

1 Samuel 2:1-10

The God I Don't Understand Violence

Introduction: Good morning - If it's your first time, welcome! We are beginning a New Series within our Year of Biblical Literacy - The God I Don't Understand.

In January when we did our series on the Bible we talked a bit about, especially the OT, having really hard things in it - difficult things for us to get around, not just culturally, but also theologically. We mentioned this back then and at that time we were reading through some interesting narrative in Genesis - some hairy stories and sordid characters. But now we've read through Joshua and Judges, not to mention Numbers and Deuteronomy - And you know what - Reading the OT is startling - there is a whole lot of BLOOD, a whole lot of SEX, and a whole lot of VIOLENCE.. and for many reading it for the first time, or maybe the first time in a while - it's disenchanting, and disturbing. And remember we've been saying this is the story of God - that what the Bible is.

It's no wonder why many Christians just want to stick to the NT or now many pastors are talking about doing away with teaching or even believing in the OT all together.

So now that you've been adequately disturbed by the Bible - let's talk about it.

I think for the first time, maybe ever, - people are leaving the church - not because of spiritual abuse or hypocrisy or any problem they had with their particular local church community being unloving - but plainly because they could no longer believe in the Bible and the God of the Bible - As Richard Dawkins has famously said,

"The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully." - Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*

Some, in order to reconcile this portrait of God in the OT with God in the NT, have gone so far as to return to an early church heresy called Marcionism - teaching that the God of the Old Testament and the God of

the New Testament are actually two different God's - one of judgment and one of Grace.. In that way - we don't have to seriously deal with the OT. Just be thankful that isn't your God. Though the church condemned this teaching long ago as heresy (Totally and completely unbiblical), let's be honest, it's not that hard to see how someone could get there or why they would want to...

Let's be honest if there is even an ounce of truth to what Richard Dawkins said about the God of the OT - we're in trouble. As I've been saying this is the problem in the church at this moment - Christians are rocked by this stuff, and don't know how to answer it - We have a Biblically illiterate culture that is using the Bible to critique a Biblically illiterate Church. Most Christians if anything have a very general understanding of what the Bible teaches and so they simply ignore these things or try to put them out of their mind - but with our deconstructionist culture of #metoo and down with the Patriarchy and other mantras - you can't do this anymore. And that's actually a good thing. It's time for the church to recapture the authority and beauty of scripture and to rediscover the incredible story of God - the most high God who redeems at the cost of his own life - and to find our story in that story.

So let's talk about Violence.. and particularly this idea of God commissioned genocide - holy war - or ethnic cleansing.

1. God on our side

1. Holy war is as old as time. Inca and Aztec. Chinese and Mongols. Greeks and Romans. I'm a Bob Dylan fan and one of my favorite Bob Dylan songs is - With God on our side -
2. "Oh the history books tell it, they tell it so well. The cavalries charged, the Indians fell. The cavalries charged, the Indians died. For the country was young with God on its side.
3. Oh, the first World War, it came and it went. The reason for fighting, I never could get. But I learned to accept it, accept it with pride. For you don't count the dead when God's on your side.
4. And then the second World War, it came to an end. We forgave the Germans and now we are friends. Though they murdered six million, in the ovens they fried. The Germans now, too, have God on their side.."
5. Dylan exposes this self righteous American savior complex. "America's cause, is God's cause". We deified our Nation so we can justify our blood guilt - God is on our side and so he is for our

cause. Do you know that every nation thinks this way? Go to South Africa and hear their national anthem, go to Russia and hear theirs.. it's all the same. It's us vs. them. For Dylan and our parents it was the Russians - the Comies and the capitalist engaged in the cold war. For my generation it was the muslim vs. secular west. Now I guess it's North Korea.. whoever it is, and what ever country you're in - it's an us vs. them mentality which de-personalizes, dehumanizes, and objectifies the "other". And this has lead to Holy war, genocide and ethnic cleansing again and again in the history of the world. The question is - is this what is happening in the Bible? and particularly in the Canaan conquest?

6. The answer seems to be a resounding NO. In the Bible it actually works in the opposite direction in the Old Testament. It's not the strong using God to justify their conquest, it's God arising on behalf of the weak against the tyranny of the strong when it's raged for far too long.

7. Israel you remember is a nation of slaves - 430 years of it. This is all they've known for generation after generation - oppression, weakness, brutality, the slaughter of their babies. They are the bottom of the caste system and they are going up against the super powers of the day.

8. **"When the LORD your God brings you into the land you are entering to possess and drives out before you many nations-- the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites, seven nations larger and stronger than you" - Deuteronomy 7:1**

1. The giants, the powerful fortresses, the warrior peoples are often talked about when referencing Canaan.

2. Israel are not bullies, they are not the powerful, it's the other way around.

2. Israel's bizarre warfare policy - dismantle the nukes and burn the tanks

1. No King except for YHWH.

1. The King was the one who lead a nation into battle, He protected the land because it belonged to him and he would also try to gain more land. The king would have a standing army. But again - Israel has none of this. The land has been allotted to the whole nation, there is no king and therefore no standing army. At least not for hundreds of years

2. **Israel's army is untrained and volunteer.** No taxation for an army - God wants taxes and excess wealth to be given to the poor not to fund the military (Deuteronomy 14:28-29)
 1. Deuteronomy 17 strictly forbids the king (when Israel does appoint one) from multiplying horses and having a professional army, not only that but they are not to make military alliances with other nations. As the Psalmist later writes - some may trust in horses and some may trust in Chariots but we will trust in the name of the Lord our God. It is God, YHWH, the covenant God of Israel who is their protector. He is the one who fights for Israel.
 2. When Israel goes to war the captains are appointed at the time and then they are to say - is anyone afraid? go home. has anyone recently been married - go home and enjoy your life. Has anyone planted a vineyard and not enjoyed it - go home and enjoy. Bizarre right - I mean just think of Gideon's army - three hundred men vs. like 100,000, AND Gideon's men are armed with torches and pots.. Yet the Lord throws the Midianite army into confusion and they slaughter one another.
 3. David and Goliath - David has a sling and is teenage shepherd - Goliath is a warrior from his youth he has learned the art of brutality and violence, Oh also, he's a Giant- David says to Goliath, **"You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will deliver you into my hands, and I'll strike you down and cut off your head. This very day I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds and the wild animals, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord's, and he will give all of you into our hands."**
 4. So many stories of the Bible have to do with God's people being out-manned and outgunned - and yet God is the one that defends, protects, and prospers this weak and vulnerable people.. And this is really a picture into the heart of YHWH he is the defender of the weak, he cares for the small,

overlooked, unjustly treated and trampled over of this world. He fights for them, and he brings the tyrants to justice.

3. Another clear indication that God is not into violence and blood shed is - If Israel goes to war against a city they are first to offer peace to it, and only if the treaty is denied can Israel go to war. - Deuteronomy 20:10-11
 1. Non-combatants are not to be destroyed, and also fruit trees..
 2. Not only that, but they are commanded to hamstring the war horse and burn the chariots - this is like saying disarm the nukes and burn the tanks. Horses and chariots were superior weapons of strength - if you had these you were bound to win any fight. So God's people are commanded to destroy horse and chariots of other nations and their potential usefulness to Israel in further battles. It's like killing your enemy with a knife and not taking his gun. "Superior weaponry was rejected, in order to demonstrate trust in YHWH as warrior."
 1. *"Israel is never given the green light to go out and kill whomever they want whenever they feel threatened. Nor are they ever allowed to invade a country to dismantle an unjust government or preemptively strike a nation building chariots of mass destruction."* - Preston Sprinkle, *Fight, A Christian case for Non-violence.*
 3. In comparison to the surrounding nations Israel's military policy is comical - The army and the weapons of that army are what made you what you were, and what kept you on the top of the proverbial food chain..But not so with Israel - It was the Lord that protected and preserved Israel and he proved that again and again... This is Israel's policy of war whenever they are truly following YHWH - God fights for them, though they are out gunned and outmanned - and their enemies scatter before them.

3. The Canaan Conquest -

1. It would be much easier for us if we go with the idea that Israel is simply deifying their nation and their nations cause - by attaching their God to their wars. But you have to do a lot of textual stretching to get there. Wouldn't it be nice if we could simply say - The Jews did what every other nation has done - God is on our side we can do whatever we want... Rather in these stories - like in Joshua -The angel of the Lord's army says he isn't on anyone's side.. kinda scary right..the question is - who's side is Israel on?

2. Again - God does not give Israel the green light to holy war - to kill the infidel anywhere and everywhere. This is not the way of God's kingdom. What happens in the Canaan conquest is specific judgment of the inhabitants of this Land - The land that YHWH says, belongs to him - it's where his presence dwells.
 1. The first thing we must note is that the bible teaches that God is both creator and judge - He is the one who gives life, and he has authority to take life. He is the avenger of all wrong and the the one who deals out true justice. And we believe with Abraham - that the judge of all the earth will do what is right and just. (Genesis 18:25)
 2. Next thing to note is the holiness of God - God's goodness is so good, and so pure that evil cannot be in his presence and live - we have many examples of this in the Bible. Well the Canaanites are doing all their evil in the equivalent of God's living room, God says again and again, that this land is his and the Canaanites have forfeited their right to it. On top of that - God is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love for thousands (Exodus 34) and he shows the Canaanites incredible mercy and patience - Listen to Genesis 15 - Here God is speaking to Abraham about the Land - The land he is promising to Abraham's descendants - **"Then the Lord said to him, "Know for certain that for four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own and that they will be enslaved and mistreated there. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. You, however, will go to your ancestors in peace and be buried at a good old age. In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure."**
 1. The Amorites is another name for the Canaanites. God gave these people even at this time - 430 years to turn from their wickedness.. to do righteousness and justice. But they don't. I wonder how patient are you? 430 years patient?
 3. Both the NT and the OT Picture of YHWH is one of grace, patience, compassion and forgiveness against sinners. We've talked many time about how the Bible's favorite verse is Exodus 34 - God's self revelation to Golden Calf worshippers. Our God is

not a God of violence, who delights in vengeance and bloodshed. Have you ever noticed that when Cain kills Abel, God responds not by killing Cain - meeting violence with violence - but by placing a mark on Cain so that no one else will take vengeance on him. God responds to the first murder with grace - a visible preservation of the shalom that was in the garden. God seeks to preserve, as long as possible the Edenic state. This is God's consistent character with sin and sinners - God reveals himself to people in order that they would turn to him, he shows them grace, patience and offers the repentance and forgiveness, but if they continue in their rebellion God will judge their unrighteousness. (Exodus 34:6-7)

1. And so God brings judgment on this nation because their sin has reached maximum capacity - not because God hates them, not just because they aren't his special people - but because they continued to rebel and reject God and do incredible evil in his presence.
4. Sometimes we treat the wrath or judgement of God - like a divine temper tantrum - God being hot headed and just ready to blow people away. That is a gross caricature of the God of the Bible. *"The wrath of God is God's steady, unrelenting, unremitting, uncompromising antagonism to evil in all its forms and manifestations. - John Stott, The Cross of Christ"*
 1. In Light of all of this the Canaan conquest is not Genocide but Judgment - God's judgment on persistent, and un-repentent evil.
 2. *Christopher wright says, "There is a huge moral difference between arbitrary violence and violence inflicted within the moral framework of punishment. The conquest, like the flood, was divine capital punishment after hundreds of years of spurned grace.."*
3. **Devoted to Destruction** - God gives a command concerning the Canaanites in Deuteronomy 20 that no matter who you are makes your skin crawl - **"in the cities of the nations the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance, do not leave alive anything that breathes. Completely destroy them—the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites—as the Lord your God has commanded you. Otherwise, they will teach you to follow all the detestable things they do in worshiping their gods, and you will sin against the Lord your God."** Wow God,

everything? children, babies?? non-combatants and the innocent. Yes, this is what it says - keep nothing alive. What do we do with this? Let me just say - these things might soften the blow a bit, but there is still a blow.

1. If you look at most of the passages where God commands the conquest the words are - drive out and dispossess the Canaanites (Drive out: Ex. 34:24;; Num 32:21; Deu 4:38; Dispossess: Num 21:32; Deut 9:1; 11:23; 18:14; 19:1)
 1. Drive out does not mean slaughter - it means to force them out of the land. This is the most common used language when God refers to the Canaan conquest.
2. It records again and again in the book of Joshua that Joshua devoted to destruction all that breathed, just as the Lord God of Israel commanded.— BUT then records many times that the inhabitants of these very nations are still in the land - so either the Bible is contradicting itself (within the span of a few pages and no one caught this and specifically the author of Joshua is contradicting itself) or Devote to destruction and kill everything that breathes is actually more like hyperbole. We use language like this all the time - complete annihilation and total slaughter when talking about sports.
 1. First it is undeniable that the Children of Israel did not completely slaughter these nations. In fact in one passage it says that Saul the King, completely wiped out the Amalekites - he left none of them alive, YET, Amalekites keep showing up in the story of Israel so which one is it? It must be hyperbole - Hyperbole was very commonly used by that near eastern cultures in their accounts of wars.
 2. It seems to me what is going on here is that God is commanding Israel to drive out, dispossess, rendering in-operative the power of any further authority or influence of these people groups..The people of Israel are to rule the land, and be the influencers, not the other way around.
 1. But still Women and children are specifically listed. - Most scholars agree that the cities that are being destroyed by Israel are most likely military outpost and not vibrant cities. Think helms deep from LOTR and not San Francisco. So the amount of women, much less children would be minimal.

2. Lastly God commanded the removing and destroying of the Canaanites - women and children included because he says - if they don't they will become a snare and lead Israel into all their evil - it wasn't just the leaders - the whole of these nations and cultures were saturated in perversion, violence and Idolatry.. and this is exactly what happens - these nations are not driven out, and become a snare to Israel..

1. It seems that through hyperbole and merism the Canaan conquest is less barbaric than a first read might suggest. But no matter how you slice it - It's gruesome and women and children were killed.

4. How bad are the Canaanites?

1. They are particularly bad.

1. They are not one nation but many tribes engaged in continual violent civil war and blood shed.

2. Their cities and culture is filled with - incest, bestiality, rampant religious prostitution both male and female, and child sacrifice. These are a part of everyday life - these acts did not make the evening news. They were common, accepted and boasted about.

3. God said that the land had become defiled, so God punished their iniquity and the land itself omitted them out..But listen to what God says to Israel lest they think they are different or special - **"Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways, because this is how the nations that I am going to drive out before you became defiled. Even the land was defiled; so I punished it for its sin, and the land vomited out its inhabitants. But you must keep my decrees and my laws. The native-born and the foreigners residing among you must not do any of these detestable things, for all these things were done by the people who lived in the land before you, and the land became defiled. And if you defile the land, it will vomit you out as it vomited out the nations that were before you. Everyone who does any of these detestable things—such persons must be cut off from their people. Keep my requirements and do not follow any of the detestable customs that were practiced before you came and do not**

**defile yourselves with them. I am the Lord your God.” -
Leviticus 18:24-30**

4. Sadly this is exactly what happens to Israel - eventually they become a militaristic state - Filled with violence, they practice and perfect the art of violence and war and they boast in it; They make alliances with the other nations for power and wealth; They worship all the pagan deities from the nations around them; they give themselves to the same perverse sexual practices as the canaanites, and they even burn their children in the fire as an offering to Molech..
 1. In short, Israel becomes Canaanized - and God is good on his word - Assyria and Babylon come and bring God’s judgment on them as well - the land vomits out Israel- they go into captivity..
 1. *“God did not bully the Canaanites because of their ethnicity nor did he coax Israel into a bloodthirsty massacre carried out with xenophobic relish. Rather God’s holiness demands sacred space for him to dwell with human beings. This is why the Canaanites had to be driven out...” - Preston Sprinkle, Fight*
 2. It also needs to be pointed out that those who turned toward God - God brought them into and made them a part of his people and blessed them. - Rahab the prostitute, Ruth - the Cursed Moabite (Both in the lineage of Jesus the Messiah), The Gibeonites.. all of these turned when they heard of the amazing acts of YHWH while the nations, doubled their efforts to fight and resist YHWH. Could these nations have repented even at the 11th hour? That doesn’t seem contrary to our God’s character. But sadly they don’t.

5. How Bad are we?

1. The last one hundred years have been called the most violent century in history. Over 187 million have been killed in war, most of whom were civilians. Around 170 million have been killed by their own governments. This century has witnessed 7 genocides - in Rwanda alone 800,000 people were slaughtered in just 90 days.
2. Currently there are 26 thousand nuclear warheads in the world - each eight times more powerful than the Atom Bomb of Hiroshima.
3. There’s been an escalation in violent crimes: homicide, rape, and torture, as well as human trafficking. Not to mention the millions of

babies that we have murdered in the name of freedom and equality for all.

4. Violence is everywhere - Music, art, movies, video games - even though attempts were made to block any viewing of the New Zealand shooters filming of his mass shooting - hundreds of thousands of people searched for it online - our world craves violence.
 1. So whats the difference between Canaan and our current culture - Honestly I would say not a whole lot.
 2. I've been thinking a lot about Pharaoh - as you do. God came to this tyrant oppressor of his people and like Cain God does just slaughter him for enslaving his people and murdering the children of Israel - NO - God presses upon Pharaoh - he makes known his power, his wisdom and his wonders to Pharaoh and all of Egypt - and yet Pharaoh hardens his heart and finally God brings judgment on Him, his house and his people. Just like the Canaanites, Just like Israel.. and I would say just like the world today.
 3. God has not changed. What has changed is we are living in a time of Grace - the Grace of the kingdom of God. It's the parable of the wedding feast. Go and invite anyone and everyone - everything is ready - come and receive.
 4. Sometimes we forget - we are living under a dispensation of Grace - God is not repaying us - the world for it's sins - But he has laid the judgment of sin on Jesus - and the Father and the son have made a way that any who would trust in Jesus - oppressor and oppressed, captor and slave, abused and abuser, sinner and sinned against, can find both forgiveness and justice, repentance and healing, grace and peace - through the work of Jesus' cross.
 5. We, those sinned against sinners, the people who have come to Jesus for rescue, are sent out as non-violent ambassadors of God's kingdom to make known his righteous rule and his just and righteous king - BUT there is coming a day when God will judge everyone - for what they have done - he will settle all debts, judge all unrighteousness, repay all wickedness, and reward all faithfulness, goodness and righteousness -We are to compel all to receive the body and blood of the passover lamb as a covering for their sin and to live under that blood against the day of judgment.

1. READ 2 PETER 3:3-14