

# Is God...Changeless?

## TOUGH QUESTIONS

Pt. 5

In Malachi 3:6, God emphatically states, "I *am* the Lord, I do not change." Yet many people are more comfortable with the God presented in the New Testament (NT) than that of the Old. To them He seems more loving, kind, and merciful, while in the Old Testament (OT) He seems vengeful and violent. Undeniably there are a whole lot more wars and deaths in the OT. So is God changeless, or has He evolved through the years into a nicer being?

**Exodus 34:6-7**—Many people might associate the first part of God's self description of His own character with the God of the NT, and the last part with the OT. Yet this is one package. (See sermon "TQ03 Is God Jealous" to understand this last part better; it's at [www.birmingham1st.org/podcast](http://www.birmingham1st.org/podcast))

**Matthew 5:38-39**—Many people think the OT meme is summed up, "Eye for eye, tooth for tooth." While the NT teaches, "Turn the other cheek." Yet Jesus clearly stated that He did not intend to get rid of the OT (Law and prophets) but to fulfill them (Matt 5:17). His teaching on the sermon on the mount is not intended as a contradiction but an expansion of the OT.

**Exodus 21:24; Leviticus 24:20; Deuteronomy 19:21**—The phrase "Eye for eye, tooth for tooth" appears three times in the OT. In each case the passage containing the language is judicial in nature; a penalty only given when convicted of a crime. While some may argue that these standards are barbaric, they could hardly be called unjust. In these cases, and hundreds of other OT examples that seem to portray God as violent, He is operating in a judicial/governmental capacity over Israel which was a theocracy. Even today law enforcement officers and soldiers, as representatives of the government, sometimes have to use lethal force to keep peace and protect those who are innocent. We have national debates as to how this power should properly be used, but few people propose that such authority is never appropriate.

**Romans 13:1-5**—In the NT, God is running a church, not a theocracy. God instructs Christians to submit to the governmental authorities (unless they tell you to disobey God, Acts 5:29) as His agents of justice and peace. The power to execute judgement now generally lies with the secular government. But even though the laws and enforcers are different, we still answer to God for how we conduct our lives as good citizens.

**Matthew 5:39-42**—By Jesus' time it appears that the Jews had come to apply this judicial maxim to personal situations. If someone insulted you, you had the right to insult back. When Jesus said "turn the other cheek," He was addressing interpersonal relationships, not governmental prerogative.

Throughout the OT you can find glimpses of the "NT God" of mercy and forgiveness. **Genesis 6:8**: Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. **2 Samuel 24:14**: David believed in God's mercy even during punishment. **Psalms 32:1-2, 5**: David clearly knew God as a merciful and forgiving God. The picture of God that David experienced was much like the picture Jesus portrayed in the NT.

**Isaiah 43:25**—God forgives for His own sake. He *desires* to forgive. He *loves* to restore. Even in the OT God's first choice was mercy and forgiveness. How else could the Human race have made it past the Garden of Eden to see NT times?

**Acts 5:1-11**—Similarly the NT has some acts that may seem to fit better in the OT. In the story of Ananias and Sapphira, God's judgement was swift and deadly. They lied to the Holy Spirit and tried to defraud the brand new Christian church and God made a strong point by striking them dead on the spot. This seems so OT like, yet if you look at the facts this is really just God acting in the judicial sense as King of His burgeoning church. Imagine the fraud waste and abuse that could have entered the church's welfare system if God didn't step in in a strong way. God had to stop it at the beginning. Acts 5:11 shows that God did this so that people would have a healthy respect (fear) of His church. God didn't want the radical message of grace and forgiveness, to be misapplied and abused<sup>1</sup>

God is the same in both testaments, but the perspective is different. The OT covers about 3.9 years per chapter. While the NT has about 2.8 chapters per year. So the OT gives the broad high points while the NT goes into much greater detail. Even today, when we need a quick rundown of the news we hear of wars, corruption and violence. When we take more time to look into the news, the human interest comes out and we see a nicer side of world events. When the OT slows down and focuses more on the story of a short time, such as the cases of David, Elisha, and Daniel, you see God healing, forgiving, providing, protecting and entering into relationship with humanity. When the NT, speeds up, as in the case of much of the book of Acts, you see persecutions, disputes and the apostles getting chased off.

**John 14:9**—Jesus assured Phillip, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father." And Jesus doesn't change (Hebrews 13:8). That's good news because if God doesn't change, then the rules don't change. Yes, God still does, at times, have to use strong tactics in defense of the righteous. That's why we should not presume on God's mercy as did Ananias, with Sapphira. But he is also still full of love and mercy. He loves to forgive and save people.

**Malachi 3:6**—It's because of God's unchanging character that you still have the opportunity, even with all the personal baggage of sin and rebellion, trauma and abuse that you may carry, to leave those things with Him and find new life in Him.

<sup>1</sup> Another example of God punishing wickedness in the New Testament is in Acts 13:6-12