
Introduction: The Focus of this Book

Atheism is nothing new. The fact that there are atheists in the world is not surprising, but what is different today, as compared with thirty years ago, is that they are very loud, adamant, and angry. They have no trouble getting into people's faces to denigrate belief in God, to support their atheistic views, and to try to limit the influence of religion in modern society. Globalization and secularization, along with social media that allows people to share their views with a worldwide audience, are some of the factors that have promoted their rise to prominence. Several atheists have been at the forefront of the attack on religion and belief in God. The 'four horsemen' spearheading this movement are Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens, and Daniel Dennett.¹ They

1. Christopher Hitchens, Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, and Daniel Dennett, *The Four Horsemen: A Conversation that Sparked an Atheist Revolution* (Random House, 2019).

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express themselves with great passion, even anger, and are not afraid to call religion dangerous for human society and something that must be destroyed.²

Although they make a lot of noise, the new atheists are not necessarily succeeding in their attempts of eradicating the influence of religion from society. The Western world has seen a progression in secularization, but other parts of the world have seen the growth of Christianity, as well as other religions. Statistics show that China could be a majority-Christian country by 2050. It is projected that by 2060, Christianity will still be the largest belief system with about 32 percent of the world's population. Other religions, like Islam, are also growing. The proportion of humanity identifying as atheists is projected to decline from 16 to 13 percent. Although many Americans are becoming nonreligious, 40 percent of Americans raised nonreligious become religious (typically Christian) as adults, while only 20 percent of those raised Protestant make the switch to atheism. These statistics have led many to argue that secularization has failed to capture the hearts and minds of most people.³ Whether or not that is true, the new atheists need to be answered.

2. Paul Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster? Making Sense of the Old Testament God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), p. 15.

3. For the sources of the statistical evidence see Rebecca McLaughlin, *Confronting Christianity: 12 Hard Questions for the World's Largest Religion* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2019), pp. 11-15.

This book will address some of the specific charges that Dawkins has made against the God of the Bible in his book *The God Delusion*.⁴ He is an influential, popular author who is not afraid to state his views with passion, boldness, and bluntness.⁵ It is easy to take verses from the Bible out of context, put them on a meme, and make the God of the Bible look like a tyrannical despot. To present an accurate picture of God, we will have to look at how the Bible presents God. The Bible claims to be the revelation of His character and His plan for human beings and the world we live in. Thus, we must honestly examine the Bible's view of God to accurately understand Him. Even if you do not believe what the Bible says, at least you should be concerned with an accurate view of what the Bible says about God; otherwise, you will not be taken seriously by most Christians.

Once we see this fundamental, pervasive, biblical teaching about the character and plan of God, we can also see why Dawkins's charges against God based on certain Old Testament passages lack plausibility. Dawkins displays little awareness of the overall biblical narrative that informs and illuminates the texts he cites. One

4. Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2008).

5. Richard Dawkins is included in the Great Thinkers series published by P&R not because he is a great thinker but because of his influence. See Ranson Poythress, *Richard Dawkins* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2018), pp. xvii-xix.

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main aim of this book is to make this connection clear. By the time you finish chapters 1–3, you will be in a good position to see why Dawkins' charges against God, surveyed in chapters 4 to 6, are implausible.

We will begin in Chapter 1 with a discussion of the goodness of God and its implications for our lives. Chapter 2 will show that God has both the power and the desire to save us from what has held us back from being fulfilled in life. Chapter 3 shows that God's justice is a necessary and beneficial attribute for us to celebrate because it means that the injustices that we face in life will not ultimately triumph. Chapter 4 covers 'texts of violence' on which the charge is made that God is a violent God of genocide, delighting in the destruction of people. Chapter 5 addresses the charge that God is a cruel, racist, and misogynist God who oppresses certain groups of people. Chapter 6 examines the exclusive claims of God and seeks to answer the charge that He is a megalomaniac. Chapter 7 examines the charge that religion is the greatest threat that society faces and shows that getting rid of religion is not the answer to the problems of the world. In fact, horrible relationships develop among people in societies that live without God. We hope to show that the God of the Bible, particularly the God of the Old Testament, is not the moral monster that many have portrayed Him to be. It is impossible to do this without examining the Bible.

I encourage everyone to read the Bible. But be careful, it is a powerful book that has changed people's lives.⁶

6. For a riveting example of how the Bible has changed someone's life see Rosaria Butterfield, *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert: An English Professor's Journey into Christian Faith*, 2nd ed. (Pittsburgh: Crown & Covenant Publications, 2014); for other examples see William Edgar, *Does Christianity Really Work?* (Ross-shire: Christian Focus Publications, 2016).