully we’ll gain a new appreciation for what is going on in the Old Testament, especially when we compare it to other ancient Near East cultures.

Further Reading


The New Atheists and the Old Testament God

As I write this book, the Neo-atheists are not quite as cutting edge as they once were. They’re so 2006! Yet they dig up the dirt on many perennial Old Testament ethical challenges, and Bible believers shouldn’t shove them under their holy rugs. As people of the Book, Christians should honestly reflect on such matters. Unfortunately, most pastors and Christian leaders are reluctant to tackle such subjects, and the results are fairly predictable. When uninformed Christians are challenged about these texts, they may be rattled in their faith.

The ancient heretic Marcion rejected the seemingly harsh Creator and God of the Israelites for a New Testament God of love—a heavenly Father. Likewise, the New Atheists aren’t too impressed with Yahweh—one of the Hebrew names for God in the Old Testament. Christopher Hitchens’s book title expresses it: God Is Not Great. This is in contrast to the Muslim’s call, Allahu akbar, “God is great(er).” Richard Dawkins calls God a “moral monster.” As we read the New Atheists, we can compile quite a catalog of alleged offenses. Let’s start with Dawkins and work our way down the list.

Dawkins deems God’s commanding Abraham to sacrifice Isaac (see Gen. 22) to be “disgraceful” and tantamount to “child abuse and bullying.” Moreover, this God breaks into a “monumental rage whenever his chosen people flirted with a rival god,” resembling “nothing so much as sexual jealousy of the worst kind.” Add to this the killing of the Canaanites—an “ethnic cleansing” in which “bloodthirsty massacres” were carried out with “xenophobic relish.”
Joshua’s destruction of Jericho is “morally indistinguishable from Hitler’s invasion of Poland, or Saddam Hussein’s massacres of the Kurds and the Marsh Arabs.” This is just one example of why religion is, as Dawkins’s 2006 BBC documentary phrases it, “the root of all evil.”

To make matters worse, Dawkins points out the “ubiquitous weirdness of the Bible.” Many biblical characters engaged in morally scummy acts. Here’s a sampling:

- A drunken Lot was seduced by his recently widowed daughters, who eventually bore his children (Gen. 19:31–36).
- Abraham gave a repeat performance of lying about his wife (Gen. 12:18–19; 20:1–13).
- Jephthah made a foolish vow that resulted in his daughter being sacrificed as a burnt offering (Judg. 11).
- David power-raped Bathsheba and engaged in murderous treachery toward her husband, Uriah—one of David’s loyal “mighty men” (2 Sam. 11; 23:39).

We can add more to the list. Dawkins’s most notable description of Yahweh is this one:

The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully.

Then there’s Dan Dennett. He declares that the “Old Testament Jehovah” is simply a super-man who “could take sides in battles, and be both jealous and wrathful.” He happens to be more forgiving and loving in the New Testament. Dennett adds, “Part of what makes Jehovah such a fascinating participant in stories of the Old Testament is His kinglike jealousy and pride, and His great appetite for praise and sacrifices. But we have moved beyond this God (haven’t we?).” He thanks “heaven” that those thinking blasphemy or adultery deserves capital punishment are a “dwindling minority.”

Christopher Hitchens (who at the time of this writing is grappling with esophageal cancer and for whom many of us are praying) voices similar complaints. Chapter 7 of God Is Not Great is titled “Revelation: The Nightmare of the Old Testament,” noting God’s “unalterable laws.” The forgotten Canaanites were “pitilessly driven out of their homes to make room for the ungrateful and mutinous children of Israel.” Moreover, the Old Testament contains “a warrant for trafficking in humans, for ethnic cleansing, for slavery, for bride-price, and for indiscriminate massacre, but we are not bound by...
any of it because it was put together by crude, uncultured human animals." And the Ten Commandments are “proof that religion is manmade.” For one thing, you don’t need God to tell you that murder is wrong; this information is available to all humans.⁶

Sam Harris similarly chimes in. His *Letter to a Christian Nation* deliberately sets out to “demolish the intellectual and moral pretensions of Christianity in its most committed forms.” If the Bible is true, then we should be stoning people to death for heresy, adultery, homosexuality, worshiping graven images, and “other imaginary crimes.” In fact, putting to death idolaters in our midst (see Deut. 13:6–15) reflects “God’s timeless wisdom.”⁷

In *The End of Faith*, Harris, referring to Deuteronomy 13:6–11, insists that the consistent Bible believer should stone his son or daughter if she comes home from a yoga class a devotee of Krishna. Harris wryly quips that one of the Old Testament’s “barbarisms”—stoning children for heresy—“has fallen out of fashion in our country.”⁸

Harris reminds Bible-believers that once we recognize that slaves are human beings who are equally capable of suffering and happiness, we’ll understand that it is “patently evil to own them and treat them like farm equipment.”

A few pages later, Harris claims we can be good without God. We do not need God or a Bible to tell us what’s right and what’s wrong. We can know objective moral truths without “the existence of a lawgiving God,” and we can judge Hitler to be morally reprehensible “without reference to scripture.”⁹ Harris calls this “the myth of secular moral chaos”—that morality will crumble if people don’t have a Bible or if they happen not to believe in God.

We’ve accumulated quite a working list of charges coming from the New Atheists:

- Canaanite “genocide”
- the binding of Isaac
- a jealous, egocentric deity
- ethnocentrism/racism
- chattel slavery
- bride-price
- women as inferior to men
- harsh laws in Israel
- the Mosaic law as perfect and permanently binding for all nations
- the irrelevance of God for morality

I don’t want to give the impression that all of these questions are easily solved. The noted Christian Old Testament scholar Christopher Wright has written a direct, honest exploration of certain Old Testament difficulties, es-
pecialy the Canaanite question, in *The God I Don’t Understand.* Will gaps in our understanding of these texts still exist? Will some of our questions remain unanswered? Yes and amen. But I believe that with patience, charity, and humility we can navigate these waters with greater skill, arriving at far more satisfactory answers than the New Atheists allow.

One big problem for any interpreter is this: we’re dealing with an Old Testament text that is remote in both time and culture. In many cases, the New Atheists aren’t all that patient in their attempts to understand a complex text, historical contexts, and the broader biblical canon. Yet this is what we need to do and what this book attempts to do at a popular level.

In each chapter, I’ll be borrowing from the phrases of these Neo-atheists to frame the discussion. Hopefully, we can see these Old Testament ethical issues in their proper context. In doing so, we’ll get a firmer grasp on what the Old Testament ethical issues really are and how we should assess them.

**Further Reading**