

## Interpretation & Application – “What does it mean and what am I going to do about it?”

### Did God ever Require or Reward Human Sacrifice?

1. Sam Harris claims that God required or rewarded human sacrifice in the OT. (Letter to a Christian Nation, P. 97)

Of course, the God of Abraham was no stranger to ritual murder. **Occasionally, He condemns the practice** (Deuteronomy 12:31; Jeremiah 19:4-5; Ezekiel 16:20-21); **at other points, He requires or rewards it** (Exodus 22:29-30; Judges 11:29-40; 1 Kings 13:1-2; 2 Kings 3:27; 2 Kings 23:20-25; Numbers 31:40, Deuteronomy 13:13-19). In the case of Abraham, God demands that he sacrifice his son Isaac but then stays his hand at the last moment (Genesis 22:1-18), without ever suggesting that the act of slaughtering one's own child is immoral. Elsewhere, God confesses to inspiring human sacrifice so as to defile its practitioners (Ezekiel 20:26), while getting into the act Himself by slaying the firstborn of Egypt (Exodus 11:5). The rite of circumcision emerges as a surrogate for child sacrifice (Exodus 4:24-26), and God seems to generally encourage the substitution of animals for people. Indeed, His thirst for the blood of animals, as well as His attentiveness to the niceties of their slaughter and holocaust, is almost impossible to exaggerate. (Letter to a Christian Nation, P. 97)

[http://www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=Sam+Harris+on+human+sacrifice&sm=3](http://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=Sam+Harris+on+human+sacrifice&sm=3) 2:34-3:56

2. Sam Harris is completely wrong. Had he read the context he'd see that these texts do not at all require or reward human sacrifice.
3. God explicitly forbids child sacrifice. (Lev. 18:21; Deut. 12:29-31; 2 Kings 17:16-18; Jer. 19:4-6; Jer. 32:35; Ezek. 16:20-21; Psalm 106:34-40)

Lev. 18:21 You shall not give any of your offspring to offer them to Molech, nor shall you profane the name of your God; I am the LORD.

Deut. 12:29-31 “When the LORD your God cuts off before you the nations which you are going in to dispossess, and you dispossess them and dwell in their land,<sup>30</sup> beware that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, ‘How do these nations serve their gods, that I also may do likewise?’<sup>31</sup> You shall not behave thus toward the LORD your God, for every abominable act which the LORD hates they have done for their gods; for they even burn their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods.

2 Kings 17:16-18 They forsook all the commandments of the LORD their God and made for themselves molten images, *even* two calves, and made an Asherah and worshiped all the host of heaven and served Baal.<sup>17</sup> Then they made their sons and their daughters pass through the fire, and practiced divination and enchantments, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking Him.<sup>18</sup> So the LORD was very angry with Israel and removed them from His sight; none was left except the tribe of Judah.

Jeremiah 19:4-6 Because they have forsaken Me and have made this an alien place and have burned sacrifices in it to other gods, that neither they nor their forefathers nor the kings of Judah had *ever* known, and *because* they have filled this place with the blood of the innocent<sup>5</sup> and have built the high places of Baal to burn their sons in the fire as burnt offerings to Baal, a thing which I never commanded or spoke of, **nor did it ever enter My mind;**<sup>6</sup> therefore, behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when this place will no longer be called Topheth or the valley of Ben-hinnom, but rather the valley of Slaughter.

Jeremiah 32:35 They built the high places of Baal that are in the valley of Ben-hinnom to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through *the fire* to Molech, which I had not commanded them **nor had it entered My mind that they should do this abomination,** to cause Judah to sin.

Ezekiel 16:20-21 “Moreover, you took your sons and daughters whom you had borne to Me and sacrificed them to idols to be devoured. Were your harlotries so small a matter?<sup>21</sup> You slaughtered My children and offered them up to idols by causing them to pass through *the fire*.

Psalm 106:34-40

<sup>34</sup> They did not destroy the peoples,

As the LORD commanded them,

<sup>35</sup> But they mingled with the nations

And learned their practices,

<sup>36</sup> And served their idols,

Which became a snare to them.

<sup>37</sup> They even sacrificed their sons and their daughters to the demons,

<sup>38</sup> And shed innocent blood,

The blood of their sons and their daughters,

Whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan;

And the land was polluted with the blood.

<sup>39</sup> Thus they became unclean in their practices,  
And played the harlot in their deeds.

<sup>40</sup> Therefore the anger of the LORD was kindled against His people  
And He abhorred His inheritance.

4. In addition to Genesis 22:1-18 (See Nov. 24, 2013 sermon) Harris lists ten OT scripture references as support for his claim that God requires or rewards ritual murder (ritual murder is killing someone as part of a religious ritual, or in other words, human sacrifice). (*Letter*, p. 97) Let's look at these verses.

### Exodus 22:29-30

<sup>29</sup> “You shall not delay *the offering from* your harvest and your vintage. **The firstborn of your sons you shall give to Me.** <sup>30</sup> You shall do the same with your oxen *and* with your sheep. It shall be with its mother seven days; on the eighth day you shall give it to Me.

1. Every 1<sup>st</sup> born son was God's and **had** to be redeemed with an offering of five shekels of silver.

Exodus 13:2, 12-13; <sup>2</sup> “Sanctify to Me every firstborn, the first offspring of every womb among the sons of Israel, both of man and beast; it belongs to Me.”... <sup>12</sup> you shall devote to the LORD the first offspring of every womb, and the first offspring of every beast that you own; the males belong to the LORD. <sup>13</sup> But every first offspring of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb, but if you do not redeem *it*, then you shall break its neck; and every firstborn of man among your sons you shall redeem.

Exodus 34:19-20; <sup>19</sup> “The first offspring from every womb belongs to Me, and all your male livestock, the first offspring from cattle and sheep. <sup>20</sup> You shall redeem with a lamb the first offspring from a donkey; and if you do not redeem *it*, then you shall break its neck. You shall redeem all the firstborn of your sons. None shall appear before Me empty-handed.

Numbers 18:15-16 <sup>15</sup> Every first issue of the womb of all flesh, whether man or animal, which they offer to the LORD, shall be yours; nevertheless the firstborn of man you shall surely redeem, and the firstborn of unclean animals you shall redeem. <sup>16</sup> As to their redemption price, from a month old you shall redeem them, by your valuation, five shekels in silver, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, which is twenty gerahs.

2. Firstborn males were the property of God. Since the priestly tribe of Levi had been set apart in their stead, the firstborn in other tribes needed be ransomed through payment of a nominal redemption price to the priest. (See Numbers 8:14-18)

<sup>14</sup> “Thus you shall separate the Levites from among the sons of Israel, and the Levites shall be Mine. <sup>15</sup> Then after that the Levites may go in to serve the tent of meeting. But you shall cleanse them and present them as a wave offering; <sup>16</sup> for they are wholly given to Me from among the sons of Israel. I have taken them for Myself instead of every first issue of the womb, the firstborn of all the sons of Israel. <sup>17</sup> For every firstborn among the sons of Israel is Mine, among the men and among the animals; on the day that I struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt I sanctified them for Myself. <sup>18</sup> But I have taken the Levites instead of every firstborn among the sons of Israel.

3. Human sacrifice was not required nor rewarded in these verses. It's not even in view in these verses.

### Judges 11:29-40

<sup>29</sup> Now the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah, so that he passed through Gilead and Manasseh; then he passed through Mizpah of Gilead, and from Mizpah of Gilead he went on to the sons of Ammon. <sup>30</sup> Jephthah made a vow to the LORD and said, “If You will indeed give the sons of Ammon into my hand, <sup>31</sup> then it shall be that whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the sons of Ammon, it shall be the LORD'S, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering.” <sup>32</sup> So Jephthah crossed over to the sons of Ammon to fight against them; and the LORD gave them into his hand. <sup>33</sup> He struck them with a very great slaughter from Aroer to the entrance of Minnith, twenty cities, and as far as Abel-keramim. So the sons of Ammon were subdued before the sons of Israel.

<sup>34</sup> When Jephthah came to his house at Mizpah, behold, his daughter was coming out to meet him with tambourines and with dancing. Now she was his one *and* only child; besides her he had no son or daughter. <sup>35</sup> When he saw her, he tore his clothes and said, “Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low, and you are among those who trouble me; for I have given my word to the LORD, and I cannot take *it* back.” <sup>36</sup> So she said to him, “My father, you have given your word to the LORD; do to me as you have said, since the LORD has avenged you of your enemies, the sons of Ammon.” <sup>37</sup> She said to her father, “Let this thing be done for me; let me alone two months, that I may go to the mountains and weep because of my virginity, I and my companions.” <sup>38</sup> Then he said, “Go.” So he sent her away for two months; and she left with her companions, and wept on the mountains because of her virginity. <sup>39</sup> At the end of two months she returned to her father, who did to her according to the vow which he had made; and she had no relations with a man. Thus it became a custom in Israel, <sup>40</sup> that the daughters of Israel went yearly to commemorate the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in the year.

Before going into battle, Jephthah made a vow to God that if the Lord gave him victory over the Ammonites, Jephthah would make a burnt offering of the first thing he saw coming out of his house after the war. In those times, the Jews often kept animals stabled

in a ground floor enclosure, while the family lived on the second floor. The Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah. He led the Gileadite army to destroy 20 Ammonite towns, but when Jephthah returned to his home at Mizpah, something terrible happened. The first thing that came out of his house was not an animal, but his young daughter, his only child. The Bible tells us Jephthah kept his vow. It does **not say** whether he sacrificed his daughter or whether he consecrated her to God as a perpetual virgin--which meant he would have no family line, a disgrace in ancient times.

### The “sacrifice view”

1. Just because God granted him victory does not mean the Lord endorsed Jephthah’s vow.

God used Jephthah as a judge to protect the people of Israel against the people of Ammon who were oppressing them. The Bible does not state that God approved of Jephthah’s vow. In fact, throughout the period of the Judges, God used certain men, even some ungodly men, to free the Israelites from their oppressors. Prior to this battle, the Bible reveals that Jephthah was part of a group of “worthless men” (*Judges 11:3*). He is never described as a godly man.<sup>1</sup> So it seems that God would have granted the victory to Jephthah with or without a vow because He was protecting Israel. This is a classic example of critics turning an inference into an implication. In other words, they have assumed, since God granted victory to Jephthah and the Israelites, that He must have been pleased with the vow and subsequent sacrifice as well. **Or as Harris says, God rewarded Jephthah vow to sacrifice his daughter as a human sacrifice, by granting him the victory.** Yet God has often used sinful people and nations to accomplish His will without endorsing their wicked ways. He used the Babylonians to conquer Judah and to lead the people away to Babylon, but He never condoned the pagan religious practices of the Babylonians. Jephthah is listed in Hebrews 11, which is often called the “Faith Hall of Fame,” but it is important to notice that he is listed with Gideon, Barak, and Samson (*Hebrews 11:32*). When they trusted Him, God used these men to win important victories in the book of Judges, but each of them had serious problems, such as idolatry (*Judges 8:27*), cowardice (*Judges 4:8*), and infidelity (*Judges 16:1*), respectively. So we should not necessarily hold them up as examples of godliness.

2. If Jephthah offered a human sacrifice, he did something that was strictly forbidden by Mosaic law and that was repugnant to God (Leviticus 18:21; 20:2-5; Deuteronomy 12:31; 18:10).
3. If Jephthah offered his daughter as a human sacrifice, no indication is given in the text that God [approved](#) of the action.

The Bible records many illicit actions carried out by numerous individuals throughout history, without an accompanying word of condemnation by the inspired writer. We must not assume that silence is evidence of divine approval. Even the commendation of Jephthah’s faith in the New Testament does not offer a blanket endorsement to **everything** Jephthah did during his lifetime. It merely commended the faith that he demonstrated when he risked going to war. Similarly, the Bible commends the faith of Samson, and Rahab the prostitute, without implying that their behavior was always in harmony with God’s will. Abraham manifested an incredible level of faith on several occasions, and is commended for such (Romans 4:20-21). Yet he clearly sinned on more than one occasion (Genesis 12:13; 16:4; 20:2ff.).

### The “dedication/consecration view”.

1. Jephthah dedicated/consecrated his only child to permanent, religious service associated with the Tabernacle.
2. To offer a virgin to the Lord in the OT was to serve in the sanctuary as a nun, who was not to marry, hence, dying a virgin.

The Bible indicates that such non-priestly service was available, particularly to women who chose to so dedicate themselves (e.g., Exodus 38:8). Several contextual indicators support this conclusion.

- A. The two-month period of mourning that Jephthah granted to his daughter was not for the purpose of grieving over her impending loss of life, but over the fact that she would never be able to marry and have children. She bewailed her virginity not her death (11:37).
  - B. The text goes out of its way to state that Jephthah had no other children. (11:34).
  - C. For his only child to be consecrated to perpetual celibacy meant the end of Jephthah’s family line, which in that culture was very troubling.
  - D. After stating that Jephthah “did with her according to his vow which he had vowed,” the inspired writer immediately adds, “and knew no man” (11:39).
3. Whether Jephthah did or did not sacrifice his daughter as a human sacrifice, just because an event is described in the Bible does not mean that action is prescribed by God. That Scripture describes what happened does not mean that God approved it, or that it should be done.
  4. Human sacrifice was not required nor rewarded in these verses.

## 1 Kings 13:1-2

Now behold, there came a man of God from Judah to Bethel by the word of the LORD, while Jeroboam was standing by the altar to burn incense. <sup>2</sup>He cried against the altar by the word of the LORD, and said, “O altar, altar, thus says the LORD, ‘Behold, a son shall

be born to the house of David, Josiah by name; and **on you he shall sacrifice the priests of the high places** who burn incense on you, and human bones shall be burned on you.”

1. The man of God then prophesied what would happen to priests who offered sacrifices to other gods on that altar. (See 2 Kings 23:20 for fulfillment 290 years later.)

<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, the altar that *was* at Bethel *and* the high place which Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel sin, had made, even that altar and the high place he broke down. Then he demolished its stones, ground them to dust, and burned the Asherah.

<sup>16</sup> Now when Josiah turned, he saw the graves that *were* there on the mountain, and he sent and took the bones from the graves and burned *them* on the altar and defiled it according to the word of the LORD which the man of God proclaimed, who proclaimed these things. <sup>17</sup> Then he said, “What is this monument that I see?” And the men of the city told him, “It is the grave of the man of God who came from Judah and proclaimed these things which you have done against the altar of Bethel.” <sup>18</sup> He said, “Let him alone; let no one disturb his bones.” So they left his bones undisturbed with the bones of the prophet who came from Samaria. <sup>19</sup> Josiah also removed all the houses of the high places which *were* in the cities of Samaria, which the kings of Israel had made provoking the LORD; and he did to them just as he had done in Bethel. <sup>20</sup> **Josiah slaughtered all the priests of those high places on the altars and burned human bones on them. Then he went back to Jerusalem.**

<sup>21</sup> The king gave this order to all the people: “Celebrate the Passover to the LORD your God, as it is written in this Book of the Covenant.” <sup>22</sup> Neither in the days of the judges who led Israel nor in the days of the kings of Israel and the kings of Judah had any such Passover been observed. <sup>23</sup> But in the eighteenth year of King Josiah, this Passover was celebrated to the LORD in Jerusalem.

<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, **Josiah got rid of the mediums and spiritists**, the household gods, the idols and all the other detestable things seen in Judah and Jerusalem. This he did to fulfill the requirements of the law written in the book that Hilkiah the priest had discovered in the temple of the LORD. <sup>25</sup> Neither before nor after Josiah was there a king like him who turned to the LORD as he did— with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strength, in accordance with all the Law of Moses.

2. 2 Kings 23:15-20 makes it clear that Josiah did not offer the pagan priests upon their altars as a sacrifice to God. He executed them on their own altars as punishment.
3. Josiah executed the priests for violating God's commandments against idolatry and child sacrifice. He was, in essence, doing to them what they had done to countless victims on their altars.
4. This was not a case of human sacrifice, but merely another case of Capital Punishment.
  - A. Manasseh, the previous king, had built High Places all over Israel where pagan gods were worshipped.
  - B. Josiah, killed all of the false priests who were leading the people of Israel to worship these false gods.
  - C. Josiah and his men did not perform any religious ritual. They simply executed the idolatrous, pagan priests in accordance with God's law.
5. Human sacrifice was not required nor rewarded in these verses.

## 2 Kings 3:27

Then he took his oldest son who was to reign in his place, and offered him as a burnt offering on the wall. And there came great wrath against Israel, and they departed from him and returned to their own land.

1. Meshah, King of Moab, sacrificed his son to curry the favor of his god, and probably to spur on his troops to fight all the harder.
2. Great wrath against Israel refers here to human wrath (see 2 Kings 5:11 and 13:19 for human fury)
  - A. which either refers to the renewed zeal with which the enemy fought, which presumably led to Israel's withdraw from the siege and return to their own land
  - B. or could refer to the men of Israel's disgust with (anger at) this act and so they left the siege. They had already decisively won the war.
3. Human sacrifice was not required nor rewarded in these verses. It is merely recorded as something pagan king did.

## Numbers 31:40

<sup>40</sup> and the human beings were 16,000, from whom the LORD's levy was 32 persons.

1. These 32 pre-adolescent girls were not offered up as human sacrifices in any religious ritual.
2. They were put in service to the priests, probably for menial tasks.
3. These young girls were absorbed into the Israelite community and grew up to become wives and mothers in Israel.

## Deut. 13:12-19

<sup>12</sup>“If you hear in one of your cities, which the LORD your God is giving you to live in, *anyone* saying *that* <sup>13</sup>some worthless men have gone out from among you and have seduced the inhabitants of their city, saying, ‘Let us go and serve other gods’ (whom you have not known), <sup>14</sup>then you shall investigate and search out and inquire thoroughly. If it is true *and* the matter established that this abomination has been done among you, <sup>15</sup>**you shall surely strike the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword, utterly destroying it and all that is in it and its cattle with the edge of the sword.** <sup>16</sup>Then you shall gather all its booty into the middle of its open square and **burn the city and all its booty with fire as a whole burnt offering to the LORD your God;** and it shall be a ruin forever. It shall never be rebuilt. <sup>17</sup>Nothing from that which is put under the ban shall cling to your hand, in order that the LORD may turn from His burning anger and show mercy to you, and have compassion on you and make you increase, just as He has sworn to your fathers, <sup>18</sup>if you will listen to the voice of the LORD your God, keeping all His commandments which I am commanding you today, and doing what is right in the sight of the LORD your God.

1. This was punishment on any who betrayed the covenant with Yahweh, the covenant to which they had sworn allegiance.
2. This was not human sacrifice during a religious ritual.
3. This was just like placing a city under [ban](#) during war, because for an Israelite person or town to openly worship other gods and to allow the open worship of other gods was tantamount to declaring war on Yahweh and on Israel.
4. Human sacrifice was not required nor rewarded in these verses. It's not even in view in these verses.

**Ezekiel 20:26** Harris says God inspired child sacrifice so as to defile its practitioners

<sup>19</sup>I am the LORD your God; walk in My statutes and keep My ordinances and observe them. <sup>20</sup>Sanctify My sabbaths; and they shall be a sign between Me and you, that you may know that I am the LORD your God.’ <sup>21</sup>But the children rebelled against Me; they did not walk in My statutes, nor were they careful to observe My ordinances, by which, *if* a man observes them, he will live; they profaned My sabbaths. So I resolved to pour out My wrath on them, to accomplish My anger against them in the wilderness. <sup>22</sup>But I withdrew My hand and acted for the sake of My name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations in whose sight I had brought them out. <sup>23</sup>Also I swore to them in the wilderness that I would scatter them among the nations and disperse them among the lands, <sup>24</sup>because they had not observed My ordinances, but had rejected My statutes and had profaned My sabbaths, and their eyes were on the idols of their fathers. <sup>25</sup>I also gave them statutes that were not good and ordinances by which they could not live; <sup>26</sup>**and I pronounced them unclean because of their gifts, in that they caused all their firstborn to pass through *the fire* so that I might make them desolate, in order that they might know that I am the LORD.”**

The NLT captures the idea of verse 26 well:

<sup>26</sup>I let them pollute themselves with the very gifts I had given them, and I allowed them to give their firstborn children as offerings to their gods—so I might devastate them and remind them that I alone am the LORD.

1. This is an OT example of what Romans 1 describes as giving them over to themselves. God simply let them go and do as they [insisted](#), (Romans 1:24, 26, 28) and let them experience the consequences of their sinful choices.
2. The statutes that were not good and ordinances by which they could not live are not at all referring to the Law of Moses (which Romans 7:12 describes as holy, righteous and good”). The statutes and ordinances here refer to those of the pagan religions to which Israel had turned and which would indeed bring about their demise and death.
3. God declares judgment, telling Israel sarcastically “go, serve everyone his idols” (Ezek 20:39) <sup>39</sup>“As for you, O house of Israel,” thus says the Lord GOD, “Go, serve everyone his idols; but later you will surely listen to Me, and My holy name you will profane no longer with your gifts and with your idols.
4. God is sarcastic in Amos 4:4 also,  
“Go to Bethel and sin; go to Gilgal and sin yet more. Bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three years.”
5. Human sacrifice was not required nor rewarded in these verses. And it's certainly not inspired by God in these verses.

**Exodus 11:5** Harris says God, “did it Himself by slaying the firstborn of Egypt.”

1. Read the account of the slaying of the firstborn in Egypt in Exodus chapter 11 and tell me if you see anything that resembles a religious ritual during which a child is offered up as a sacrifice to God.
2. Human sacrifice was not required nor rewarded in these verses.

**Exodus 4:24-26** Harris claims that the rite of circumcision is a surrogate for child sacrifice

<sup>24</sup> Now it came about at the lodging place on the way that the LORD met him and sought to put him to death. <sup>25</sup> Then Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin and threw it at Moses' feet, and she said, "You are indeed a bridegroom of blood to me." <sup>26</sup> So He let him alone. At that time she said, "*You are* a bridegroom of blood"—because of the circumcision.

1. God instituted circumcision as a [sign](#) of His covenant with Abraham in Genesis 17.
2. Here in exodus 4 Moses' wife circumcised their son. Why Moses had neglected it until now, whether his wife resisted it, we don't know.
3. Whatever you understand these verses to be talking about, there is [nothing](#) here that suggests that the circumcision of Moses' son was substituted in place of a religious ritual during which a child is offered up as a human sacrifice to a deity.
4. Human sacrifice was not required nor rewarded in these verses. It's not even in view in these verses.

**Lev. 27:28-29** Harris does not mention Lev. 27:28-29, but others do.

<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, anything which a man sets apart to the LORD out of all that he has, of man or animal or of the fields of his own property, shall not be sold or redeemed. Anything devoted to destruction is most holy to the LORD. <sup>29</sup> No one who may have been set apart among men shall be ransomed; he shall surely be put to death.

1. The last phrase in verse 28 and verse 29 form a [separate](#) thought unit.
2. This command refers to anything God has placed under ban, like the city of Jericho.
3. God's [judgment](#) is in view here, not human sacrifice during religious rituals (ritual murder).
4. Human sacrifice was not required nor rewarded in these verses. It's not even in view in these verses.

**(OT)** Harris claims that God encourages the substitution of animals for people.

1. Actually God requires the substitution of animals for people when sacrifices are at issue.
2. When it comes to things under ban, capital punishment and executions, God does not permit animals to be substituted for humans because in these cases sacrifices are not at issue.

Message

Always read and interpret Bible verses in their context.

Action Points:

- Get to know your Bible!
- Come to Sunday School
- Join a fold.