Why is the Old Testament so "brutal"?

One Sunday afternoon my wife and I were visiting my sister-in-law in her hospital room. As we were discussing the Bible and in particular the Old Testament, my sister-in-law commented, "It is brutal!" And that comment led to a great conversation.

So. As my sister-in-law asked, "Why is the Old Testament so 'brutal'"? It depicts animal sacrifices, annihilated cities, enslaved people-groups, and bloody battles.

God wants us to come to Him out of love, out of a passionate desire to be with Him. However, He has given us humans free-choice to believe in His Son, our Redeemer. He does not want human robots – He could have very easily shaped us to want Him (with no free choice), but He wanted us to join Him for all eternity because we want to do so. The Old Testament exists as a historical narrative, with a glimpse into God's character, all pointing to the future Messiah.

So, why did God institute animal sacrifice, including young sheep – adorable lambs? Why all the blood? Why did all of those animals have to die?!?!?

First, we must understand that God is absolutely holy and cannot tolerate sin; He cannot be in the same room with a sinner. Sin is serious stuff! Blood is life. Sin is death.

In the Old Testament, God instituted animal sacrifice as a way for repentant people to atone (i.e., to make amends) for sin. An animal had to die for the sins of the people or for the person; over and over and over. The shed blood of the animal-sacrifice atones for the person's sin; otherwise, unrepentant sin is death.

Second, God wanted people to understand the seriousness of sin. Therefore, in a number of instances God judged the egregious sin of a city or people-group; He judged the condition of their hearts. Were the people repentant or unrepentant? In His infinite wisdom God knew if the people would repent in the future. And He judged accordingly. Unrepentant sin is death.

In His infinite plan, all the blood in the Old Testament points to the torture and crucifixion of His Son Jesus. Jesus' blood oozed and, perhaps, gushed from the many whip-caused lacerations that gouged His body. His shed blood was (and is) the final sacrifice for sin. If a person does not believe in God, or His Son Christ Jesus and His saving grace, then they remain under the Law (the Ten Commandments). If one commandment is broken, then the person has sinned. Blood is life. Sin is death. God does not grade on a curve. Any sinful act is death.

We can judge that the Old Testament is "brutal" and we then, by extension, judge that God is "brutal." We must never forget that God is God, and we are 'the created'. It doesn't matter if you believe that the 'Theory of Evolution' is fact or if the earth is 6,000 years old. It matters not what human knowledge you or I believe. We are the created. God is the Creator.

Within the pages of the Old Testament, God has given us example upon example of the consequence for sin. It is up to you and me to choose life, to choose to accept the saving grace of Christ Jesus and the blood that He shed for our salvation. Through His sacrifice, Jesus paid the penalty for our sins and, when God judges you and me, we who believe will receive a verdict of "Not guilty!" It is a tremendous, life-giving gift that was given at a deadly cost to the Giver!

What is your choice? What (or Who) do you choose?