

Reading the Bible as a Modern Person: Science and Violence

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Introduction:

- a. Full disclosure: who I am: a Christian reader in the 21st Century
- b. How I see these two issues related: it's about the Bible: it's nature as scripture and ancient text

1. The Issue of Science and the Bible

1.1. Starting with some Stories

- 1.1.1. "Enuma Elish" (= "when, on high") 2,000 BC Mesopotamian Celebrates Marduk.

Conflict between older gods. Tiamat plans to kill certain gods who were involved in the death of her husband. Marduk, chosen to lead the defense, fights and defeats Tiamat and lays out the cosmos using her corpse; half is the earth, half the sky. Marduk then kill's Kingu, who had aided Tiamat and makes people from the blood.

- 1.1.2. Atrahasis Epic: Sumerian (4,000 BC Mesopotamia)

The gods are restless and then rebellious because of the hard labor they are engaged in. People are created from clay to lighten the load. Human population explodes and after several attempts to limit it, finally a decision is made to send a flood to wipe out humanity. Atrahasis, king of Shuruppak learns of the plan, builds a boat and saves himself and human civilization.

- 1.1.3. Epic of Gilgamesh: (3,000 BC, has a long complex history as a text: the most widely copied piece of literature in the ancient world). In his journey-quest for immortality, Gilgamesh meets Utnapishtim, the survivor of the flood. In Gilgamesh, a life-giving plant is stolen from the hero by a serpent.

- 1.1.4. Notes from other stories

Sumerian (4,000 BC Mesopotamia) Enki and Ninma: creation of people from clay to relieve the gods of their hard labor. Sumerian Creation: opens with separation of heaven and earth. Gods in council agree to make humans to labor at irrigating the fields. An original pair, man and woman are made.

Egyptian: Memphis Creation Account, 3,000 BC. Ptah, the craftsman deity: he speaks into existence the Ennead, nine deities representing all of creation.

Hittite: Illuyanka: Illuyanka is a serpent representing chaos.

Ugarit (ancient Canaanite) The Baal Cycle: Baal is in conflict with Yamm, the god of the sea and chaos. He is eventually in conflict with Mot (god of death) who kills him, but later he returns from the underworld and fertility returns to the earth. In Ugarit, the man, ('adm) touches a tree he should not touch and is subsequently bitten by a poisonous snake

1.2. The Bible's Story

1.2.1. Creation in Genesis 1-2

Original condition: watery chaos, God present, alone

Gen 1:1-5 First Day - Light & Darkness

Gen 1:6-8 Second Day - Dome separates waters above and below [slide: text]

Gen 1:9-13 Third Day - Dry land (& vegetation) [slide: text]

Gen. 1:14-19 Fourth Day - Luminaries (un-named sun - Shamesh; moon, 'areah)

Gen. 1:20-23 Fifth Day - water life

Gen 1:24-25 Sixth Day - Land animals, 1:26-31 humans (in image of God, blessed)

Everything made pronounced "very good" v. 31

Gen. 2:1-3 Seventh Day - rest

Gen. 2 - 2nd version - creation of "man" from clay, woman from man's rib, to till and keep it (v. 15), trees - life & knowledge of good & evil v. 9, river v. 10

1.2.2. The World in Genesis 1-6

Flood story waters above and below Gen 7:11 & 8:2

1.3. Comparisons and what they Mean

1.3.1. Similarities: a shared world view

The world (cosmos) comes into being by means of (a) god(s)

World as bubble: water all around

Creation by Spoken word, or from existing material - clay

An original pair of humans

Job given to humans

Garden

Snake that is bad, tricky or evil in some sense

Sacred Tree(s)

Plant (tree) of immortality

Significance of touching a forbidden tree

God needing and getting rest after creation is complete (rest in a temple)

Nearly every element of the biblical creation story is in common with other ANE lit.

Clearly this is not a new revelation from God to the Israelites about how the world was made.

1.3.2. Differences: a difference with a reason: cosmology = theology

But there are profoundly significant differences which must be accounted for.
The Differences show the theological reflection of the Israelites, i.e. theology

1.4. Why a Creation Story? (theology)

1.4.1. Monotheism: Gen. 1:1 *“In the beginning, God...”* One God, outside created cosmos, unchallenged, without rival or conflict, the single source of everything made, all the world, all people(s), unlimited in power and scope; not a tribal God.

1.4.2. Goodness of Creation, the physical world

“God saw that it was good” - (Gen 1:4... 28) all works of creation; concluding of all of them “very good”

- This is why Incarnation is possible and why all forms of body-despising & gnosticism is wrong. Plato’s “body is the prison of the soul” is wrong.

1.4.3. Non-divinity of the Luminaries: Gen 1:14-19 (in great contrast to other peoples’ cosmologies)

Lights are merely objects created within the “sky” space

“Sun” and “moon” not named, but “greater” and “lesser lights, “and some stars”

Are given functions: rule day and night, mark times and seasons

1.4.4. Humans - Special Creation of humanity: The last and climactic creature

Breaks the rhetorical creation pattern established in the first 5 days:

Introduction of the command: “God said”

Command: “let there be”

completion: “it was so”

judgment: “God saw it that it was good”

time sequence: “It was evening... on day”

1.4.5. The “image of God” Gen. 1:27

- both male and female
- before racial or ethnic differentiation
- before political or linguistic differentiation
- before religious or ideological differentiation
- before any social or economic differentiation
- unique dignity: humans alone are created in God’s image
- reaffirmed after the flood Gen 9:4-6

- 1.4.6. Function humans fulfill: Gen. 1:28 Blessings: to be fruitful, multiply; to Subdue the earth and have dominion

Contrast: Babylonian: “to carry the yoke of the gods” i.e. relieve them of burden of daily drudgery.

Dominion in bible: in language of dominion of kings, cf. Ps. 8

- 1.4.7. God’s rest: Gen. 2:1 Rest is the goal: all the days of work culminate in a special day - Sabbath rest for humans like for God. (basis of Sabbath commandment in Exod 20:8)

- 1.4.8. Gen. 2:7 “living being” from clay + breath of life: a unity, not a body with a soul.

- 1.4.9. Work: Gen. 2:15 human is put in a garden “*to till it and keep it.*” “Paradise” of leisure is a foreign concept to the Bible. Work is natural: the garden needs upkeep and maintenance and the human is capable to do it. Work is understood functionally - soon, besides agriculture, it will become specialized (Gen 4:17-26)

Contrast the work humans are given in ANE stories to relieve the gods of drudgery.

- 1.4.10. Community: adam’s state before Eve was “not good” (Gen. 2:18) then Gen 2:23-25
Animals: contrast Gilgamesh epic, his companion Enkidu, formed from the earth, first lives “shaggy” with animals, eating with & like them, unafraid. Then the gods send a woman who seduces him, and civilizes him.

In Gen. animals are never proper “helpers” for humans. (W. 84)

- 1.4.11. The Human Defect: Gen. 3:1ff. - bad, but not the end

- 1.4.11.1. Note Pattern of sin followed by Divine intervention (grace):

Person(s)	Sin	Consequence	Intervention /Grace
Adam and Eve	eating fruit	Shame	God covers them
Cain	fratricide	Expulsion	mark of protection
all humanity	violence, & violating boundaries	Flood	Ark
all humanity	tower & violating boundaries	Languages, Destruction & scattering	Call of Abraham

1.4.11.2. Gen. 3:4-5 The Essential Failure = Failure of Trust

(1) Serpent raises question: has God kept something from the humans? Gen 3:1

Can they trust that God has their best interests at heart even if they do not know everything?
- i.e. a trust issue. the primal sin is mistrust of God - see Fretheim, p. 75

(2) Man (Adam) has been there the whole time: 3:6 and makes no objections to the offer

(3) Curse language is descriptive, not prescriptive (not a rule for the future, but a description of the consequences) Note: 3:16 “rule” of man over woman is a curse-state, not the intended, created state

(4) Note God’s continued presence outside the Garden, in spite of evil. Gen. 4:26

(5) The following stories up to the flood show increasing corruption, especially violence, from Cain’s fratricide (4:8, ff.) to Lamech’s arrogant vengeance (4:17-24) to the description of the state of humanity (6:5, 11) fully violent.

1.4.12. The Flood Story

(1) Consciously parallels Creation “and God saw...good/corrupt” 1:31; 6:12

(2) Undoes creation - return to watery world of Gen. 1

(3) Therefore: completes the two possible ways of Creating a “good” world:

a. Start from nothing (Gen 1-2)

b. Start with only good people (Gen. 6-9)

Result: same - people make wrong choices

1.4.13. The Creation Themes continue to play important role throughout the OT
Creation in other contexts in OT - a few noteworthy examples:

Psalms: 8, 19; 33:6, 9; 65:12-13; 90:2; 96:11-12; 104; 146; 148

Prophets, for example, Jeremiah 10:1-16; Amos 4:13; Isaiah 40:28-31; 41:1-5; 42:5-6a, 12-13; 43:5-7; 44:2; 45:18; 51:9

Writings: Job 38-41; Proverbs 8

2. The Issue of Violence in the Bible

2.1. The Problem of violence in the bible (not small, not going away)

2.1.1. Stories of violence: Samuel, Saul and the Amalekites 1 Sam15

Samuel told king Saul to commit genocide at the Lord's command:

1Sam. 15:1 Samuel said to Saul, "The LORD sent me to anoint you king over his people Israel; now therefore listen to the words of the LORD. 2 Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'I will punish the Amalekites for what they did in opposing the Israelites when they came up out of Egypt. 3 Now go and attack Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have; do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.'"

This was God's punishment for a crime the Amalekites committed 400 years earlier when the Israelites were in the wilderness on the way from Egypt to Canaan. (Exodus 17:8-13)

Saul did go and fight the Amalekites, but he and his men kept some of the spoil animals instead of killing them, and the king Agag. 1 sam 15:7-9

1Sam. 15:7 Saul defeated the Amalekites, from Havilah as far as Shur, which is east of Egypt. 8 He took King Agag of the Amalekites alive, but utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword. 9 Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep and of the cattle and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was valuable, and would not utterly destroy them; all that was despised and worthless they utterly destroyed.

Here is the reaction of God and Samuel (1 Sam 15:10-

1Sam. 15:10 The word of the LORD came to Samuel: 11 "I regret that I made Saul king, for he has turned back from following me, and has not carried out my commands."

14 But Samuel said, "What then is this bleating of sheep in my ears, and the lowing of cattle that I hear?" 15 Saul said, "They have brought them from the Amalekites; for the people spared the best of the sheep and the cattle, to sacrifice to the LORD your God; but the rest we have utterly destroyed." 16 Then Samuel said to Saul, "Stop! I will tell you what the LORD said to me last night." He replied, "Speak."

18 And the LORD sent you on a mission, and said, 'Go, utterly destroy the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are consumed.' 19 Why then did you not obey the voice of the LORD? Why did you swoop down on the spoil, and do what was evil in the sight of the LORD?" 20 Saul said to Samuel, "I have obeyed the voice of the LORD, I have gone on the mission on which the LORD sent me, I have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and I have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. 21 But from the spoil the people took sheep and cattle, the best of the things devoted to destruction, to sacrifice to the LORD your God in Gilgal."

28 And Samuel said to him, “The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this very day, and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you.

15:32 Then Samuel said, “Bring Agag king of the Amalekites here to me.” And Agag came to him haltingly. Agag said, “Surely this is the bitterness of death.” 33 But Samuel said, “As your sword has made women childless, so your mother shall be childless among women.” And Samuel hewed Agag in pieces before the LORD in Gilgal.

2.1.2. God’s participation: commanding and conducting mass killing:

1. The Flood, Gen. 6-9

Gen. 6:5-7 The LORD saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually. 6 And the LORD was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. 7 So the LORD said, “I will blot out from the earth the human beings I have created—people together with animals and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.”

2. The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah Gen. 19

Gen. 19:24 Then the LORD rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulfur and fire from the LORD out of heaven; 25 and he overthrew those cities, and all the Plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground.

3. The “conquest of Canaan” Deut. 7:1-2; 20:16-18

Deut. 7:1 When the LORD your God brings you into the land that you are about to enter and occupy, and he clears away many nations before you—the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations mightier and more numerous than you— 2 and when the LORD your God gives them over to you and you defeat them, then you must utterly destroy them. Make no covenant with them and show them no mercy.

Deut. 20:16 But as for the towns of these peoples that the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, you must not let anything that breathes remain alive. 17 You shall annihilate them—the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites—just as the LORD your God has commanded, 18 so that they may not teach you to do all the abhorrent things that they do for their gods, and you thus sin against the LORD your God.

Joshua 10:40 So Joshua defeated the whole land, the hill country and the Negeb and the lowland and the slopes, and all their kings; he left no one remaining, but utterly destroyed all that breathed, as the LORD God of Israel commanded.

Note that this includes killing women and children, infants and the elderly, sick, lame, everyone.

To this list could be added numerous plagues (e.g. Numb 16), the killing of all the firstborn of Egypt at Passover (Exod 12), the numerous death penalty laws, death by snakes (Num. 21), hailstones (Josh 23), lions (2 Kings 17)

2.1.3. Individual Deaths as punishment - numerous examples

A man who picked up sticks on the Sabbath (Numb 15:32-36)
 Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu who offered "unholy fire" (Lev. 10:1-2)
 Uzzah; killed for touching the ark, to keep it from falling (2 Sam. 6:1-8)

2.1.4. Attempted solutions and their problems

(source: Eric A. Seibert: *Disturbing Divine Behavior*)

Divine Immunity: Everything God does is good because God can do no wrong
 The Just Cause: God had a good reason for killing

The Greater Good: killing some serves the greater good
 God acted differently in the OT: he did it then when Israel was a political state

Permissive will (not his Perfect will) is why he allowed violence in the OT

2.1.4.1. Divine Immunity: Everything God does is good because God can do no wrong.

Language and Morality: calling acts "good" or "just" must mean we know what these words mean.

"Cruelty remains cruelty even if the Bible attributes it to God." - Gerd Ludemann (in Seibert, p. 74)

"If God's standard of justice is so fundamentally different from ours that physical abuse and the slaughter of babies can be considered just, then it no longer seems possible to have a meaningful conversation about what constitutes justice" - Seibert, p. 74

"If the indiscriminate slaughter of human beings for any reason can be called a 'good' and 'righteous act... then all moral and ethical absolutes are destroyed, all distinctions between good and evil are rendered meaningless, and all claims about God's love and compassion become cruel depictions. It represents the ultimate corruption of human language and makes meaningful theological discourse virtually impossible." - C. S. Cowles, in Seibert, 74 (from *Show Them No Mercy*" p. 100)

2.1.4.2. The Just Cause: God had a good reason for killing

Typically the reason given is that the level of sinfulness requires death, as in the case of the flood (Gen. 6:11-13).

But: remember this includes everyone - babies, mothers, the elderly, the lame.

Sometimes the "reason" is preposterous: the genocide against the Amalekites for actions

they did hundreds of yeas in the past. (1 Sam. 15)

2.1.4.3. The Greater Good: killing some serves the greater good

The Canaanites would have corrupted the morality of the Israelites, and so they had to be eliminated (Exod 23:31-33; Deut. 20:16-18)

This is the logic of Hitler's *Mein Kampf* which justifies genocide like the Holocaust: the extermination of one group to save the purity of another.

Is it morally coherent to ask people to commit genocide in order to preserve their moral purity? This is the ultimate use of "ends justifies means" argument, which is morally vacant.

2.1.4.4. God acted differently in the OT: he did it then when Israel was a political state

They were at an earlier stage of moral development, so God accommodated himself to their level.

But there is no evidence that "later" texts (which is hard to determine) have a higher moral sense than later ones.

This is especially evident in Hosea's condemnation of Jehu's campaign of violence [Hosea 1:4] and Micah's vision of worldwide peace [Micah 4], followed by many stories of violence by God and people, including the exilic Psalm 137

2.1.4.5. Permissive will (not his Perfect will) is why he allowed violence in the OT

This simply excludes from discussion all the times God himself initiates massive violence, commands violent acts, and assists violent behavior.

2.1.5. Discerning a Trajectory

2.1.5.1. The Bible's view of the use of violence (word study of "violence")

The subject of violence in the bible is much larger than a study of the word "violence" itself, but it is interesting to start there. There are nearly 60 texts from a concordance search of the word "violence", here are some general conclusions:

- Violence is linked with evil – evil people, evil plans, accompanied by murderous anger (Proverbs 10:11)
- Violence is judged as sinful, cursed, will come back on the ones who use it against others, it fills the land and necessitates God's judgment (Psalm 7:16; 11:5)

- Violence is linked with court fraud (Ex 23:1; Ps 35:11)
- One cries out to God to be safe from violence and violent people (2 Samuel 22:3)
- Violence is a sign of innocence is not having violence on your hands (Job 16:17)
- According to the prophets, in the future time of restoration violence will be finished, not heard of anymore (Isaiah 60:18)

So violence is never a good thing, never excused or justified. It's always evil, done by evil people, a reason for the righteous to cry out to God and a reason for God to judge the ones who practice it.

In the end there is an irresolvable tension within the OT on the subject of violence. It is celebrated and condemned. It is a means God uses against those he condemns and a reason he condemns them.

2.1.5.2. The Self Disclosure motif, Exodus 34:6

The character of God: part of the tension concerning violence is that God both uses and commands violence, is called “a warrior” (Exod 15:3) but also discloses an opposite side of his character:

Ex. 34:6 The LORD passed before him (Moses), and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,

This “disclosure formula” (with variation) occurs throughout the entire OT in books of “Law” “Prophets” and “Writings” (the 3 sections of the Hebrew bible)

Law: Exod 34:6; Num 14:18; Deut 4:31;

Prophets: Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2;

Writings: Psalms 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Neh 9:17

This often-repeated self-disclosure stands in direct tension with the depictions of God as violent.

2.1.5.3. The Vision of the world as it should be/will be: the Peaceable Kingdom

The vision of the future time of beating swords into plows and spears into pruning hooks (Micah 4:3 // Isa 2:2-4) only further emphasizes that swords and spears are bad things in themselves – regardless of whose hands they are in; and yet there is that hopeful vision of a time of peace to come in which no hand will hold them, neither will people learn how to

use them.

Mic. 4:1 "In days to come... they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more; 4 but they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken."

2.2. Jesus and violence

2.2.1. Jesus' rejection of violence

1. Jesus taught the Love of enemies Matt 5:44

Matt. 5:43 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be children of your Father in heaven;

Note that this command is rooted in the nature of God (v. 45) as Jesus understands God.

2. Overcome evil with good Matt 5:38

Matt. 5:38 "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' 39 But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also;

3. Inaugural sermon in Nazareth (Luke 4:18-19) Jesus reads from Isaiah 61:1-2 and says that it is now fulfilled in him

Luke 4:16 "When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, 17 and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

*18 "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,*

19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

20 And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. 21 Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

But Isaiah continues with violence, which Jesus intentionally eliminated from his reading:

Isa 61:2 to proclaim the year of, the LORD'S favor, and the day of vengeance of our God;

4. Jesus forbids his disciples from calling down fire from heaven to consume Samaritans Luke 9:51-56.
5. At his arrest Jesus reversed the violent effects of Peter's sword, saying, "*all who take the sword will perish by the sword.*" Matt 26:52
6. Jesus stopped an execution of an adulterer (John 8:1-11) in spite of the OT laws commanding it (Lev. 20:10)
7. Jesus allowed himself to be killed rather than use violence to protect himself.

2.2.2. Jesus is why violence is a problem

It is precisely Jesus, his life and teaching which lead us to conclude that violence is wrong, and therefore why we find the violence in the OT such a problem.

2.2.3. Jesus is the how we know God

Christians believe that Jesus shows us who God is:

Incarnation: Jesus is God in flesh (John 1:1; Phil. 2:5-6; Col. 1:15, 19; Heb 1:3)

To see Jesus is to see God John 14:8

"In the New Testament, Jesus is not defined by God; rather God is defined by Jesus." - Cowles, 22.

"The stories that reflect the God revealed in Jesus Christ ... function as the lens through which we interpret the rest of the biblical material and will be our guide to a truer understanding of the character of God" - David Janzen, in Seibert, p. 186

2.3. Reading as a Christian: a "Christo-centric" reading (Christ in the center)

"The God Jesus reveals should be the standard, or measuring rod, by which all Old Testament portrayals of God are evaluated" - Seibert, p. 185

The question to ask is, what kind of God does God reveal?

If the God that Jesus reveals differs from the God described by the authors of the OT, which one must go?

3. Reading the Bible as adults

3.1. The Impossibility of literal reading: the example of the 2 "Ten Commandments"

The Ten Commandments: 2 versions, by the “finger of God” (Ex. 31:18; Deut. 9:10)

Ex. 31:18 When God finished speaking with Moses on Mount Sinai, he gave him the two tablets of the covenant, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God.

Deut. 9:10 And the LORD gave me the two stone tablets written with the finger of God; on them were all the words that the LORD had spoken to you at the mountain out of the fire on the day of the assembly.

But they have differences, especially the reason given for Sabbath keeping: for Exodus it is Creation rest, for Deuteronomy it is Liberation from slavery, plus other minor differences.

Exodus 20	Deuteronomy 5
<p><i>Ex. 20:8 Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work. 10 But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. 11 For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.</i></p>	<p><i>Deut. 5:12 Observe the sabbath day and keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. 13 Six days you shall labor and do all your work. 14 But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work—you, or your son or your daughter, or your male or female slave, or your ox or your donkey, or any of your livestock, or the resident alien in your towns, so that your male and female slave may rest as well as you. 15 Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day.</i></p>

3.2. Many other examples of the impossibility of reading the bible literally could be added:

- Creation: “light” created on “day one” but the sun (greater light) on day 4
- Cain kills Able (the only two children of Adam and Eve) then left to settle in the land of Nod where he and his wife have children (Gen 4:16-17)
- Joshua conquered all the land (11:21-23; 21:43-45) but much remained outside Israelite control (13:1-7); The book of Judges begins in the first chapter (1:27-34) contains a litany of the tribes who “did not drive out the inhabitants” of their allotted territory in spite of Joshua’s sweeping claims.
- Israelite tribes were not able to dispossess the indigenous inhabitants (Josh. 15:63; 16:10; 17:4-8), but none of their enemies withstood them (Josh. 21:43-45).

This is not a matter of finding “contradictions” as if they were mistakes.

Rather this shows clearly that these texts were never intended to be read literally.

- Irony: many “descriptions” are written with irony, often bitter irony: as the whole saga of the “wise” Solomon whose policies both bankrupted the nation and set up the conditions for the re-enslavement of the population by dismantling of family tribal lands, not to mention rampant idolatry (1 Kings)
- The Song of Miriam and Moses (Exodus 15) after the Red Sea crossing is clearly a re-use of a poem originally about a battle at sea, and ends with a reference to the “sanctuary” on the mountain where the Lord dwells (15:17)

3.3. The Nature of Ancient Literature: History as Parable, Lesson, Theology, Ideology

There are many reasons that the authors of the bible had for writing about the past, but one of most common is to assert something about the present (the author’s present time) - e.g. to justify the rise of the house of David over the house of Saul, or to assert that the monarchy was a failed project which should not be repeated (post exile).

Seibert uses the example of modern literature that works the same way: *The Crucible* is set in the time of the Salem witch trials but Miller wrote it to attack McCarthyism. *MASH* was set in the time of the Korean war to say something about the Viet Nam war. (Seibert, p. 108)

3.4. “God” as a character in someone’s story

When a story is written in which God says or does something, God is a character in that story.

The OT is a collection of many stories in which God is a character.

God’s characteristics are those that the biblical author chooses to give him - anger, love, hostility, creativity, impatience, mercy.

Note: in a culture and context that practices polygamy, slavery and holy war, the human characters and the God character will assume these “facts of life” as “given” - the way it is.

“...it is so crucial to distinguish carefully between the textual God and the actual God lest we confuse the two and make God the author of unspeakable evil” - Seibert, p. 204

“As we begin to see God through the lens of Jesus, we realize there are times when we simply must say, ‘This is not God!’ God is not in the business of acting unjustly, abusing people, or perpetuating acts of violence.... Therefore, instead of rushing to God’s defense, attempting to explain why God was justified to act in such ethically and morally problematic ways, we should acknowledge that these portrayals do not display God’s true nature.” - Seibert, p. 205

3.5. Some Recommendations for Reading the Bible today

- 3.5.1. First ask the question: What was it about this particular text that the community of faith found important as a guide to their faithfulness to God, given what they believed that they knew of God then, and how they understood themselves and their context then?

Note: even one of worst, ugliest, unjustifiable stories in the OT - (in which Samuel kills the Amalekite king Agag whom Saul had failed to kill, along with all the people and all the animals according to God's command as punishment for their crime 400 years earlier, 1 Sam 15) we find a teaching that is so fundamentally important that it was used (in the Hosea version) by Jesus himself, the essence of which is that sacrifice is not most important:

Matt. 12:7 *"I desire mercy and not sacrifice"*

1 Sam 15:22 *"And Samuel said, Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Surely, to obey is better than sacrifice"*

- 3.5.2. Ask the Jesus question

Since his revelation of God and God's will takes precedence for Christians: how does this text fit on the understanding of God that Jesus championed?

What did Jesus say or do that has bearing on this text?

How can I understand this text in such a way that it will increase my faithfulness as a disciple of Jesus?

- 3.5.3. End with the "end game" or eschatological question:

Given the vision of God's future state (Isaiah, & Micah, & Joel & Revelation, et.al.) how does this text move us forward? For example, the vision of the Messianic banquet, the throne room of the Lamb, etc.

- 3.5.4. Rely on the promise Jesus made of help from the Holy Spirit's whose role is to guide this process.

John 14:25 "I have said these things to you while I am still with you. 26 But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, [1] will teach you everything, and [2] remind you of all that I have said to you."

4. Recommended Resources

4.1. On Science or Creation or Ancient Cosmologies

- *God and the World in the Old Testament: A Relational Theology of Creation* by Terrence E. Fretheim, Abingdon Press, 2005.
- *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the conceptual world of the Hebrew Bible*, by John H. Walton, Baker Books, 2006 (“Hebrew Bible” is just another way of saying “Old Testament” - knowledge of Hebrew is not required).
- *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate*, also by John H. Walton, IVP, 2009
- *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief*, by Francis Collins, Free Press, 2007. Collins is a medical geneticist who headed the Human Genome Project (some knowledge of science required)

4.2. On Violence in the Bible

- *Disturbing Divine Behavior: Troubling Old Testament Images of God* by Eric Seibert, Fortress press, 2009
- *Show Them No Mercy: Four Views on God and Canaanite Genocide* especially the chapter “The Case for Radical Discontinuity” by C. S. Cowels
- *Jesus and the Victory of God*, by N. T. Wright, Fortress Press, 1996, especially Wright’s analysis of the meaning of the motif of cosmological signs (the moon turning to blood, & etc.) in the bible and in its historical context)

4.3. On Reading

- *The Blue Parakeet: Rethinking how you read your Bible*, by Scot McKnight, Zondervan, 2008
- *The Things They Carried*” a novel by Tim O’Brien, Mariner Books, 2009. (this is a novel about soldiers in Viet Nam, but the real value is in O’Brien’s reflections on what it means to tell a story that is “true” - that is, that communicates the “truth” that the story-tell experienced in all its complexity.)

4.4. On Christian Ethics

- *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics*, by Stanley Hauerwas, Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1983. This is a classic.

Appendix:

A. Word Study of Violence (hamas) in the OT

Gen. 6:11 Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence.

Gen. 6:13 And God said to Noah, "I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence because of them; now I am going to destroy them along with the earth.

Gen. 16:5 Then Sarai said to Abram, "May the wrong done to me be on you! I gave my slave-girl to your embrace, and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked on me with contempt. May the LORD judge between you and me!"

Gen. 49:5 Simeon and Levi are brothers;
weapons of violence are their swords.

Ex. 23:1 You shall not spread a false report. You shall not join hands with the wicked to act as a malicious witness.

Deut. 19:16 If a malicious witness comes forward to accuse someone of wrongdoing,

Judg. 9:24 This happened so that the violence done to the seventy sons of Jerubbaal might be avenged and their blood be laid on their brother Abimelech, who killed them, and on the lords of Shechem, who strengthened his hands to kill his brothers.

2Sam. 22:3 my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge,
my shield and the horn of my salvation,
my stronghold and my refuge,
my savior; you save me from violence.

2Sam. 22:49 who brought me out from my enemies;
you exalted me above my adversaries,
you delivered me from the violent.

Is. 53:9 They made his grave with the wicked
and his tomb with the rich,
although he had done no violence,
and there was no deceit in his mouth.

Is. 59:6 Their webs cannot serve as clothing;
they cannot cover themselves with what they make.
Their works are works of iniquity,

and deeds of violence are in their hands.

Is. 60:18 Violence shall no more be heard in your land,
devastation or destruction within your borders;
you shall call your walls Salvation,
and your gates Praise.

Jer. 6:7 As a well keeps its water fresh,
so she keeps fresh her wickedness;
violence and destruction are heard within her;
sickness and wounds are ever before me.

Jer. 20:8 For whenever I speak, I must cry out,
I must shout, "Violence and destruction!"
For the word of the LORD has become for me
a reproach and derision all day long.

Jer. 51:35 May my torn flesh be avenged on Babylon,"
the inhabitants of Zion shall say.
"May my blood be avenged on the inhabitants of Chaldea,"
Jerusalem shall say.

Jer. 51:46 Do not be faint-hearted or fearful
at the rumors heard in the land—
one year one rumor comes,
the next year another,
rumors of violence in the land
and of ruler against ruler.

Ezek. 7:11 Violence has grown into a rod of wickedness.
None of them shall remain,
not their abundance, not their wealth;
no pre-eminence among them.

Ezek. 7:23 Make a chain!
For the land is full of bloody crimes;
the city is full of violence.

Ezek. 8:17 Then he said to me, "Have you seen this, O mortal? Is it not bad enough that the house of Judah commits the abominations done here? Must they fill the land with violence, and provoke my anger still further? See, they are putting the branch to their nose!

Ezek. 12:19 and say to the people of the land, Thus says the Lord GOD concerning the inhabitants of Jerusalem in the land of Israel: They shall eat their bread with fearfulness, and drink their water in dismay, because their land shall be stripped of all it contains, on account of the violence of all those who live in it.

Ezek. 28:16 In the abundance of your trade
 you were filled with violence, and you sinned;
 so I cast you as a profane thing from the mountain of God,
 and the guardian cherub drove you out
 from among the stones of fire.

Ezek. 45:9 Thus says the Lord GOD: Enough, O princes of Israel! Put away violence and oppression, and do what is just and right. Cease your evictions of my people, says the Lord GOD.

Joel 3:19 Egypt shall become a desolation
 and Edom a desolate wilderness,
 because of the violence done to the people of Judah,
 in whose land they have shed innocent blood.

Amos 3:10 They do not know how to do right, says the LORD,
 those who store up violence and robbery in their strongholds.

Amos 6:3 O you that put far away the evil day,
 and bring near a reign of violence?

Obad. 10 For the slaughter and violence done to your brother Jacob,
 shame shall cover you,
 and you shall be cut off forever.

Jonah 3:8 Human beings and animals shall be covered with sackcloth, and they shall cry mightily to God. All shall turn from their evil ways and from the violence that is in their hands.

Mic. 6:12 Your wealthy are full of violence;
 your inhabitants speak lies,
 with tongues of deceit in their mouths.

Hab. 1:2 O LORD, how long shall I cry for help,
 and you will not listen?
 Or cry to you "Violence!"
 and you will not save?

3 Why do you make me see wrong-doing
 and look at trouble?
 Destruction and violence are before me;
 strife and contention arise.

Hab. 1:9 They all come for violence,
 with faces pressing forward;
 they gather captives like sand.

Hab. 2:8 Because you have plundered many nations,
all that survive of the peoples shall plunder you—
because of human bloodshed, and violence to the earth,
to cities and all who live in them.

Hab. 2:17 For the violence done to Lebanon will overwhelm you;
the destruction of the animals will terrify you—
because of human bloodshed and violence to the earth,
to cities and all who live in them.

Zeph. 1:9 On that day I will punish
all who leap over the threshold,
who fill their master's house
with violence and fraud.

Mal. 2:16 For I hate divorce, says the LORD, the God of Israel, and covering one's garment with violence, says the LORD of hosts. So take heed to yourselves and do not be faithless.

Psa. 7:16 Their mischief returns upon their own heads,
and on their own heads their violence descends.

Psa. 11:5 The LORD tests the righteous and the wicked,
and his soul hates the lover of violence.

Psa. 18:48 who delivered me from my enemies;
indeed, you exalted me above my adversaries;
you delivered me from the violent.

Psa. 25:19 Consider how many are my foes,
and with what violent hatred they hate me.

Psa. 27:12 Do not give me up to the will of my adversaries,
for false witnesses have risen against me,
and they are breathing out violence.

Psa. 35:11 Malicious witnesses rise up;
they ask me about things I do not know.

Psa. 55:9 Confuse, O Lord, confound their speech;
for I see violence and strife in the city.

Psa. 58:2 No, in your hearts you devise wrongs;
your hands deal out violence on earth.

Psa. 72:14 From oppression and violence he redeems their life;
and precious is their blood in his sight.

Psa. 73:6 Therefore pride is their necklace;
violence covers them like a garment.

Psa. 74:20 Have regard for your covenant,
for the dark places of the land are full of the haunts of violence.

Psa. 140:1 Deliver me, O LORD, from evildoers;
protect me from those who are violent,

Psa. 140:4 Guard me, O LORD, from the hands of the wicked;
protect me from the violent
who have planned my downfall.

Psa. 140:11 Do not let the slanderer be established in the land;
let evil speedily hunt down the violent!

Job 16:17 though there is no violence in my hands,
and my prayer is pure.

Job 19:7 Even when I cry out, 'Violence!' I am not answered;
I call aloud, but there is no justice.

Prov. 3:31 Do not envy the violent
and do not choose any of their ways;

Prov. 4:17 For they eat the bread of wickedness
and drink the wine of violence.

Prov. 10:6 Blessings are on the head of the righteous,
but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.

Prov. 10:11 The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life,
but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.

Prov. 13:2 From the fruit of their words good persons eat good things,
but the desire of the treacherous is for wrongdoing.

Prov. 16:29 The violent entice their neighbors,
and lead them in a way that is not good.

Prov. 26:6 It is like cutting off one's foot and drinking down violence,
to send a message by a fool.

1Chr. 12:17 David went out to meet them and said to them, "If you have come to me in friendship, to help me, then my heart will be knit to you; but if you have come to betray me to my adversaries, though my hands have done no wrong, then may the God of our ancestors see and give judgment."

Appendix B. The “Divine Disclosure” formula texts

Ex. 34:6 The LORD passed before him, and proclaimed,
 “The LORD, the LORD,
 a God merciful and gracious,
 slow to anger,
 and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,

Num. 14:18 ‘The LORD is slow to anger,
 and abounding in steadfast love,
 forgiving iniquity and transgression,
 but by no means clearing the guilty,
 visiting the iniquity of the parents
 upon the children
 to the third and the fourth generation.’

Deut. 4:31 Because the LORD your God is a merciful God, he will neither abandon you nor destroy you; he will not forget the covenant with your ancestors that he swore to them.

Neh. 9:17 they refused to obey, and were not mindful of the wonders that you performed among them; but they stiffened their necks and determined to return to their slavery in Egypt. But you are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and you did not forsake them.

Psa. 86:15 But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious,
 slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

Psa. 103:8 The LORD is merciful and gracious,
 slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

Psa. 145:8 The LORD is gracious and merciful,
 slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

Joel 2:13 rend your hearts and not your clothing.
 Return to the LORD, your God,
 for he is gracious and merciful,
 slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love,
 and relents from punishing.

Jonah 4:2 He prayed to the LORD and said, “O LORD! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing.