



Is the God of the Old Testament a Tyrant?

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In this paper I attempt to respond in theological and hermeneutical terms to the question of whether or not the God of the Old Testament is a tyrant: theologically, in that it is a question of what God is like (assuming that God is); and hermeneutically, in that it is also a question of how what God is like may be known and conveyed. I offer three points in response, two hermeneutical and one theological. Hermeneutically, I suggest firstly that there are aspects of the Old Testament context that need to be understood better than they usually are, and secondly that it is necessary to appreciate well the literary functioning of the early stories of the life of Israel. As a theological response, I note that reading of Scripture is always influenced by perceptions of what God is like, and hence necessarily theological. I propose that a theological reading of the tyrannical aspects of God's portrayal in Scripture entails three things: a Christological lens, an ear to tradition, and humility before the voice of God. But the last word goes to Job and P.D. James.