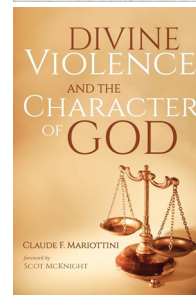
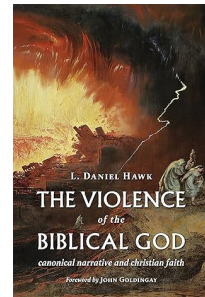
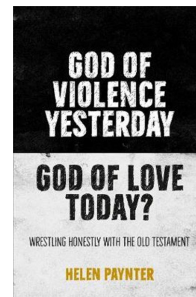
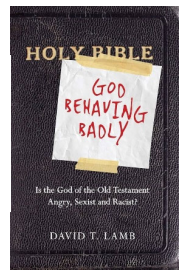


# God Behaving Badly – Lesson 5: Is God violent or peaceful?



## A quick review

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### Week 1 - Introduction

### Week 2 – Is God angry or loving?

### Week 3 – Is God sexist or affirming?

### Week 4 – Is God racist or hospitable?

- There is no evidence to support the assertion that God is racist.
- There is no place for racism in the church.
- God is welcoming to all nations and even commands his people to be hospitable towards foreigners.

## Let's start with a discussion

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**What are some incidents in the Bible that would make people conclude God is violent?**

**Just because the Bible contains violence does not mean our God is violent.**

## Let's look at some examples people use

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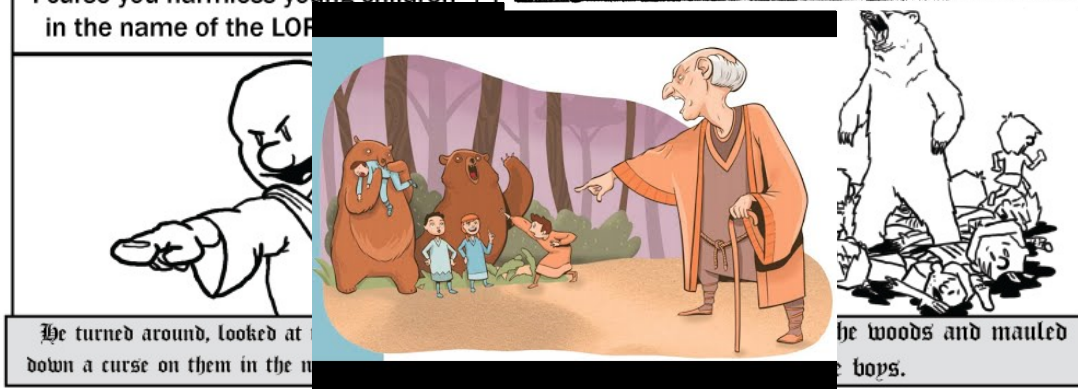
**God commands Abraham to sacrifice his own son, i.e. God commanded filicide! How can you possibly justify this?**

**Gen 22:2 Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you."**

**The point was Abraham's faith.**

**God never actually requires the sacrifice (unlike other gods in the ANE).**

## Elisha and the mocking boys



## Let's read the actual passage

2 Kings 2:23-25 (ESV) <sup>23</sup> He went up from there to Bethel, and while he was going up on the way, some **small boys** came out of the city and jeered at him, saying, “**Go up, you baldhead! Go up, you baldhead!**” <sup>24</sup> And he turned around, and when he saw them, **he cursed them in the name of the LORD**. And **two she-bears came out of the woods and tore forty-two of the boys**. <sup>25</sup> From there he went on to Mount Carmel, and from there he returned to Samaria.

What is disturbing about this passage? Is the response commensurate with the offense?

**NOTE:** There is always some interpretation when translating.

- NIV says “boys”/“youths” not “small boys”
- NIV says “mauled,” not “tore”

## **Elisha and the boys**

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**Here are three reasons this story bothers people:**

- 1. Elisha was a prophet of God – shouldn't he be able to control his temper?**
- 2. The boys seem to be young and innocent (some translations say "some small boys").**
- 3. God seems to be the primary force behind the attack.**

**How would you respond to people who have these concerns?**

**Here are three points to consider**

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**1. There are two Hebrew words for boys (naar 2:23 and yeled 2:24) used in this passage.**

- Both can mean "boy" or even "young boy," but they can also mean "adolescent" or "older teenager" (both were used for Joseph's brother Benjamin when he was in his 20s in Gen 44:20-22).
- When there are multiple meanings of a word, you always need to look at the context.
- It seems unreasonable to assume a large group of very young boys were allowed to leave the town unsupervised and follow Elisha through the woods.
- A gang of teenagers seems more reasonable.
- This was not harmless teasing by a group of preschoolers, but serious taunting by a pack of teens. It is reasonable to assume Elisha's life might be in danger.

## Here are three points to consider

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### **2. We need to understand the culture.**

- In the U.S. we might say, “names will never hurt us,” but in the rest of the world, and throughout history, insults are taken far more seriously (think of dueling).
- In his culture (and in many today) his response would be considered justified. (People were severely punished for insulting leaders, rulers, or elders).

### **3. We need to look at Elisha in the larger context of 2 Kings. We can't view his actions in isolation.**

- He heals the sick (Naaman, a foreign general).
- He feeds the hungry, purifies poisoned water, prays for a barren woman who then gives birth, raises the dead and prevents a war.
- His life was characterized by miraculous acts of service.

## Here are three points to consider

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### **Final notes:**

- **The text does not suggest death was the result. It says they were “mauled.” If they had been killed, the text likely would have said so.**
- **A series of manuscripts from the Septuagint records that the boys also threw stones at Elisha.**

**So, what is the main point?**

**God protected the life of Elisha.**



## Let's revisit the Canaanite conquest

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Here are a few things we noted in the last lesson:

- The concept of “totally destroy” (herem) is not genocide.
- God may have been using the Israelites to punish the Canaanites for their wicked and violent behavior. If so, God had been slow to punish the Canaanites.
- Israel was not trying to expand their borders or establish an empire, but as exiles, they were attempting to reestablish a home in the land of their ancestors.
- Not unusual in the ANE. Military victors typically either killed or enslaved the vanquished people.
- The killing was probably limited and localized, and there was hyperbole in the descriptions.

## Let's look at some other aspects of the Canaanite conquest

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The primary description used is not slaughter, but the term used far more frequently is “drive out.”

Ex 23:28-31 <sup>28</sup> And **I will send** hornets before you, which shall **drive out** the Hivites, the Canaanites, and the Hittites from before you. <sup>29</sup> I will not **drive them out** from before you in one year, lest the land become desolate and the wild beasts multiply against you. <sup>30</sup> Little by little **I will drive** them out from before you, until you have increased and possess the land. <sup>31</sup> And I will set your border from the Red Sea to the Sea of the Philistines, and from the wilderness to the Euphrates, for I will give the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and **you shall drive them out** before you.

Ex 34:11 “Observe what I command you this day. Behold, **I will drive out** before you the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.”

## **The description of the conquest is often referred to as “driving out”**

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Num 33:52 ...then you shall **drive out** all the inhabitants of the land from before you and **destroy all their figured stones and destroy all their metal images and demolish all their high places.**

Deut 9:3-5 <sup>3</sup> Know therefore today that he who goes over before you as a consuming fire is the Lord your God. He will **destroy them** and **subdue** them before you. So you shall **drive them out** and make them **perish quickly**, as the Lord has promised you. <sup>4</sup> Do not say in your heart, after the Lord your God has **thrust them out** before you, “It is because of my righteousness that the Lord has brought me in to possess this land,” whereas it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the **Lord is driving them out** before you. <sup>5</sup> Not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart are you going in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations the Lord your **God is driving them out** from before you, and that he may confirm the word that the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

## **The description of the conquest is often referred to as “driving out”**

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Josh 3:10 And Joshua said, “Here is how you shall know that the living God is among you and that **he will without fail drive out** from before you the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Hivites, the Perizzites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, and the Jebusites.”

**The books of Joshua and Judges repeatedly say that not only did they not slaughter all the Canaanites, but they did not even drive them out.**

**Does “drive out” still seem too violent? In Ex 6:1 God wanted his own people to be driven out of Egypt.**

Ex 6:1 Then the Lord said to Moses, “Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh: Because of my mighty hand he will let them go; because of my mighty hand he will **drive them out** of his country.”

## **What about when God (or his angels) directly kill people?**

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**Do you know of any examples where this happened?**

### **When the Assyrians were about to attack Jerusalem**

**2 Kings 19:35** And that night the angel of the Lord went out and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians. And when people arose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies.

## **When the angel killed the Assyrians**

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- **About 20 years earlier Assyria had conquered Israel. At this point they were attempting to conquer Judah. God was defending his people.**
- **Assyria was a brutally violent nation (Assyrian texts describe burning, mutilating, and hanging captives, including boys and girls.)**
- **The Assyrians mocked God.**

**2 Kings 19:4** “It may be that the Lord your God heard all the words of the Rabshakeh, whom his master the king of Assyria has sent to **mock the living God**, and will rebuke the words that the Lord your God has heard; therefore lift up your prayer for the remnant that is left.”

**2 Kings 19:22-23** ...By your messengers you have **ridiculed the Lord....**



## We also have examples when God prevented violence

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### 2 Kings 6:8-23

6:18-23 <sup>18</sup> As the enemy came down toward him, Elisha prayed to the LORD, “Strike this army with blindness.” So, he struck them with blindness, as Elisha had asked. <sup>19</sup> Elisha told them, “This is not the road and this is not the city. Follow me, and I will lead you to the man you are looking for.” And he led them to Samaria. <sup>20</sup> After they entered the city, Elisha said, “LORD, open the eyes of these men so they can see.” Then the LORD opened their eyes and they looked, and there they were, inside Samaria. <sup>21</sup> When the king of Israel saw them, he asked Elisha, **“Shall I kill them, my father? Shall I kill them?”** <sup>22</sup> **“Do not kill them,”** he answered. “Would you kill those you have captured with your own sword or bow? Set food and water before them so that they may eat and drink and then go back to their master.” <sup>23</sup> **So he prepared a great feast for them,** and after they had finished eating and drinking, he sent them away, and they returned to their master. So the bands from Aram stopped raiding Israel’s territory.

## Here is another example when God did not kill the enemy

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### 2 Kings 6:24-7:7 (This was “some time later”, the king of Aram laid siege to Samaria, and there was a great famine.)

<sup>3</sup> Now there were four men with leprosy at the entrance of the city gate. They said to each other, “Why stay here until we die? <sup>4</sup> If we say, ‘We’ll go into the city’—the famine is there, and we will die. And if we stay here, we will die. So, let’s go over to the camp of the Arameans and surrender. If they spare us, we live; if they kill us, then we die.” <sup>5</sup> At dusk they got up and went to the camp of the Arameans. When they reached the edge of the camp, no one was there, <sup>6</sup> **for the Lord had caused the Arameans to hear the sound of chariots and horses and a great army,** so that they said to one another, “Look, the king of Israel has hired the Hittite and Egyptian kings to attack us!” <sup>7</sup> **So they got up and fled** in the dusk and abandoned their tents and their horses and donkeys. **They left the camp as it was and ran for their lives.**

## What about Jesus?

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**He said he did not come to bring peace, but a sword.**

**Mt 10:34 “Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.”**

**But he also said:**

**Jn 16:33 “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”**

**Jn 14:27 “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”**

**How do you reconcile these verses?**

### **Bottom line**

**God is willing to severely punish individuals and even nations because of sin, to protect the weak, and to promote peace.**

**Questions or comments?**

Here is another “What would you say?” video.

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Let's look at a couple of good videos.

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**Let's look at the next few weeks**

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**Week 6: Is God legalistic or gracious?**

**Week 7: Is God rigid or flexible?**

**Week 8: TBD**