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God is Good: Exploring the Character of the Biblical God

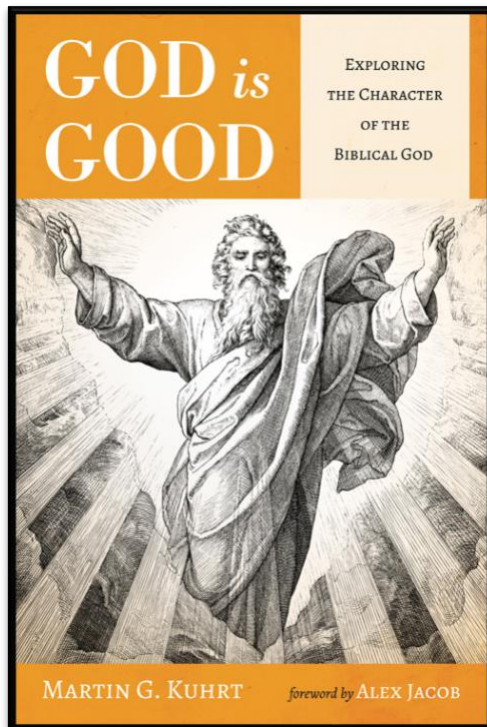
by Martin G. Kuhrt

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New Title from Martin G. Kuhrt
God is Good: Exploring the Character of the Biblical God



Is the God of the Bible the most unpleasant character in all fiction, as Richard Dawkins claims in *The God Delusion*? He is backed up by former preacher and now virulent atheist, Dan Barker, who has cited Scripture, seeking to justify every one of Dawkins's infamous character slurs about the God of the Old Testament. Dawkins says the biblical God is "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." Barker has added eight accusations of his own. Dawkins was too kind, he says. The God of the Bible is also "a pyromaniacal, angry, merciless, curse hurling, vaccicidal, aborticidal, cannibalistic slavemonger." Furthermore, Barker thoroughly implicates Jesus in the alleged crimes of his Father. *God is Good* seeks to answer every one of these twenty-seven accusations. Written for theological students, pastors, preachers, thoughtful laypeople who wince at some of what they read in the Bible, and those atheists who are honestly searching for truth, this book ducks none of the difficult questions and problematic passages.

Martin G. Kuhrt is vicar of the Church of the Holy Spirit, Aylesbury, in the United Kingdom. After a brief flirtation with the legal profession, he was ordained into ministry in the Church of England twenty-four years ago, serving in various parishes and as a chaplain to the international community of Lee Abbey in Devon. He is married to Anna and has four children in full-time education, three golden retriever breeding dogs, and two guinea pigs.



What is this book about?

It is a reply to the so-called “new atheists” who say that the character of the God presented in the Bible is deeply unpleasant. Richard Dawkins wrote in *The God Delusion* that the God of the Old Testament is “probably the most unpleasant character in all fiction,” listing nineteen slurs including accusations that this God is an unjust, unforgiving, genocidal, racist, misogynistic, homophobic, pestilential bully. Dan Barker, in the United States, has written a book seeking to justify all these slurs and has added some of his own. Barker also thoroughly implicates Jesus in the alleged crimes of his Father.

Who is it written for?

It’s for theological students, preachers, pastors and thoughtful Christians who might struggle to explain parts of the Bible and respond to its critics. I hope also that non-believers (including Richard Dawkins) will read it in order to honestly engage with what Christians really believe.

Other people have written responses to the New Atheists. What is different about this book?

This book is distinctive in that it concentrates on the character of the biblical God which has come under attack by Dawkins and others. It does not deal with philosophical arguments over the existence of God or respond to their criticisms of “organized religion,” nor does it explore the therapeutic benefits of Christian belief today. On the other hand, I don’t know of any other book that so comprehensively faces all the “problem passages” in the Old Testament while stressing the continuity between Old and New.

Why did you write it?

On Christmas Day 2018 I received a strange present from my brother Stephen who is also a Christian minister and author. It was the tenth anniversary edition of *The God Delusion*. I happened to notice in Daniel Dennett’s afterword a reference to the book Dan Barker had written seeking to back up the infamous Dawkins’ paragraph referred to above. Dennett boasted that no Christian had been able to respond point by point to all these charges against the biblical God and that he didn’t expect it to happen anytime soon. I felt prompted to pick up the gauntlet.

Why is it called “God is Good”?

I wanted a simple title that pointed to the basic character of God as compared to the moral criticisms leveled against Him. The title could have been “God is Love”, but the word “love” needs to be understood in the context of all the moral qualities of God. Some people think that a “god of love” must be an indulgent, “anything goes” kind of god.

What was the most difficult chapter to write?

The chapters dealing with the accusations of brutality required careful study and reflection. The theme of violence and war is a prominent one in Scripture, and there is no getting round that. There is a deeply entrenched view, which many Christians tend to share in one way or another, that the God of the New Testament is a nicer God than the one presented in the Old Testament. Challenging this assumption means seeking to convey the seriousness of sin and warning of spiritual realities that seem far-fetched to many who feel quite at home in the world today.

What do you hope the book will achieve?

I hope the book will cause people to return to reading the Bible carefully and respecting the fact that the whole Bible is God's word. I hope it will increase confidence that the Bible is reliable in presenting the truly authentic, good God of Love, and that troubling parts of Scripture should be wrestled with in an attitude of humble, persistent faith, so that we will become wise unto salvation, mature disciples and equipped for every good work in the name of Jesus Christ.

An Excerpt from *God is Good: Exploring the Character of the Biblical God*

In 2006 the first edition of Richard Dawkins's *The God Delusion* was published and in the following ten years some three million copies were sold.

The book contains many lines of attack against monotheistic faith. Christian writers have defended their beliefs against the broad range of his arguments.

This book is mainly an attempt to tackle just one paragraph, albeit an infamous one. Dawkins wrote,

“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.”

These words inspired American preacher-turned-atheist Dan Barker to write a book seeking to justify every one of these accusations—a chapter for each one. There are nineteen in all plus another eight he has thought up himself and added for good measure. Dawkins was too kind, he says. God is also a “. . . pyromaniacal, angry, merciless, curse hurling, vaccicidal, aborticidal, cannibalistic slavemonger.”

Daniel Dennett, another book-writing atheist, in his afterword to the tenth anniversary edition of *The God Delusion*, referring to the criticism the Dawkins paragraph provoked, concedes that it is indeed a startling one, but says, “aside from deploring it, who has the temerity to go through it, point by point and dispute it? As Dawkins notes, Dan Barker has published a rollicking case for the prosecution, God: The Most Unpleasant Character in all Fiction, citing chapter and verse for each feature. The ball is in the critics’ court but I don’t expect to see a return of service.”

Well this book is a return of service. In each chapter I will respond to one of the now twenty-seven charges. The final three chapters specifically address the Jesus of the Gospels and his attitude to the Hebrew Scriptures (what Christians call the Old Testament), the general question of biblical authority and a final word on the character of God as revealed by the Old Testament.

First, I would like to make two general points. Dawkins and Barker are entitled to their opinion that the Bible is a work of fiction. However, they should at least then treat the biblical books as having literary integrity within themselves, as they would with works of fiction generally. If they did this, it would challenge some of the aspersions they cast on the character of the biblical God.

So, for example, the God who tells Abraham to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice is portrayed in the narrative of Genesis as the God who created all life and who promised Abraham that his millions of descendants would trace their line from Isaac. Isaac was the miracle child born to Sarah in her barren old age that God promised him a year earlier. So Abraham, as the writer of the New Testament book of Hebrews comments, reasoned (on the basis of God being faithful in the past and all powerful and good enough to keep his promises in the future) that God would raise Isaac to life again to fulfil what he said he would do. Thus Abraham figured God was not asking him to do anything that as an omnipotent deity he could not undo, and wanted him to simply trust in his goodness and power. (See chapter fourteen for all the problems associated with this story and the accusation that the biblical God is filicidal.)

Praise for *God is Good: Exploring the Character of the Biblical God*

“At the heart of the challenge of the new atheists to Christian faith lies their attack on the very character of God. In this brilliantly written book, Martin Kuhrt does a spectacular job responding to many of their common accusations. Biblically grounded, well argued, meticulously detailed, generous to his opponents, and very accessible—*God is Good* is the ideal book for Christians seeking for help responding to atheist friends, or for skeptics willing to take the trouble to discover what Christians actually believe. A timely, important book.”

—Andy Bannister, Director, Solas Centre for Public Christianity

“Richard Dawkins and his followers spew out adjectives in an attempt to discredit the God made known to us in the Bible. By contrast, Martin Kuhrt here shows that when the Bible is read carefully and with attentiveness to its real content, it shows us a God who is good and worthy of worship. This is indeed good news.”

—David Firth, Tutor in Old Testament, Academic Dean, Trinity College Bristol

“In their attacks on Christianity and the Bible, Richard Dawkins and his friends think they have served up a bunch of unreturnable ‘aces.’ But Martin Kuhrt returns them all. He is gritty, passionate, argumentative, and very readable in this book. He combines his understanding of the new atheists with his massive Bible knowledge and peppers the whole book with lots of illustrations and personal stories. If you are struggling with these issues this is a great book to read.”

—Robin Gamble, Bishops’ Adviser for Church Growth, Diocese of Leeds

“Martin Kuhrt has given us an outstanding resource in answering many of the genuine and difficult questions leveled at the Christian faith. This is a brilliant, pastoral, accessible, biblical, and ultimately compelling apologetic for the God who is good.”

—Simon Ponsonby, Teaching Pastor, St Aldates Oxford

“This well-written and carefully researched book is a detailed, informative, and comprehensive response to the biblical criticism of the new atheists. Martin goes out of his way to help us read and understand these ancient accounts, not shying away at all from the difficult issues often raised about the Old Testament. The reader comes away with a fuller, richer, more rounded understanding of these Scriptures, better equipped to understand the wisdom, justice, and mercy of God. A book not only for reading, but for referencing when needing insight into complex biblical passages.”

—Dave Hopwood, author, speaker, and biblical dramatist

“Martin Kuhrt gives Christians a biblical defense to an aggressive atheistic challenge! An encouraging and positive exposition of what our God is really like. Pastors could use this material in a preaching series and all of us would benefit from a careful reading of this book.”

—**Stephen Gaukroger, international Bible teacher, entrepreneur, and author**

“I commend this book to Christians who want to face up to the undoubted challenges in the Bible about the nature of God. I hope Richard Dawkins and Dan Barker will read it too!”

—**Don Brewin, former Director of SOMA (Sharing of Ministries Abroad)**

“As the leader of Flame International, which ministers God’s healing to the spirits, souls, and bodies of the poorest of people made in his image, I read this book with wonder. Martin has written with an insight and revelation into biblical truth from both the Old and New Testaments that I have not come across before. I have personally been challenged and given fresh understanding of the nature of God. May I commend this book to readers who want new insights into the character of the God of the Bible. The chapter on forgiveness, for example, is truly inspiring, and I believe that as people apply what they read this book will be life changing.”

—**Jan Ransom, Director of Flame International**

