

SERMON NOTES

SERIES: Join the Conversation Part 2

TITLE: Is God a god of violence?

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We are in our series called Join the Conversation: Part 2. The first installment was aimed at engaging with those who may have some strong skepticism towards Christianity, people who might get frazzled at how some Christians think about hell, homosexuality, science, and so on. We encourage you to go listen to, watch, and share those previous sermons at our web site.

This installment has a slightly different focus: Christians in dialogue with other Christians over 'tougher questions' that are often misunderstood or interpreted differently. The purpose of this series is not to answer every single question, but to help you see the value of these discussions and then take part in them.

In this message, we consider the question, "Is God—the God we worship—a god of violence?" Some OT stories seem to answer, "yes!"

Set-up:

The Bible does contain shocking, violent, and confusing stories that honestly makes us very uncomfortable (such as Joshua 9-12, where God's command from Deuteronomy 20:16-18 was carried out violently). How do we make sense of these passages?

To begin, here are three resources for further reading:

- *Skeleton's in God's Closet* by Joshua Ryan Butler
- *God Behaving Badly: Is the God of the Old Testament: Angry, Sexist, and Racist?* by David Lamb
- *The God I Don't Understand* by Christopher Wright

Summary and Application of Passages:

We're looking at three stories in the book of 2 Kings that give three principles to help interpret the violence we see in the OT, so we see God for who he really is and not how we might perceive him to be.

2 Kings 2:23-24—the story of Elisha, the boys, and the bears

- This was probably a dangerous gang of young men who were potentially putting Elisha's life at risk.
- The text doesn't actually say that anyone died.

- Elisha was God's primary agent for good during a very dark time in human history and God protected him for his purposes.
- Moral: Sometimes, God uses violence to protect the weak and powerless.

2 Kings 19:34-36—the story of the 185,000 bodies

- People were getting killed in the context of war.
- These soldiers were in the most brutal, violent army the world has ever known
- The Assyrians have mocked Yahweh and asserted that he could not protect the people of Jerusalem.
- Moral: Sometimes, God uses violence to punish the wicked and to stop the spread of evil in the world.

2 Kings 6:14-23—the story of Elisha and the end of raids into the land of Israel

- Elisha's life was in danger, but he doesn't want the people who threatened him to be harmed.
- Instead he commands that they be fed and sent home. After that, there were no more Syrian raids in Israel, but rather a season of peace.
- Moral: Ultimately, in and through it all, God is working to promote peace.

God works to promote peace in this world—and he has called us to be peacemakers. (Romans 12:18, Hebrews 12:14, 1 Peter 3:11)

The violence in the Bible is closed-ended. We are never encouraged or permitted to be perpetrators of violence.

It's God's job to punish the wicked; it *is* our job to protect the powerless.

We need to remember that some acts of violence are actually acts of rescue.

For Discussion:

1. Who is violent—God or Man? Who is bloodthirsty—God or Man?
2. Consider the statement: *Some acts of violence are actually acts of rescue*. Have you seen this to be true firsthand?
3. What does it mean for you to be a peacemaker in your family, workplace, school, and community? Give specific examples of how you can live out God's commands in Romans 12:18, Hebrews 12:14, and 1 Peter 3:11.