

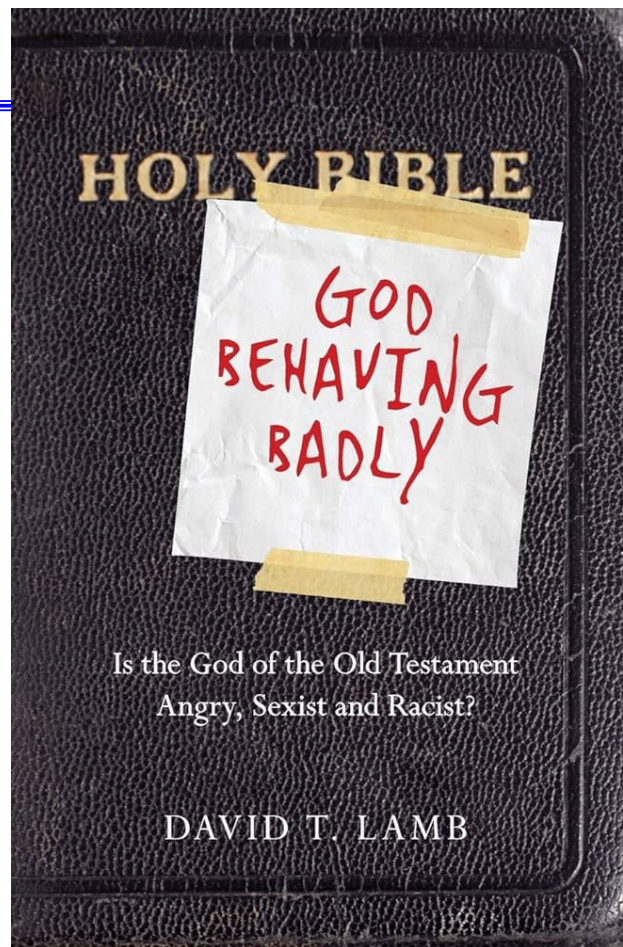
God Behaving Badly

Phillip Cornwell

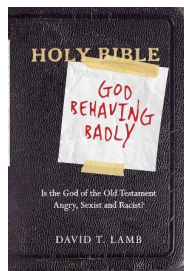
Eastside Church of Christ

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In this class we will be discussing if the God of the Old Testament is angry, sexist, and racist.



Week 1: Introduction



Week 2 – 8: We will be looking at various criticisms of God

I am thrilled to be following Eddie's class on being unoffendable. This may be a great chance for you to practice this quality!



Let's start with a discussion

What negative impressions of God (especially as he is revealed in the Old Testament) do you think some people have?

Richard Dawkins has a famous quote about God

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.



What are some Old Testament stories you think he would use to support his view?

Are there Biblical passages you find problematic, confusing, or bizarre?

Why did I decide to teach this class?

In the class called “Irresistible,” there sometimes appeared to be a low view of the Old Testament.

The view that “Jesus is God, so anything in the Old Testament that seems to contradict the character of Jesus wasn’t done by God.”

One author states that the Canaanite conquest texts are “patently non-Christian texts” where the authors were confused.

The “Red-Letter” Christian movement

Here are some additional reasons

We need to know how to respond to people who cherry-pick passages to attack Christianity.

We cannot ignore problematic passages or give unsatisfactory answers such as

- “God is God, and he can do whatever he wants.”**
- “I know the Bible says that, but there is no way God would do that.”**

Some Christians have a dismissive/negative view of the Old Testament, so they ignore or discount it.

The most famous heretic of the 2nd century, Marcion of Sinope, rejected the Old Testament

Marcion of Sinope



He believed that the God of the Old Testament is not the God of the New Testament.

He believed that the God of the Old Testament was inconsistent, wrathful, and genocidal.

He rejected the Old Testament as being irrelevant for Christians.

85 – 160 AD

**Excommunicated
around 144 AD**

But, he was the first to codify a Christian canon.

- Eleven books: a short version of Luke, and ten Pauline epistles.
- Rejected the entire Old Testament, along with all other epistles and gospels.

Jesus and the apostles loved the Old Testament

In the New Testament there are about 283 quotes from the Old Testament and nearly 1000 allusions to it.

Book	Number
Matthew	96
Mark	34
Luke (Gospel and Acts)	115
John (Gospel, letters)	295
James	16
Hebrews	86
Peter	30
Paul	173

When Paul said, “All Scripture is God-breathed ...” (2 Tim 3:16) he was referring to the Old Testament.

Let's look at a few examples of Jesus' use of the OT

Temptation in the desert

Quoted 3 times from Deut

On the cross

Quoted Ps 22

When asked which command was most important/greatest (Mark 12:28-31)

Quoted Deut 6:4-5, Lev 19:18

When asked if he is the Christ

He responded "I AM" alluding to Ex 3:14

Frequently mentioned the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms

Lk 7:27, 10:26, 18:31, 19:46, 20:17, 22:37, 24:44

Jesus used OT images to describe God and himself

Vineyard owner (Mt 21:33, Isa 5:2)

Isa 5:2 He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a **watchtower** in it and cut out a **winepress** as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit.

Mt 21:33 Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a **winepress** in it and built a **watchtower**. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place.

Jesus used OT images to describe God and himself

Bridegroom (Isa 62:5, Mk 2:19)

Isa 62:5 For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your sons marry you, and **as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.**

Mark 2:19 And Jesus said to them, "Can the wedding guests fast while the **bridegroom is with them**? As long as they have the **bridegroom** with them, they cannot fast."

Jesus used OT images to describe God and himself

Shepherd (Ezek 34:11-12, Jn 10:11)

Ezek 34:11-12 ¹¹ For thus says the Lord God: Behold, I, **I myself will search for my sheep** and will seek them out. ¹² As a **shepherd** seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness.

John 10:11 **I am the good shepherd.** The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

Jesus used OT images to describe God and himself

King (Ps 47:2, Mt 18:23)

Ps 47:2 For the Lord, the Most High, is to be feared, a great **king** over all the earth.

Matt 18:23 “Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a **king** who wished to settle accounts with his servants.”

An accurate view of God is important for spiritual health

In what ways can a distorted view of God cause spiritual problems?

Our image of God will directly affect how we either pursue or avoid God.

If you believe that the God of the OT is harsh, unfair, and cruel, you won't want anything to do with him.

Our image of God will also affect what we think God's followers should be like. If God is angry, sexist, and racist, it would follow that Christians would be as well.

Compared to other ANE literature, the OT is shockingly progressive in its portrayal of divine love, acceptance of foreigners, and affirmation of women.

Let's start off with some basic principles of Biblical interpretation (this is from my Genesis class)

Biblical authority is tied to the author's intent – you should always ask yourself, “What is the author trying to convey?”

We don't need to believe everything they believed or view the world the way they did.

- They did believe that there was a solid sky.
- They generally had an Eastern mindset and not a Western mindset.
- They had a collectivistic vs individualistic worldview.

Setting aside such culturally bound ideas does not jeopardize the text's message or authority.

Biblical translation (and interpretation) is difficult because we need to determine:

- What do the original words mean (not the English translation) at the time it was written? (no dictionaries)
- What do the words mean in context? (example: contranym)
- What did the words mean in the culture in which it was written?
- What is the genre of the writing?

Let's look at some examples in English. What do these phrases mean?

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| • “Have a heart” | • “He made love to me ...” Ginger Rogers in <i>Top Hat</i> (1935) |
| • “He's a nice person” | • “Silly art thou, holy virgin Mary” (~1400) |
| • “I live on the first floor” | • “He was a good dog” |
| • “Blood is thicker than water” | • “Young girls of the diocese” (Chaucer late 1300's) |
| • “Stop throwing shade” | |
| • “_____ is gay” | |

What comes to mind when you read these English words?

“law”



“torah”

“create”, “make”



“bara”, “asa”

“Totally destroy”



“herem”

Disclaimer: Just like my Genesis class, I will do my best in this class, but I might be wrong.

How do you think the people living 3000 years ago (ANE) viewed the world differently than we do?

Any given ancient Near Eastern culture was more similar to other ancient Near Eastern cultures than any of them are to modern Western culture.

Remember when this was written and by whom.

We need to avoid letting modern concepts influence how we interpret Scripture

Concepts that would have been completely foreign to them:

- capitalism
- democracy
- our legal system
- books
- science
- the sun is much larger than the earth
- “rugged individualism”
- supernatural vs. natural law
- our educational system

The Bible was written for us, but not to us.

In this series we will be looking at problematic passages in which God appears to behave badly

We will look at biblical texts across the diverse genres of OT literature.

We will try to understand passages in the context of the culture they were written in and the historical context.

We will see how OT qualities of God are also manifested in the behavior of Jesus.

Angry vs. Loving *Legalistic vs. Gracious*
Sexist vs. Affirming
Rigid vs Flexible *Racist vs Hospitable*
Violent vs. Peaceful

Questions or comments?

(If you want a copy of my slides, let me know)