

## READING 1

*“When you march up to attack a city, make its people an offer of peace. If they accept and open their gates, all the people in it shall be subject to forced labor and shall work for you. If they refuse to make peace and they engage you in battle, lay siege to that city. When the LORD your God delivers it into your hand, put to the sword all the men in it. As for the women, the children, the livestock and everything else in the city, you may take these as plunder for yourselves. And you may use the plunder the LORD your God gives you from your enemies. This is how you are to treat all the cities that are at a distance from you and do not belong to the nations nearby.”*

**16** *However, in the cities of the nations the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, do not leave alive anything that breathes. **17** Completely destroy[a] them—the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites—as the LORD your God has commanded you.*

## ***Deuteronomy 20: 10-15***

**John Dickson**

That's Deuteronomy, chapter 20, in the Old Testament

...

God commanding Israelite armies to conquer and enslave the people of Canaan - soon to be the land of Israel.

It's the prologue to one of the most controversial parts of the Bible - the book of Joshua - where the history of that conquest is laid out in brutal detail.

Parts of the Bible are hard to read.

Some have lost their faith in God over it.

Here's Kristi Burke, a popular youtuber who posted a video titled '5 passages that caused me to lose my faith'.

## [YouTube - Five Bible passages that caused me to lose my faith](#)

### **John Dickson**

I was friends with the head of the Sceptics Society in NSW a few years ago.

He agreed with me that the 'new atheists' didn't offer any compelling philosophical or scientific arguments against Christianity. But told me that the one argument from that literature he did find powerful was this one: The God of the OT seems like a vindictive tyrant.

- God destroys all life in a huge flood
- God makes fire and brimstone rain down on the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah
- God commands the destruction of the whole city of Jericho
- God commands the killing of the people of Amalek - all the men, women, children and animals.

The list goes on. This isn't God just *allowing* violence. He is *commanding* it.

What are we to do with this?

Let me admit up front, there are things I find baffling in the Bible. I sometimes want to turn the page quickly and pretend it's not there.

We won't be doing that today.

I'm John Dickson, and this is Undeceptions.

## **INTRO**

This season of Undeceptions is sponsored by Zondervan Academic. Get discounts on MasterLectures video courses and exclusive samples of their books at [zondervanacademic.com/undeceptions](http://zondervanacademic.com/undeceptions).

Each episode we explore some aspect of life, faith, history, philosophy, science, culture, or ethics that's either much misunderstood or mostly forgotten. With the help of people who know what they're talking about,

we're trying to 'undeceive ourselves', and let the truth 'out'.

### **John Dickson (tape)**

Let's go back to the, to the very beginning, um, the opening of, uh, the Bible, the creation. Account, uh, doesn't seem to have any violence. It does seem like violence is an intrusion later. Is this significant, uh, in terms of the literary flow, of the Bible, in terms of theology?

### **Helen Paynter**

Oh, this is hugely significant. Uh, we need to remember that. And if I use the language, a myth, um, I want listeners to understand I'm, I'm not, I, I, I'm not denigrating these texts. I'm talking about. A myth is a, is a foundational story that has enormous, ongoing, explanatory

### **John Dickson (tape)**

We've done many episodes with that exact language. You, you're amongst friends. Great.

## **John Dickson**

I'm speaking with the Reverend Dr. Helen Paynter, a minister and Research Fellow at Bristol Baptist College in the UK, with a PhD in Old Testament studies. She's also the Director of the Centre for the Study of the Bible and Violence, and she has a new book soon to be published called *Blessed are the Peacemakers: A Biblical Theology of Human Violence*.

## **Helen Paynter**

Great. So, uh, so the, the Genesis myth is written is one among many in its day. Um, and, uh, the, the, the ancient Near East was a wash with creation myths and all of the others, although they have different, you know, differences of course, but, but they share, um, the, the feature that they all involve violence.

## **John Dickson**

For new listeners, 'myth' in this context doesn't mean untrue or fiction. It means that the early chapters of Genesis employ literary devices (originally, oral storytelling devices) to convey large cultural themes.

Check out Episode 72 'The Flood' with Professor John Walton - my colleague here at Wheaton - for more info on the "cultural river" that informed a lot of these ancient creation/decreation texts.

## **Helen Paynter**

So the h at the east was a, was a wash with, um, with, with other myths. And what they have in common is, is that they, that the, the deity or the deities, which are creating all employ violence that the, the. Creation is sometimes kind of an accidental byproduct of violence or it's, it's done outta a violent urge or an an, an urge to, to, to have slaves to do their work, or there's always violence at the heart

## **John Dickson**

The Enūma Eliš is the Babylonian creation myth, discovered in the 19th century on 7 tablets in the ruined

library of Ashurbanipal - named after an Assyrian King.

It was one of a staggering 30,000 works found, with other texts including the famous *Epic of Gilgamesh*, which is a Sumerian creation myth ... man we need to do an episode on ancient libraries one day.

Anyway, *Enūma Eliš* recounts the origins of the world, the ascendancy of the God Marduk in the Babylonian pantheon, and the creation of humans to be slaves of the gods.

## Helen Paynter

Um, So the victorious God Marduk, um, has, is creating the world outta the corpse of the Concord monster, tma. And it says this, he split her in two, like a fish for drying. Half of her, he set up and made as a cover heaven. He stretched out the hide and assigned watchmen and ordered them not to let her waters escape.

So there's this monsters being kind of broken in half and, and her spine is being used as a, uh, to, to create the, the firmament above. Um, and, and we've got these inter interesting intertwining themes, which we do see some of these glimpses of some of these themes in



Genesis interestingly. So the idea of separation of something above and something below.

Um, the idea of binding back chaos. This is language of ordering her, them not to let her waters escape. We see those glimpses. In Genesis and elsewhere, actually in, uh, in the Old Testament, but it's absolutely not violent. Unlike the Enum Elish and, and many others that we could think of.

### **John Dickson (tape)**

I, I guess, People will be listening and thinking, okay, that's great. You know, two pages of the Bible are, are, are pretty. And then it gets pretty ugly. Cain and Abel. Sure. And then God wipes everyone out in chapters six to nine.

### **READING**

*“The LORD regretted making human beings on the earth, and his heart was grieved.*

*So the LORD said: I will wipe out from the earth the human beings I have created, and not only the human beings but also the animals and the crawling things and the birds of the air, for I regret that I made them.”*

## ***Genesis 6: 6-7***

### **John Dickson (tape)**

And, uh, how do, how do we account for this? I mean, do we have a contradiction right in the opening chapters?

### **Helen Paynter**

Uh, not in my view. Um, and, and. Please don't hear me be want being, um, insent being, you know, being flippant about some of the challenges that, that we read in, in the pages of the Old Testament. And I, and I really do take them seriously, but, um, if we just think about what happens after the fall, um, so as you say, pretty much the first thing that happens is, is Cain and Abel, and it's very interesting.

### **John Dickson**

That's Cain murdering his brother Abel, by the way, found in Genesis 4.

It's the first case of murder recorded in the Bible and comes just after their parents - Adam and Eve - are expelled from the Garden of Eden.

## Helen Paynter

To me that as our narrator is constructing a, a narrative of human, um, of, of ever-increasing human depravity, which is basically what we get in these opening chapters, um, after the fall. Um, He could have chosen all sorts of things to highlight. Um, he could have chosen sexual perversion, for example, but actually what he chooses to, to highlight is the ever increasing violence of the world. Um, and, and I think that's, that's very interesting because it's, first of all, it shows the significance of violence in in God's.

Mind in God's heart, I think, and also because it shows how inherently our violent urges are, are, are entangled with our disordered desires. Um, And with our, with our human, with our human fallen state. Um, so that's what I read in the, in the next few chapters, you've got Cain and Abel, and then you've got this, um, you've got Lamek who celebrates, um, multiplication of violence in his little song that he sings to his wives.

Uh, we've got the structure of violence coming in as well with, with polygamy and, and, and, and the emergence of warriors. Um, and then we get to the flood and, and you're right, this is, uh, for many a, a really challenging. Um, few chapters and some of the really helpful work that's been done on this, in my view, is by Daniel Hawke.

## **John Dickson**

Professor L. Daniel Hawke is Ashland Theological Seminary in Ohio.

He wrote an important book on this subject; *The Violence of the Biblical God*. Link in the show notes.

## **Helen Paynter**

Um, and he draws attention to the way that, um, that violence is kind of fronted, uh, by the narrator as the problem which, which God is seeing, um, and to which he's responding. Um, but he also draws attention to something that often doesn't show up in our English translations, which is that God looks, um, at the world and says, um, behold it is ruined.

And then he says, and therefore I will ruin it. Um, and it's, it's the same verb in other words. So, What Hawke argues is going on, and, and I think this is really helpful and plausible, and I think it's plausible 'cause we see the same pattern many further times in scripture, is that what God is doing at the flood, um, is that he is giving humanity over to its own urges and that humanity is embracing violence and he's therefore just simply giving them over, giving us, giving them over to it.

And he, as it were, takes his hands off. And so to, to, to my mind, the, the really big message, well, there's a number of really big messages of the flood, but one of the really big messages is, is God's urge to preserve rather than God's urge to destroy. And the fact that he chooses one family, um, and, uh, you know, one man as it were.

And, and of course, uh, as, as listeners may well know as the, as the waters subside,-we get language, which sounds very, very much like Genesis one again. Um, and as, and you have this, you know, the waters have separated again as it was, as the flood waters subside, and then out into this sparkling new World steps one man.

Um, And, and this one man is now going to be the progenitor of, of, of and, and the, of the human race and the, and the recipient of God's blessing and charge, which he gave to Adam and Eve. to my mind, the flood is the, the, the wonder of the flood is that God doesn't just wash his hands of it of us, but he, but he continually repeats this wonderful cycle of creation, a recreation.

## **John Dickson**

After the flood, God blesses Noah and his family and promises to never again destroy life on earth with a flood.

But there's a catch.

In re-establishing His dominion over the Earth and humanity, God builds in a sort of "violence clause".

"For your lifeblood, I will surely demand an accounting", God tells Noah in Genesis 9.

"Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made mankind".

God seems to be anticipating what's to come in human history.

Sadly, across the rest of the Biblical narrative we find story after story of murder, rape, and oppression.

Throughout the rest of Genesis, into Exodus and beyond, human violence is cast as a tragedy, part of the fallen estate of God's creation (not his original intent!).

That is, until we come to the history of God's people entering the promised land, which at the time was someone else's land!!

## READING

*On the plains of Moab by the Jordan across from Jericho the LORD said to Moses, "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'When you cross the Jordan into Canaan, drive out all the inhabitants of the land before you. Destroy all their carved images and their cast idols, and demolish all their high places. Take possession of the land and settle in it, for I have given you the land to possess. Distribute the land by lot, according to your clans. To a larger group give a larger inheritance, and to a smaller group a smaller*

*one. Whatever falls to them by lot will be theirs.  
Distribute it according to your ancestral tribes.*

*“But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land,  
those you allow to remain will become barbs in your eyes  
and thorns in your sides. They will give you trouble in the  
land where you will live. And then I will do to you what I  
plan to do to them.”*

## **Numbers 33: 50 - 56**

### **John Dickson**

After centuries of enslavement in Egypt (and a generation of wandering in the Sinai desert), the Books of Numbers and Deuteronomy record the moment the Israelite population finally arrived on the banks of the Jordan River, ready to enter their new lands.

Led by a military commander named Joshua - the successor of the late Moses - the Israelites are commanded to drive out the tribes residing in the territory - the most famous among them being the Canaanites.



The conquest that follows - recorded in the book of Joshua - is a series of bloody military campaigns, with the Israelites seizing territory constituting modern Israel, the West Bank, and into modern-day Gaza, Jordan, and portions of Syria and Lebanon

Disturbingly, in Joshua, we read accounts of entire cities seemingly slaughtered at the hands of God's armies.

## READING

*All these kings joined forces and made camp together at the Waters of Merom to fight against Israel.*

*The LORD said to Joshua, "Do not be afraid of them, because by this time tomorrow, I will hand all of them, slain, over to Israel. You are to hamstring their horses and burn their chariots."*

*So Joshua and his whole army came against them suddenly at the Waters of Merom and attacked them, and the LORD gave them into the hand of Israel. They defeated them and pursued them all the way to Greater Sidon, to Misrephoth Maim [mis-re-foth my-eem, and to the Valley of Mizpah on the east, until no survivors were left. Joshua did to them as the LORD had directed: He hamstrung their horses and burned their chariots.*

*At that time Joshua turned back and captured Hazor and put its king to the sword. (Hazor had been the head of all these kingdoms.) Everyone in it they put to the sword. They totally destroyed them, not sparing anyone that breathed, and he burned Hazor itself.*

*Joshua took all these royal cities and their kings and put them to the sword. He totally destroyed them, as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded. Yet Israel did not burn any of the cities built on their mounds—except Hazor, which Joshua burned. The Israelites carried off for themselves all the plunder and livestock of these cities, but all the people they put to the sword until they completely destroyed them, not sparing anyone that breathed.*

## **Joshua 11: 5-14**

### **John Dickson**

This episode has gone on to be dubbed the “Canaanite genocide”.

American historian David Stannard has argued that this narrative “had a major influence on shaping thought and

belief systems that permitted, and even inspired, genocide” throughout other periods of history”.

Why would God order what appears to be a collection of war crimes.

### **John Dickson (tape)**

Okay, so it, it's probably time we move to the, you know, the feature film, uh, the conquests, the Conquest narrative, and. In particular, you know, there's a, there's a whole book dedicated to the brutal slaughtering of, of the Canaanites, or that's one way of describing it. You write and, uh, I hope you don't mind me quoting you to you, uh, God is entitled to do as he wishes with his creatures. The wonder is not that some are destroyed, but that any are preserved. What did you mean by this? Can you unpack it? Uh, especially for my poor sceptical listeners who will be going What? She sounds so lovely.

### **Helen Paynter**

So I think that, so I will, I will address what I meant by that, but if I could just put a little bit of, um, kind of background in there. One of the important things I think we need to understand is the nature of what is being

commanded. Um, that the language, the, the technical word is, is em, and it's often translated as totally destroyed.

It doesn't mean that. Um, so we need to understand that. Um, so we need to, we need to think a bit about the historical realities and the pragmatic realities of, of a, a people in a fortified city who see an army approaching. And we'll absolutely not just sit there with their women and children, but we'll send their women and children away and we'll, we'll defend the city with just the warriors.

Mainly the warriors. Um, so we need to think, and we need to understand the, the use of rhetoric within the text, um, which is, you know, an ancient convention, um, that is being used, which, which every ancient society employed when it's describing its victories. We need to notice within the text, um, the deep ambivalence, which it seems to have itself and we often. Characterize the book of Joshua. Uh, you know, in the way that you just did is this book about conquest, about destruction. And, and for sure we see that in there. But, but we also see, it's like we've got two voices in Joshua. Um, we've got this kind of grand, this voice

that makes these grandiose claims about, you know, utter destruction and, or whatever that means.

We've also got this cautious voice that speaks about survivors and about territory unconquered. Um, and, and we have them sometimes in the same verse. You know, you've got, you've got the, the, the one voice, as it were saying that he completely destroyed this place and, and, and exterminated everybody. And then the second half of the verse says, and when the survivors had escaped.

### **John Dickson (tape)**

Is this just bad editing or,

### **Helen Paynter**

No, no, absolutely no. I, I The source hypothesis, the documentary hypothesis is may well have some, um, useful, uh, well, may, may well have some underlying truth, but, uh, if we are going to listen to this text, um, I. And if we gonna give credit to the, uh, work of the, of the editor, um, and as, as I wish to do, to listen for the voice of God, then we need to pay attention to its final form.

And these are not, you know, in order for this to be bad editing, our editor would have to be absolute stupid or, or drunk. Um, and I don't believe he was either.

## **John Dickson**

There's another seeming "contradiction" in the conquest accounts worth noting.

In Joshua chapter 10, we're told the Israelite armies wiped out all the Canaanites who lived in Debir, Hebron and the Hill country.

But you turn a few pages to the book of Judges and .... Canaanites are still living there.

This might sound odd to us today - maybe the Bible authors were terrible editors - but, actually, this isn't surprising to scholars of the ancient Near-East.

This is well understood hyperbolic war rhetoric, a literary trope found all over the ancient Near East.

In her book *Joshua and the Rhetoric of Violence*, scholar Lori. L. Rowlett notes similarities between the

language in Joshua and the records of Neo-Assyrian war oracles, with further similarities found in the texts of the Egyptian, Hittite, Moabite, and Ugaritic peoples.

To put it crassly, it was well known to ancient readers that the language of ‘total destruction’ did total destruction. It mean the victory was total. This isn’t the Bible fibbing or exaggerating in the sneaky sense; it’s the Bible using the literary forms of the day.

But there’s an added something in the biblical narrative.

This was not tribal violence, or even ethnic violence. It was the judgement of God.

Bear with me.

Way back in Genesis Abraham was told that he couldn’t just waltz into the promised land in his day (1800 and something BC) because “the iniquity of those living there is not yet complete” (Genesis 15:16).

This tells us that the fact that God had promised this land to Abraham was not enough of a reason to give the land to Abraham. It is only centuries later that the land

would be given to them, on account of the accumulated evil in the region.

This becomes crystal clear 6 or 7 centuries later, just as Israel has left Egyptian slavery and is about to take the promised land. Here's what Moses says to the Israelites:

## READING

*Hear, O Israel! You are about to cross the Jordan today, to go in and dispossess nations larger and mightier than you, great cities, fortified to the heavens, a strong and tall people ... When the LORD your God thrusts them out before you, do not say to yourself, "It is because of my righteousness that the LORD has brought me in to occupy this land"; it is rather because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is dispossessing them before you. It is not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart that you are going in to occupy their land; but because of the wickedness of these nations the LORD your God is dispossessing them before you, in order to fulfill the promise that the LORD made on oath to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. Know, then, that the LORD your*



*God is not giving you this good land to occupy because of your righteousness; for you are a stubborn people.*

## **Deuteronomy 9:1-7**

### **John Dickson**

This is weird in ancient historical terms.

Normally, the conventions of war did not need to underline the wickedness of opponents in order to justify conquering them. Winning booty and land was plenty justification!!

And it is unusual in the extreme for a “war” story to say (repeatedly) that the “heroes” of the story were themselves unworthy of the victory!

According to the Bible’s narrative—and we are free to reject it, of course—God’s purpose in the conquest of Canaan was to use his own naturally sinful people as an instrument of special divine judgment on a perversely evil society, one charged with, among other things, practising child sacrifice.

This was not a normal state of affairs. The Bible teaches that all pagan cultures (and Israel) were evil to some degree or other, and yet no command was ever given to attack Egypt or Syria or Babylon. There was something singular about the evil of the Canaanites, the way we might speak of the uniqueness of the tyranny of Nazi Germany in the 1930s-40s.

The conquest of Canaan was a one-off in the history of Israel. It was a unique act of judgment on a particular people at a particular time, and never practised again in the nation's long history. Even at the height of their settled power in the 10th – 8th centuries BC, three or four hundred years after the conquest of Canaan, the Israelites were not instructed to go out conquering other territories to expand the borders of Israel.

The weirdness of this biblical conquest history is underscored by another literary dimension that mustn't be missed.

## READING

*Now when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went up to him and asked, “Are you for us or for our enemies?”*

*“Neither,” he replied, “but as commander of the army of the LORD I have now come.” Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence, and asked him, “What message does my Lord have for his servant?”*

*The commander of the LORD’s army replied, “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy.” And Joshua did so.*

### **Joshua 5: 13 - 15**

#### **John Dickson (tape)**

I've always been fascinated by those opening scenes of Joshua, and maybe you can reflect for my audience a little more on, uh, on, the, um, angelic figure that appears to Joshua.

#### **Helen Paynter**

Oh, I, I thank you for giving the opportunity to talk about this. What's going on is, uh, Joshua is doing what I think. Um, probably generals always do on the eve of a great battle, and he's kind of, he can't sleep.

He's walking out his worries. Um, and he, uh, and he encounters this figure with a drawn sword. Um, now as we read on, we are going to discover that this is indeed an angelic figure. He has, he describes himself in a minute as the commander of the Lord's army. Um, but. There's nothing to, to mark him as that, as Joshua meets him.

So, but Joshua must be thinking, good grief, what's going on with the centuries? How, how, how have we got this? This bloke just shot is turned up, you know, what's going on? And he challenges him as he would, are you friend or foe? He says, are you for us or for our enemies? Um, and. A a, and I think what we need to realize is that if Joshua knew this was an angel, he would not have asked that question.

He'd have given him a high five and said, oh great, you've turned up because we are about to have this massive victory, and I know that you're on our side and I'm really pleased you've shown up. You know? Um, If

we read the narrative of, think about Joshua in that narrative up to this point. Um, then he has, he was a slave in Egypt.

He's, he's come out of Egypt by God's mighty hand. He's been led through the desert. He's been fed in the desert by God. God's made a covenant with his people. Um, the only battle defeat they've seen, they've had several victories so far in the desert, but the only battle that defeat they've seen was when they're explicitly disobedient.

Um, and so he has no doubt. In his mind that God is 100% on his side. 'cause it's obvious, isn't it? And so he, uh, and so it's only because he, he doesn't know this is an angel that he asks that question and therefore he, and we, the reader, um, on his behalf as it were looking over his shoulder, as it were, should be absolutely staggered by the response because the, the angel says, uh, in response to the question, are you for us or our enemies?

He says, neither. But as the commander of the army of the Lord, I have come, so, so Joshua must have been, you know, this, this, we, we need to think our way into this character. It must have been absolutely staggered

and somewhat dismayed to hear this language of I'm not unequivocally on your side. And for sure they go on then to win the next battle.

But the one after that, they are badly routed and so it will continue. Now I think this little moment is underappreciated as, as a part of the opening of this book as you, as you say. Um, and I think it needs to provide. A, a very important hermeneutical lens, interpretive lens as we go on to read that, whatever else is going.

And I do not deny that. I still have, you know, I still wrestle with what's going on. I'd, I'd rather read something different, but whatever else is going on, we need to hold it in the it under that, um, sort of preliminary comment of God saying, uh, I'm not on your side. I'm on my own side. You know? Um, so that's, A very important moment to the book of Joshua.

And then the other one that you flag up and it's got a twin actually a little bit later on, um, is the story of Rahab.

## **READING**

*Then Joshua son of Nun secretly sent two spies from Shittim. “Go, look over the land,” he said, “especially Jericho.” So they went and entered the house of a prostitute named Rahab and stayed there.*

***2** The king of Jericho was told, “Look, some of the Israelites have come here tonight to spy out the land.” **3** So the king of Jericho sent this message to Rahab: “Bring out the men who came to you and entered your house because they have come to spy out the whole land.”*

...

***8** Before the spies lay down for the night, she went up on the roof **9** and said to them, “I know that the LORD has given you this land and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you. **10** We have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed. **11** When we heard of it, our hearts melted in fear and everyone’s courage failed because of you, for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.*

**12** *“Now then, please swear to me by the LORD that you will show kindness to my family, because I have shown kindness to you. Give me a sure sign **13** that you will spare the lives of my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them—and that you will save us from death.”*

## **Joshua 2: 1 - 3, 8-12**

### **Helen Paynter**

So Rahab is, um, either an inkeeper or a prostitute in Jericho in the city that's about to be taken. And this city. Um, has been designated as this, like this word em, means it's going to be utterly devoted to the deity.

And, um, for sure that is going to involve destruction. Although, as I tried to say earlier, it doesn't equate to destruction. Now she, she meets these two spies that Joshua has sent him, and, uh, she makes a, uh, an appeal to them and she makes an appeal to them on the basis of this extraordinary understanding of who.

Yahweh of who their God is and this isn't her God. Um, and the, she makes this kind of statement of faith and it's a statement of faith that is only, uh, found one other



place in scripture. And if I remember correctly, I'd have to check to be sure, but I think it's Solomon who makes it. So, you know, the only other person who makes this is this kind of great, um, it's great figure, um, you know, a, a King of Israel.

And, and here is this, this pagan. Woman prostitute who makes this statement of faith. And it is on the basis of this statement of faith that she is, she and her family are, are saved from the destruction of the city.

She's brought first to the outside of the camp, but often readers stop paying attention to her at that point. But then she's brought into the heart of the nation, and as, as many people may know, she then kind of writes herself into the, the family line of, of the kings of Israel.

## **John Dickson**

This is not your average ancient tribal conflict, where each party claims a divinity who will guarantee victory and win glory for the nation and the deity.

You could almost say that the narrative of Joshua seems to be written precisely to overturn these normal military expectations.

It is a violent war story, for sure. But it is a war story with a difference. It can't be read as genocide. The text establishes that God wants to save Canaanites like Rahab and her family. Coming at the front of the narrative like it does, the Rahab incident is probably meant to be read as the prototype or pattern that we are meant to assume for the rest of the story.

Rahab isn't the only foreigner in Joshua who is spared God's judgement.

There were other people - *peoples* in fact - who were saved due to a change of ways at the last minute.

## **Helen Paynter**

That story is paralleled, or is, is, there's a similar one a little bit later in the book with a a, a group called the Gibeonites. And the Gibeonites were also known as the Hivites, and that's one of the seven nations, um, dead, you know, intended for em. And they come and they trick Joshua into making covenant with them.

Um, all sorts of interesting things going on. Their use of the language of Covenant is itself very significant in in,

in given how, what a weighty theological term that is. The point of this story in my view, is that these people who have heard. Of of the coming of the people of Israel. They are, they're determined, um, as Rahab was not just to save their lives, but to kind of write themselves into the story of the covenant people of God.

And they are just, just another of of many actually in the Old Testament, to use any means necessary to write themselves into the story. And it's like God is say, oh, go on, then you twisted my arm. It's, it's really interesting because you've got this, this instruction that the high rights among others are to be subject to harem and yet, and yet God just capitulates the moment they make an appeal. And there's an interesting moment, very, uh, shortly afterwards, after that in the book where God says, of the other nations, which, um, are subject harem, they didn't, they didn't sue for peace as the high writes. Did the implication being, do you know what they, they could all have.

That they could all have escaped this fate. So as I say, none of this makes the whole thing, uh, sweetness and light and easy. Um, but there are some really interesting

kind of counter counter narratives within the text, I think, which we need to pay attention.

### **John Dickson (tape)**

And you see these as deliberate on the part of the narrator to flag to people. This is not your typical tribalistic violence narrative I'm telling. Is that right?

### **Helen Paynter**

Yeah, absolutely. Um, because continually the idea. Sometimes people have that, that the people of Israel were a kind of hermetically sealed group. That they were ethnically pure, which is a very, very troubling way of, of imagining them. Um, and that they, uh, and that they kind of operate Yeah. Operated in this kind of, yeah, in this sealed unit, going around conquering things is, is absolutely not obviously in the text.

Their porous, um, people, uh, lose their status within it because of disobedience and lack of faith. Um, people make their way in through, through faithfulness, through faith. Um, and, and yeah. And so we are continually seeing the kind of the. The pushback against a, against an overs simplistic view of Israel as being the people of God, whom God alone, whom God loves alone.

## **John Dickson (tape)**

Okay. So I mean, that's all extremely, uh, helpful. Um, I, I guess it raises the question, but why did they go and take those people's land in the first place? I mean, even if, even if the narrative is exaggerated and deliberate, sort of literary hyperbole and, you know, as, as you point out, the archeology makes clear that they didn't completely waste the land.

And you've got all these incredible narrative. Uh, hints that this is not a tribalistic story, but they were still, I mean, clearly they were still told to go and take the land. What is your understanding of how one should read that as a reflection of God's own wishes?

## **Helen Paynter**

Yeah. And, and it's hard, and what I'm gonna say now is not gonna go down easily, I think. But I think one of the, one of the things we need to try and do is, is understand what they. The characters in the text and perhaps what the writer of the text, how, how they're conceptualizing what is happening. Now we spoke a few minutes ago about, about the flood as being an act of Deion and then recreation.

And we have a number of these, um, re recurring episodes really of, of God recreating in a kind of, in a kind of paradigmatic sense. One of the key places we see that is in the conquest, and there are a number of hints within the text that this is what the conceptualization is,-there are a number of verbs used to describe what is to happen to the Canaanites.

And although em is one of them, it's by no means the only one. And another one is, is the language dispossessing. And that much more clearly shows us the language of, of, of clearing, of, of pushing aside. Um, and there are clues also within the text that the Canaanites are described in terms that make them sound, uh, that make them sound like, um, like figures of chaos in, in that kind of ancient way of thinking.

And so I think what, how they conceptualize what is going on. Is that they are clearing sacred space. They're participating with God in an act of recreation. And that the, the land of Israel is, I think it's, it's very clear and in many places in the Old Testament, the, the, the, the physical land is viewed as, as sacred space in which God's people are to live as, as a kingdom of priests, actually.

Now that doesn't make it easy. Um, but I think in terms of their self-understanding, it, it can be helpful. And one of the things, um, that we need to notice around [00:24:30] that is that the Old Testament. Things are conceptualized in physical ways. The blessings of God are conceptualized physically.

## **John Dickson**

Hang in there (if you're still there). We'll be back in a moment.

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**\*\*BREAK\*\***

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YouTube - [“A woman place](#)

## **John Dickson**

That's a scene from the show *The Handmaid's Tale*, a dystopian drama based on the book of the same name by Margaret Atwood.

In that scene, a foreign ambassador is visiting the political elite of Gilead, which is a theocratic future version of North America.

With the Constitution suspended, the States are now a nation ruled by religious fundamentalists, with men and women divided into “classes”.

Women in particular are brutalised, viewed as the “lesser sex”.

With rampant infertility, the class of “handmaid” - women who are fertile but deemed “sinful” by the elite - are assigned powerful, often married men, for the express purpose of childbearing.

If they refuse to take part in this awful, oppressive system, they’re essentially condemned to death in penal colonies.

In Atwood’s Gilead, women have little to no choice and are kept in line by their male overlords.

Aside from childbearing, they’re viewed as having little to no value in society at all.



Atwood's portrayal of brutalised theocracy is inspired by real events, ranging from Ayatollah Khomeini's Iran to Nazi Germany and the communist regimes of the Eastern Bloc. The tv show is hard to watch and Research AI (or Producer Kaley?) said s/he stopped watching because it was just too much.

Some feel that way about the Bible, and some of you may want to skip forward 2 mins if this is feeling too much.

## READING

*When you go to war against your enemies and the LORD your God delivers them into your hands and you take captives, if you notice among the captives a beautiful woman and are attracted to her, you may take her as your wife. Bring her into your home and have her shave her head, trim her nails and put aside the clothes she was wearing when captured. After she has lived in your house and mourned her father and mother for a full month, then you may go to her and be her husband and she shall be your wife. If you are not pleased with her, let her go*

*wherever she wishes. You must not sell her or treat her as a slave since you have dishonoured her.*

## **Deuteronomy 21: 10 - 14**

### **John Dickson**

That's Deuteronomy again.

Disturbingly, the Israelites seem to be given permission to kidnap the women from any territory they conquer.

It seems heartless.

Friend of the pod, atheist Richard Dawkins, famously wrote:

*“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.”*

### **John Dickson (tape)**

I I want you to reflect on, uh, for us in Deuteronomy 21, where, um, a kind of sexual violence is permitted according to ancient biblical law, where they, uh, you know, warriors are permitted to marry the.

Women who, who survive among the enemy, peoples, the conquered enemy peoples. Um, I mean there are modern examples of that and very recent modern examples of that. And it sounds horrific, but what do you make of that passage?

## **Helen Paynter**

Yeah. And this is another one which is difficult and we'd like it to say something different. Hear me say that this, this is troubling and, and I do not deny that this is troubling, but there are some interesting features in this passage which are quite surprising along the lines of the, kind of, the way that Talien was surprising perhaps in its day.

So this woman is this notional woman, or these women are not raped on the battlefield. Okay. There is no provision or, or ever for battlefield rape.

## **John Dickson**

I want to add here that rape was, awfully, viewed as a spoil of war in the ancient world.

Archaeologist and journalist Terry Madenholm writes that;

*“Because war (was) often used as an excuse for defending the sexual integrity of the “weaker sex,” consequently, rape (represented) the defeat of men, literally and figuratively”.*

We’ve seen the same thing very recently with the Hamas attacks on women just outside Gaza.

And just as Hamas sent out videos of all this happening—to parade their terror—in the ancient world conquerors would display the capture and rape of women on coins celebrating victories.

Mercifully, things *are* different in the Bible.

**Helen Paynter**

This woman is to be taken to the man's home and she's allowed to spend a month, um, mourning her, her family, and undergoing a kind of ritual of. Of transition really.

And in the ancient world, as I, as I have been informed, as I understand it, that is regarded as really quite a long time. Um, so she is allowed what would be considered a, a full month to, to, um, to undergo her mourning rituals and to kind of prepare herself for the transition to her new life. Um, then she is to be, um, a wife to this notional man. She's not, um, she, uh, she, she's not just a, a woman, you know, a woman to be raped and discarded, but she is to become his wife. And, uh, the end of that little passage, it says this, uh, if you are not satisfied with her, you shall let her go free and not sell her her money. She's not to be pastor, a man to Toman.

She used to be treated as a wife and at, at worst. Divorced legitimately as it were. Um, and then it says this, you must not treat her as a slave since you have dishonored her. So even in itself this passage is, is expressing a kind of slight dissatisfaction or a sense that this woman's honor does matter even though, you know, even though she's been taken without her consent. And married without her consent and marriage by cap. And yes, all of these things that trouble us, but,

but compared to, um, how people. Act when they are unrestrained and how the peoples around, uh, would've acted. This is actually in its day, quite extraordinary and it is nudging the people of Israel forward a little bit in their journey towards eschatological perfection.

### **John Dickson (tape)**

Okay, so let's, um, move. Toward that eschatological perfection by turning to the New Testament. Um, a lot of people feel like the beautiful Jesus, uh, is such a contrast with the Old Testament. How do you account for, or maybe I put it this way, how, what would you say to someone who's troubled by Jesus? I like that Old Testament God, I don't. What, what can you helpfully say to them? 'cause I'm sure I have listeners who are thinking that.

### **Helen Paynter**

For sure. And honestly, if I had a pound for everybody who said something along those lines, I'd be a, a rich woman sitting on a desert island somewhere. Um, I think one thing to notice is that, um, Jesus. Certain things make him very angry. Um, particularly, uh, abuse by the powerful and, and abuse by, uh, religious

leaders. Um, Um, and so, so he isn't, he isn't as as sweet in that kind of saccharine sort of way as we might imagine.

That's first thing to say. Second thing to say is the Old Testament isn't as, Um, uh, monolithically violent as people often make out, um, that there are, we've been focusing on, on some difficult texts, but there are many texts that speak in extraordinary terms of God tenderness, his love, his forbearance, his, his, his compassion, you know, his self-identification, um, to Moses on Sinai, which I think is the fullest revelation of God that we get until we meet Jesus Christ.

Um, Speaks about him forgiving for thousands of generations and being slow to anger and and so on. Um, so we've got, we've got love and compassion in the Old Testament. The other thing to say is that the, the urge to reject the Old Testament and just keep the new, um, is, is, is an unfortunate one, uh, for lots of reasons.

But one is the very kind of pragmatic reason that we, we won't understand the New Testament. Um, and unless we are, well, you know, well, well versed in the old because. Every time Jesus opens his mouth, he is quoting, he's referring to, he's alluding to, he's

sometimes subverting, um, or developing, um, something in the Old Testament.

And if we, if we flatten his words out and ignore the Old Testament resonances, which is in, are clearly in his mind and expect it to be in the mind of his, his listeners, um, then we really won't understand what he's saying. So yeah, there's a number of things to say there for sure.

## **John Dickson**

### **Let's press pause ... I've got a 5 - min Jesus for you**

The “holy war” in the book of Joshua provides no genuine rationale for “holy war” in other contexts.

The fact is: even ancient Israel did not read Joshua as a mandate—or permission—to fight wars beyond their homeland. The classical Jewish view of war is complex, as various rabbis came to different views about “obligatory” and “discretionary” warfare.

Yet, all agreed that the biblical mandates to eject the nations of Canaan (Deuteronomy 7:1) were special cases no longer applicable, except inasmuch as it provided a rationale for defending Israel's borders from



outside attack. There's a helpful summary article that we'll link to in the shownotes: "Military Law", Jewish Virtual Library.

So, Jewish scholars didn't even see the conquest chapters of the Bible as granting permission for warfare. This alone underscores how misguided was the interpretation of the book of Joshua a thousand years after Jesus: the Crusaders did, in fact, see themselves as re-enacting the conquest of Joshua.

But ... a thousand or so years before the crusades, and a thousand or so years after Joshua, Jesus explicitly forbade sacred violence. The evidence is consistent across the four Gospels.

Think of his most famous pronouncement about enemies: "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you" (Luke 6:27-28). The "enemy" in Jesus' first-century Galilean context did not refer only to the annoying neighbour over the back fence. "When Jesus originally spoke," observes William Davies and Dale Allison, two of the best-known scholars of ancient Judaism and the life of Jesus, "his hearers would

undoubtedly have thought of the Romans in Palestine. So far from fomenting hatred and wreaking vengeance upon the occupying forces, Jesus was asking his hearers to display a spirit of love and tolerance.”

Again, contrasting the ways of Rome with the ways of God, Jesus also taught, “You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man [Jesus’ preferred way of referring to himself] came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:42-45).

And when he was eventually arrested and one of his zealous disciples tried to defend him violently, Jesus thundered, “Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword” (Matthew 26:52).

Finally, as he was brutalised and then crucified by “Gentiles”, by the Roman prefect Pontius Pilate and his soldiers, he declared “My kingdom is not of this world”

(John 18:36), and in his final moments, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34).

Even beyond these sayings of Jesus, the cross of Christ itself is the ultimate statement—at least for Christians—that the Lord’s way involved bearing violence for his cause rather than dishing it out. This is not to say that Christ was a pacifist in the absolute sense. He, along with other New Testament figures, seem to have accepted the state’s right to resource itself (through taxation) and to protect itself (through military force). These, however, were elements of secular governance. They were not any part of the toolkit required for building the Church and doing God’s work in the world.

The earliest Christian interpretation of the book of Joshua read the whole account—the whole Old Testament, actually—through the prism of Christ’s life, teaching, death, and resurrection.

I use prism deliberately, because a prism refracts the light that passes through it. That’s not a bad picture of how the Old and New Testaments relate to each other.

Just as light passing through a prism “refracts”—breaks into the full spectrum of colours—so the light of the Old Testament refracts when viewed on the other side of Christ.

Some things are refracted only a little (like the need to care for the poor); others are refracted beyond recognition (like the food laws, circumcision, and death penalties); still others are intensified (“love your neighbour” in the teaching of Moses is refracted as “love your enemy” in the teaching of Jesus).

This is not “cherry-picking”. It is how Christ himself urged his disciples to think of things. It’s exactly how the first centuries of Christianity read the OT.

Contemporary sceptics, just like the medieval crusaders, are mistaken to think the book of Joshua provides justification for Christian “holy war”. That wasn’t even an acceptable reading among Jews following the conquest of Canaan. And it was made a blasphemy in light of the teaching and crucifixion of Jesus.

**You can press play now.**

## **John Dickson (tape)**

Jesus did say blessed other peacemakers and blessed, uh, the poor in spirit and blessed of the meek and these things, you know, and love your enemies. Uh, these things loom large in, in our mind. How can you help people think about the relationship between the old and New Testament? Yes. Okay. We mustn't reject the Old Testament 'cause you can't understand the new, but how does one hold onto the Old Testament as a, as a gift in the light of what Jesus teaches?

## **Helen Paynter**

I think that's helpful and I think, I think that requires a lot of answering really, uh, there's lots of things I'd want to say. Um, we need to, we need to understand the kind of historical situation in which Jesus arrives, where he, he positions himself as, you know, I believe correctly, positions himself as the fulfillment of all that the Old Testament has been, has been promising, but also longing for, and there is something, When I teach about, particularly about Old Testament prophecy, but about Old Testament generally, I, I talk about, about the Old

Testament setting up problems that to which Jesus is the answer, they, they, they raise.

You know, you think about the Book of Judges, which has this refrain. There was no king in Israel in those days, and every man did what was right in his own eyes. They, there is this yearning, there is this kind of desire and because the King of Israel that they get the next couple of kings are, are appalling. And I'm, I'm sorry for those who think David's wonderful, but he really isn't. Um, and I'm not just talking about David and Bathsheba. He's, he's, he does, he acts badly on many, many occasions, and he's the best they ever have, but he's pretty rotten anyway. And so there is this kind of, there's this yearning, this desire, this, this, this.

Yeah. These unfinished stories, these unanswered prophecies, these un fulfilled expectations. Um, it's like a, you know, the old Testament ha leave ends on a cliffhanger really? And, and with all of these un fulfilled promises and they, they all condense and crystallize onto Jesus. So that's one important thing that we need to say.

I think part of that, or, or kind of a different way of looking at that same thing is that we, we see these

patterns that keep recurring in the Old Testament. And they are all, um, inadequate and incomplete pictures of who Jesus is and what Jesus is going to do. And so we see-where forgiveness is obtained where guidance is, is, um, is given and where there is communion between, between God and humans, and we see that and it keeps breaking, but we see these patterns and then we see this fully in Jesus, in whom there is forgiveness, in whom there is the presence of God. In whom there is, there is the, the, the wise teaching of God.

We, I've mentioned the theme of kingship. So there are many, many deep themes of the Old Testament, which all find their, they they all crystallize, um, in the life, death, resurrection, um, and ascension of Jesus Christ. Um, and so the Old Testament is this most extraordinary, wonderful resource for unpacking more deeply the, the, the, the way, the ways that God is working and the, um, the wonders that he's accomplishing in Jesus.

### **John Dickson (tape)**

Some would say that the death of Jesus theologically understood, um, is itself. An act of violence. And so

atonement is embedding a theory of violence right into the heart of Christianity.

## **Helen Paynter**

Yeah, and there's a lot we can say about that as well. Um, so for sure there is violence at the cross. Um, I think that nobody could possibly dispute that. The, the key question is whose violence are we seeing at the cross? And there were different models, um, as, as, as you know and as as listeners will know, and one model. And, and I think in my view that these are not mutually exclusive.

## **Helen Paynter**

So one view is that Jesus is the recipient of human violence, and he is the, the innocent, the utterly innocent, uh, victim of human violence, that he's the one who, um, submits himself to human violence. And in doing so, he absorbs all of the violence to the world.

And I think that is very helpful in my view. I think one of the things that we. Tends to, when we talk about Jesus dying for our sins or Jesus carrying our sins on the cross, um, I think we need to not be too narrow in what



we mean by that. I think that that idea is bigger than we often understand and I, I.

I'm, I'm preempting myself because I'll come back to that in a second because the other, um, the, another key model, of course, is that this is divine violence being exercised upon Jesus in, in, um, in order for him to appreciate the wrath of God. So is this human violence? Is this divine violence? Is it both?

So if we think about what it means for Jesus to bear the sin of the world or to carry our sins on his cross, um, one way to look at that and, and I personally, um, cannot escape this, I think this is clear in scripture, is that he is carrying the punishment for sins.

But another way, and I think we must not ignore this, is that he's also carrying the, the weight of sin in the terms of the, the way that we harm one another. The, he's carrying the, the, the human. Brokenness of the world as well as the human guilt. So I think when in my view, if we, if we narrow the cross to simply speaking about propitiation, we are not taking seriously, um, the weight of sin upon those who have, uh, experienced harm at the hands of others.

And I think we need to have a, a, a view of a view of the cross that is big enough to encompass both guilt and trauma, if you like, both guilt and harm.

### **John Dickson (tape)**

The final doctrine is eschatology, of Um, you know, God, tells people in the Bible, he's gonna overthrow those baddies in the end. Uh, he's gonna manoeuvre nations and all of that. And, and some would say that this has fostered a violence, you know, here and now, uh, because we know who the enemies of God are and he's gonna do violence, so we can now as well.

Um, I mean, I shudder at that, but, but it's a thing. And so how can you help us think our way through that?

### **Helen Paynter**

Yeah. Thank you. Um, yeah, so this idea of kind of cosmic war in which we are invited to participate, this is a, a, a quite a common theme, which is found both in, um, in, in kind of Christian, Christian esque, um, thinking, but also in in many other, um, patterns of thinking. I. Um, and one of the things that we encounter in scripture as we look at that idea of cosmic war is the gradual way in which humans are written outta that

project. That kind of movement, which we start to see in Daniel is, is much more clear in the book of Revelation. Now we read Revelation and our, our toes curl, I think. Um, but we need to, there's a whole lot of work that we need to do around metaphor, around, um, what's going on there.

## **John Dickson**

Chiming in here to point you to our recent episode on Revelation - Episode 97 'The Apocalypse' - check it out.

## **Helen Paynter**

Revelation, uh, plays with its, its readers, it, it twists their expectations. So there are places where, um, it seems to reference a, a great army. Um, and, and it kind of builds up this expectation.

This army is going to be, you know, marching with God in this cosmic war. And then it twists it because it says, you know, they, this, this army doesn't have. You know, it, it, it is the, the, the rider on the white horse who, who, who conquers with the sword of his mouth, which is of

course a reflection of Jesus and the word of God, rather than us riding off with our bloody swords.

And again and again, it takes, it, it, it's kind of sets up an expectation and then kind of twists it to, to show that humans are not involved in that eschatological project. That, that for sure God is going to bring, um, an end. To all the injustice of the world and all the violence of the world. And I say all men and bring it on because I am, I am so heartbroken every day by what I read in the papers.

But that he is not inviting us to, to do that. We, you know, the Saints of God conquer by the word of by the testimony. By their faithfulness and by their testimony. And, and that's, that's what conquest, that's what any element of human involvement looks like as Revelation conceptualizes it.

## **John Dickson**

At different points through history, the church has tried either to pre-empt God's judgement through violence or assert their read of Scripture through force.

We've covered this a lot on *Undeceptions*. If your new here, search for our episodes on Constantine, the Crusades, the Reformation, and a bunch of others.

Christians have sometimes been as violent as any other people group. It's obviously not specially Christian problem—the Romans were doing just fine on the violence-front before the Christians came along. But there's not getting around the fact that Christians have participated in the evil common to humanity.

And there's no avoiding the fact that violence is sometimes allowed - and even ordained - by God in the Bible. But the contexts and reasons are specific—the violence is for a particular purpose for a particular point in time.

Yet, I do think it's clear that the Bible—read in its entirety—does not allow Christians to take God's punishment into their own hands or spread the gospel message through force. There are clear teachings against this. The life, death, and resurrection are the ultimate answer to violence—even though I get it, not every listener is going to be satisfied with this episode ... I myself have lingering questions.

## **John Dickson (tape)**

Help my skeptical listener who has been troubled by this problem of. Bible violence, church violence, Christian violence. Can you speak to them for a closing minute about why you still think Christianity's worth exploring? Despite everything?

## **Helen Paynter**

Yeah. Thank you. Oh, my word. What would I say? Um, I would say don't be afraid to have your questions and to hold them and to wrestle with them. Scripture encourages that, um, all the way through. I'm so struck by, um, the story, which may be familiar to listeners, the story of, of Jacob right back in Genesis, wrestling with God. And as he wrestles with God, um, he is, he's not, you know, slapped down for daring to do so. He's, he's not kind of struck dead. He's, he's given a new name and his new name is Israel, which means the one who wrestles with God. And that is the name that becomes the name of the people of God in the Old Testament.

They're not called Abraham, which might be expect, they're not called Jacob. Uh, they're called. Rest the

ones who wrestle with God. And we see that wrestling, we see it in the Psalms, we see it in the prophets where the people speak with really real boldness. Wake up, God, why are you asleep? You know, oh God, why this justice?

You've claimed to be a God of justice. So why is this injustice persisting? So, First thing I would say is don't be afraid to rest. So God's big enough. You don't, don't swallow the lie that you need to just, you know, kind of roll over like a little puppy and say, yes Lord, I, I, I have no questions. Um, he gave us minds to, to use, not to ignore and try and suppress.

So don't be afraid of those. God's big enough for that. However, don't necessarily to get, expect to get all your questions answered. I think if we could completely explain God and his ways, he would, wouldn't be worth worshiping. He'd just be another human. Um, so we are grappling with things that are too big for us.

And then I would say start with the purpose that, sorry, the person of Jesus Christ. Um, and use him as your lens for. Um, trying to read the rest of scripture. Um, and, and when you find problems, when you find issues, um, grapple with them as much as you want to, but

continually come back to who Jesus is,-to the, the, the Jesus who stands on the Mount of Beatitudes and speaks about peace to the Jesus who prays, um, who teaches his disciples to pray your will be done and then lives it out.

And his knees in the garden saying, not my will, but yours, Lord. Um, the one who willingly embraces all, all of the filth and violence that the world can throw upon him and accepts it for our salvation. Stay focused on that. Stay tethered to the person and the work of Jesus. Um, and don't be afraid to wrestle.