

**GOD OF
VIOLENCE
YESTERDAY**

**GOD OF LOVE
TODAY?**

WRESTLING HONESTLY WITH THE OLD TESTAMENT

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I write this book because I am convinced to the core of my being that God is Love. And the love of God is fierce, it is exacting and it is utterly faithful.

So I am grateful to those who have taught me of God's love, those who have modelled God's love to me and those who have called me and urged me and encouraged me to model the love of God in my own life – imperfectly though I do so. This book is dedicated to all my teachers from my earliest days to the present; and to those who have been my companions along the way, who have prayed for and with me, laughed with me and cried with me.

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have envisaged when he promised 'for better, for worse' 27 years ago. I am grateful to my parents Eleanor and Bruce for their unwavering support, their utter belief in me and their fierce love always. I am grateful to my daughters Susanna, Louisa and Victoria for encouraging, inspiring and bearing with me.

At my baptism 32 years ago, I promised to be Christ's faithful disciple, obeying his word and showing his love. At my ordination eight years ago, I promised to seek peace, work for justice and walk in the way of love. But human promises are always flawed, always imperfectly kept, always tainted. My confidence is not in how successfully I have kept these vows, but in the steadfast, faithful, committed love of God that means he keeps his promises to me and to all the world. So, above all, I am grateful to the God whom I serve, whose name is Wonderful and whose being is Love.

INTRODUCTION

‘There’s just so much wrath in the Bible!’

‘The God of the Old Testament is so different from the God of the New Testament!’

‘Why is there so much violence in the Old Testament?’

If I had a pound for every time someone had said something like this to me, I’d... well, let’s just say I wish I had. And chances are, if you’ve picked up this book to read, or to browse in a bookshop, then you have similar questions.

It’s a problem that has niggled at me for a long time. I think it started long before I’d had any theological training, when the youth leader in my church phoned me for some advice. One of the young people was in danger of losing her faith because she was so disturbed by the violence in the Old Testament. Could I help?

I suspect whatever fumbling attempts I made that day didn’t help at all. But the problem didn’t go away for me, and I’ve been thinking about it ever since. Eventually I did my theological training, prepared for ministry and undertook postgraduate study in the Old Testament. And a lot of the time, the things I am talking about and writing about relate to this general area. I guess that’s why Mike Parsons of The Bible Reading Fellowship wrote to me in 2017 to ask me to write a book on the subject.

There is a well-known story that an ancient Thai king who wished to humble, or even ruin, a subordinate would do so by presenting him with a white elephant. The hapless recipient of the gift had no

option but to accept it, house it and feed it, since white elephants were regarded as sacred. Eventually the cost of the upkeep of such a huge animal would bankrupt him.

When one is approached by a publisher with a request to write a book, the natural response is to be pleased, and perhaps flattered. Certainly this is how I felt when I read Mike's email. In reality, of course, the gift was a white elephant – though I'm not suggesting that the editorial team of BRF were trying to humble or ruin me! Because, though they didn't say so, the request to write a book on the subject, aimed at people in churches with no specialist theological training, might have been phrased like this:

Please write a book explaining what is inexplicable. Please help people who have never yet found a satisfactory answer to these problems to finish your book feeling satisfied.

Well, that's a tall order! Better scholars than I have written on this subject and failed to offer a wholly convincing answer – at least as judged by the majority opinion in the western church. Over hundreds and hundreds of years of biblical interpretation, no one has managed to make the problem of Old Testament violence go away – at least not without doing serious violence to the Bible itself.

So with a gulp and a sense of humility, I hereby offer my best effort to grapple with the matter without making the book too heavy to read in bed. It will not provide a complete answer to the problem, but it is not true that we have nothing to say about it. There are many things we *can* work out and understand. Some of the issues stop being problems when we look at them carefully. And others – even some of the hardest ones – become less problematic.

But in order to get there, we have to be prepared to do some hard thinking. After all, we wouldn't expect to be able to understand Chaucer without putting in some mental spadework. And the world and the writing of the Old Testament is far, far more alien to us than

Chaucer's. So I'm going to ask you to be willing to unlearn some things you thought you knew, to imagine some new things you may never have dreamed of and to allow some assumptions to be challenged.

Let me at this point make a comment about honesty. It is increasingly acceptable these days to press for a 'good' outcome with any tool that is available – whether it is honest or not. An example might help. A while ago, a Facebook friend of mine copied a social media post which related to MP attendance in certain parliamentary debates. Her intention, I imagine, was good. She wanted to hold our MPs accountable, perhaps. Maybe she wanted to highlight the gravity of certain decisions that Parliament makes (such as whether to go to war or whether to accept child asylum seekers). These seem to me to be valid, indeed laudable, aims. But the particular allegation she posted was false. So I showed her that; I posted a link to some factual information that debunked the claim. Her response was to acknowledge the validity of this new evidence. *But she did not withdraw the original post.* And so people continued to see it, to believe it and to propagate it.

I do not believe that the cause of righteousness is ever served by the manipulation of truth or by the suppression of contrary evidence. I believe that all truth is God's truth and that we can fearlessly follow truth where it leads (to the best of our ability to discern it). I do not believe that God's righteousness needs defending by sleight of hand or smoke and mirrors. I do not believe that we have all the answers, and I believe it is dishonest to pretend that we have.

What might we regard as a 'good' outcome to the writing and reading of this book? Perhaps that God's righteousness will be seen more clearly; that explanations for ethically challenging texts can be set out and tested; and that believers will have more confidence in the value of the Old Testament. Ultimately, this amounts to an aspiration that God will be glorified through this book. And I do not believe that God will be glorified if I am less than honest in the writing of it.

So this is my promise to you, to myself and to God: within the limitations of the size and scope of this book, I will not wilfully manipulate evidence or suppress contrary testimony. I will be honest when a problem is difficult, and I will tell you when something remains unknown or when I am dissatisfied with a proposal I am offering.

Finally, a note on how I have constructed this book. Although we sometimes speak of ‘the problem of Old Testament violence’, it is not a homogenous thing. We can’t compare Balaam’s beating of his donkey (Numbers 22) – for instance – with the mass abduction and rape of hundreds of women (Judges 21). The incidents vary, not just in severity but also in quality. The stories are serving different purposes. They are found in different types of writing.

So I have tried to break the problem down. We will begin with some essential starting points for our thinking. There are certain baseline beliefs that we need to agree on in order to proceed – or at least, we need to be willing to work within that thought-world for the sake of understanding the argument. We will then go on to consider some crucial introductory ideas. What is violence in modern and ancient society? How does the Old Testament relate to the New? What does it mean when we say that scripture is inspired by God? What are the important principles that we need to bear in mind as we try to interpret the Bible? These preliminary ideas will be explored in the first three chapters.

After that, I will try to work my way towards the most problematic texts by way of the easier ones. First, we will consider instances where violence is *described*, not *prescribed*. Next, we will look at places – mainly the psalms – where violence is implored: where the psalmist prays for vengeance. Third, we will consider the issue of violence against animals, particularly the flood story and the system of animal sacrifice. Fourth, we will look at the use of violence as divine judgement. And fifth, we will look at the knottiest problem of all: the texts where God appears to command people to be violent to

one another. At the end of most of the chapters in this section I offer some more practical suggestions. How should we handle these texts in our churches – in our pulpits, our home groups, our Sunday schools? And then, in the final chapter, we will ‘zoom back out’ and take a look at the big picture of the Bible.

In the end, it is my hope that if this book were to fall through a time warp into the hands of the teenager whose struggle sparked my interest in the first place, she would find it helpful. And, even though some of her questions might remain, she would conclude that belief in a good God is not incompatible with the Old Testament. And it is my hope and prayer that it will do the same for you. So buckle up for the ride, and let’s start.

PART II

UNPEELING THE LAYERS

We have built a foundation. We have considered how God speaks; we have thought about the nature of violence and how it expresses itself in human society; we have looked at some tools for interpreting the Bible as well as we are able. Now we will turn our attention to the texts of violence themselves.

In her later life, my maternal grandmother tried to learn to drive. However, her efforts were unsuccessful, principally because she was totally intimidated by ‘all the cars’ that she could see at any one time. My mother, who was teaching her, tried to explain that she didn’t need to worry about them all at once – some were on the other side of the dual carriageway; some were on the slip road exit ahead of her; some were on the bridge across the road. She only needed to concern herself with the ones that she might come into contact with. But it was no use – she was overwhelmed by so many cars and gave up the attempt to learn to drive.

I think our approach to the Old Testament violence can be a bit like this. I hear and read a lot of comments about ‘all the violence’, but sometimes little effort is made to discriminate between the types of violence and to discern which ones we ought to worry about, and we are in danger of making the problem larger than it needs to be. It is my suggestion that many of these texts are much less problematic than we sometimes assume, and that we can peel them away like the layers of an onion, one by one, finally ending up with the hardest texts, the ones we do need to ‘worry about’. So in the second part of this book, we will consider groups of texts in (approximately) increasing order of difficulty. We will start by looking at places where violence is described.

4

VIOLENCE DESCRIBED

Violence should be spoken of

In 2017, *Time* magazine named as its personality of the year the ‘Silence Breakers’ – the women (and some men) of the #metoo movement. For too long, powerful men have perpetrated acts of sexual violence with apparent impunity, facilitated by an atmosphere of silence. *Time* reports the words of one of Harvey Weinstein’s alleged victims, Ashley Judd:

Weinstein’s behavior was an open secret passed around on the whisper network that had been furrowing through Hollywood for years. It allowed for people to warn others to some degree, but there was no route to stop the abuse... ‘There wasn’t a place for us to report these experiences.’⁴⁵

Similar in some ways is the well-known saying by Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel, ‘I can tolerate the memory of silence, but not the silence of memory.’⁴⁶

For the #metoo movement, silence is complicity; for Wiesel, silence is the erasure of the victim. Both would agree that acts of violence should not be brushed under the carpet. They should be told.

For these reasons, it is important that the Old Testament is not silent on matters of violence which took place in the histories it is telling. As we saw in chapter 2, society is inherently violent; arguably, the societies that were found in the ancient Near East between the time

of the patriarchs and the empires of Assyria, Babylon and Persia were more overtly violent than our own. So if the Bible omitted stories of such acts, it could rightly be criticised as both implausible and inhumane.

Therefore, because it is so deeply rooted in the story of people groups and societies, we should expect the Old Testament to include description of acts of violence: interpersonal violence, group violence and national conflict. The key things we have to do, as interpreters of the Bible, are first to notice when violence is being described but not endorsed, and then to identify the purpose the story is serving in the narrator's wider theological intention.

When is violence being described but not endorsed?

It is important that we do not automatically assume that someone's actions – even if we have been taught to consider them a 'good guy' – are necessarily being endorsed by the biblical narrator. Sometimes this will require us to question things that we have accepted since Sunday school. But this requires us to do a more sophisticated reading than we were taught as children. As an example, let's look at the story of Samson (Judges 13–16).

If this story were not in our Bibles, I'd be amazed if anyone held him up as a model citizen. Samson's life is one long list of moral and legal transgressions and violent, crazy actions. But many writers seem to consider his actions justified. A reminder of part of the story: Samson's wedding has been disrupted because he lost a bet with the Philistines. (They had cheated.) To pay the forfeit, Samson kills 30 of them for their clothes, then strops home, abandoning his new wife. When he returns after a period to claim his conjugal rights, he is turned away by his father-in-law, who has remarried the woman to another man. In response, Samson goes on the rampage and sets fire to the entire Philistine harvest. The whole story is rather squalid, and

nobody comes out of it very well. But are Samson's actions justified? Celebrated 18th-century commentator Matthew Henry thought so:

He had done what became him in offering to be reconciled to his wife, but, [since she had] rendered it impracticable, now they could not blame him if he showed his just resentment.⁴⁷

And many modern commentators similarly approve:

Samson wished to live peacefully with [the Philistines]. The entire saga breathes a remarkable spirit of fair play [here the writer makes reference to 'an eye for an eye']. Samson seems not to have adhered to the principle that might determines right. Instead, he merely sought revenge for wrongs committed against him.⁴⁸

But if we look more closely at Samson's acts of 'fair play' and consider whether they do indeed conform to the 'eye for an eye' code, we soon see that they escalate the violence level on every occasion, also punishing third parties, which is in strict contravention of the code (see Table 2).⁴⁹

Samson himself claims that he is exercising 'eye for an eye' on two occasions (Judges 15:11; 16:28), but on no occasion does he limit his actions to match the offence he has suffered. It is important that we are not duped by his self-publicity!

In actual fact, rather than exercising the moderate law of 'an eye for an eye', Samson is demonstrating something that the famous anthropologist and social theorist René Girard calls 'mimetic rivalry'. In mimesis, rivals become like one another in their desires and their actions. So when Samson escalates his violence in response to his enemy's action and the Philistines react with further violence, they are caught up in a mimetic spiral that could be straight out of a Girard textbook.

Table 2 Actions of the Philistines and reactions by Samson

Action of the Philistines	Reaction by Samson
Deception of Samson by his Philistine 'companions'	30 unconnected Philistine men killed
Samson's wife given to another man	Burning of Philistine fields and standing wheat
Burning of Samson's wife and her family	'Smote the Philistines with a great blow'
Attempt to capture Samson	1,000 Philistine men slain with a jawbone
Capture, blinding, enslavement of Samson	3,000 Philistine men, women and children slain; temple of Dagon destroyed

What are the clues that the narrator wants us to disapprove of Samson's actions? (This is part of learning to spot characterisation, which we discussed in chapter 3.) First, our 'hero' is shown breaking the law at every turn. He has repeated sexual dalliances with Philistine women (forbidden on the counts of sexual impropriety and consorting with Philistines); he drinks wine (forbidden to a Nazirite – see 13:7); he touches dead animals (forbidden to a Nazirite); he does not honour his father and mother (breach of the fifth commandment; see his peremptory words to them in 14:1–4); he commits murder (breach of the sixth commandment), and so on. These are like flags to us from the narrator, indicating that we are to view this man and his actions with suspicion.

Second, reading with that suspicion, we should notice the mismatch between Samson's claims and his actions. For example, he only pays any attention to God on two occasions, both times when he is in utter desperation (15:18; 16:28).

And the third big clue that we are not to approve of everything Samson does emerges when we read the whole of Judges. What we discover is a collection of stories that illustrate the repeated phrase, 'In those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes' (Judges 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25). In other words, the story of Samson is one of the pieces of evidence the narrator has chosen to tell us, in order to illustrate how much Israel needs a godly king. It is his repeated moral failure that proves the point. We should not celebrate his killing sprees, because they are, at best, deeply morally ambiguous.

What is the narrator doing here?

This brings us to the second question that we should ask when we read one of these stories: what is the narrator's purpose here? This is an important question, and the reason it matters is because history-telling is a selective process (as we discussed in chapter 3).⁵⁰ What we have in the narrative parts of our Old Testaments is a collection of stories, joined with a variable amount of narrative 'glue', which are constructed in order to communicate something to us. As we read, we form a hypothesis about what the narrator's purpose is in choosing and arranging *these* stories. We will probably need to modify that hypothesis as we keep rereading – this is part of the spiral process of reading and rereading which we discussed in chapter 3 – but the key questions are: why has the narrator chosen to tell me this, and why is it in this place?

So as we consider some of the described episodes of violence, it is instructive to consider the purpose of their inclusion in the wider text and in the biblical canon. I will attempt to illustrate this with another incident from the book of Judges, in chapter 19. This is the very troubling story of the gang rape and murder of a concubine.

This story is sometimes considered to be deeply misogynistic. It does, after all, describe a deeply misogynistic act. And the woman is

treated abysmally, not only by the men who abuse her directly, but also by her host and her husband/master, both of whom owe her a duty of care. But the fact that a misogynistic event is recounted does not, I think, mean that the storyteller is necessarily complicit in that misogyny. How a character is treated *within* a story may not be the same as how that character is treated *by* the storyteller.

Consider the classic book and film *The Color Purple*. This tells the story of an African-American woman called Celie Harris, and her experience of rape, incest, domestic violence and racism. But, to my knowledge, nobody calls this a misogynistic book or film. This is not, I think, because it happens to have a happy ending, whereas our concubine has a tragic one. It is because, even though the character Celie Harris is fictional, such events took place, and *The Color Purple* gives voice to them. It is an act of truth-telling. As film director Oliver Stone said, '*The Color Purple* is an excellent movie, and it was an attempt to deal with an issue that had been overlooked.'⁵¹ Exactly. *Not* to tell such stories would airbrush the victims out of history; it would imply that such crimes do not matter. It is not necessarily misogynistic to write about sexual violence (though, of course, it can be).

So if we choose to set aside the assumption that the story of the Levite's concubine is misogynistic, and instead we ask why the narrator has included it and why he has placed it where he has, something surprising emerges. We noted above the repeated refrain in Judges that draws our attention to Israel's need for a king. To prove this to us, the narrator tells us a number of stories, spiralling downwards in their witness to the catastrophic consequences of this lack of kingship. The climax to this sequence is our narrative of the Levite's concubine, and its direct consequence, civil war. (To be sure that we link this story to the overall theme, the narrator tells us that the concubine was handed over to the men for them to do to them *whatever was right in their eyes.*)

And as the supreme example of why Israel needs good, godly governance, our narrator gives us this example of the rape and

murder of a nameless concubine. This should surprise us on a number of levels. First, because she is female. It might have been expected that the supreme example would be one of violence against a man, probably a high-born man or a priest. Second, because she is a 'nobody'. This is not a story about a princess or the daughter of a priest. She does not have the status of wife. This woman has no self-determination; she does not even have power over her own body. Yet her appalling end is chosen as the prime demonstration of the lawlessness of the day. Her death matters!

The violence should shock us, appal us. The narrator intends that. But it should not cause us to doubt his integrity or, indeed, the goodness of God. Quite the reverse. This is one of many instances in the Old Testament where God's concern for the weak is demonstrated, in the selection of the story by the narrator he appointed.

So how do we actually do this? What are the tools we might use to investigate the narrator's purpose? There isn't a simple set of rules to apply, but asking the question is a good start. And there are certain things we can look out for that might give us clues.

1 Look for explicit comment

Sometimes the narrator indicates clearly that the violence we are reading about is a bad thing. Consider the story of Cain and Abel. After Cain has murdered his brother, we are shown a conversation that God has with him:

The Lord said, 'What have you done? Listen; your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground! And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand.'

GENESIS 4:10-11

There's a great deal that we might want to discuss about this story of fratricide, but whether or not we should approve of it does not seem to be in doubt.

Sometimes, however, the explicit comment isn't quite as obvious as we might wish, and we will only find it if we read wider. I've lost count of the number of times someone has said to me that the narrator gives no comment about the rape of the Levite's concubine or about the sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter (Judges 11). But, as I've suggested in both the case studies above, the repeated refrain of Judges – 'In those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes' – is indeed an explicit comment on the stories told in the book.

2 Look for implicit comment

In Exodus 1, we read of the enslavement of the Israelites under a new Pharaoh. Now, obviously later in the book it will become explicit that Pharaoh is under God's judgement for this, but if you read the first chapter or two, you will struggle to find anywhere that the narrator clearly says so. But there is definitely some implicit comment, if you know what to look for. In the opening verses of the chapter, we read of the multiplication of the Israelites, and Pharaoh's opposition to this:

But the Israelites were fruitful and prolific; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them. Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. He said to his people, 'Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, or they will increase.'

EXODUS 1:7-10

This is language that is meant to remind us of the creation account in Genesis 1. The people of Israel are doing what God's created beings are supposed to do: they are multiplying and filling the earth. (In Hebrew, 'earth' and 'land' are generally – as here – represented with

the same word.) In particular, they are fulfilling the creation mandate (we discussed this in chapter 3), ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth’ (Genesis 1:28).

Pharaoh’s actions, then, are being implicitly shown by the narrator to be in direct opposition to God’s blessing and purpose for Israel. This is *implicit* comment on violence.

3 Consider that there could be concealed comment

Sometimes things are too dangerous to speak aloud. In the New Testament book of Revelation, the frequent references to ‘Babylon’ are well understood to be a coded critique of the Roman Empire. What could not be said of Rome (currently in brutal power) could easily be said of Babylon, by then a long-defunct empire.

Concealments of this sort may be found in the Old Testament, and sometimes discovering them can help us understand some of the texts of violence.

In our final case study of this chapter, we will briefly consider the story of Elisha and the bears (2 Kings 2:23–25). This is a disturbing little story, in which some boys or youths mock the prophet, he curses them in the name of God and two she-bears come out of the woods and tear them apart. But it might help if we notice the concealed critique of Elisha that is present through these chapters – concealed because it is (was) rather daring to criticise a prophet.

It is clear to even the casual reader that the lives and ministries of Elijah and Elisha are very similar – they are often confused for one another. Both raise from the dead an only child; both mysteriously multiply food; both part the river Jordan. But there are a number of telling ways in which the two prophets are represented differently. In brief: whereas Elijah goes everywhere at God’s command, Elisha is described as travelling entirely under his own volition; whereas Elijah always attributes his miracles to the power of God, Elisha often

makes no reference to God at all when he performs his miracles; in comparison with Elijah, Elisha appears very concerned with his own reputation (compare 1 Kings 18:36 with 2 Kings 5:8). Whereas Elijah often is noble and high-minded, Elisha can be ignoble and crass. Elijah is mirrored by Elisha, and this serves to highlight the difference between them. This casts a doubt in the reader's mind about whether Elisha's actions – man of God though he is – are always to be approved. If Elisha seems bad-tempered when he summons the bears to maul the boys, this is because he *is* bad-tempered. No one is above criticism in the narrative, not even the men of God.⁵²

How might we use these texts in our churches?

In 2018, I gave a touring public lecture exploring the question of how we read the Old Testament texts of violence ethically. As part of this lecture, I suggested that reading the stories of sexual violence in our churches might allow those who have suffered such crimes to feel heard, and to give voice to their pain. I quoted Denise Ackerman, who has been reading the story of the rape of Tamar with African women suffering from HIV/AIDS:

I suggest that the ancient language of lament offers a vehicle for expressing the raw emotions arising from situations such as Tamar's. The language of lament also offers the Body of Christ the opportunity to say: 'We are suffering, we stand in solidarity with all who suffer, we lament while we believe that there is hope for all in the good News.'⁵³

In one of the venues, after the lecture, I had a surprising and moving encounter, as a lady came to speak to me about her own experience of abuse. I have no idea how she had found out about, and ended up in, the lecture; she did not appear to 'fit' the demographic of most who were attending. But I think it was God's plan that she should be there that day, for she told me, tearfully, that discovering that such stories were in the Bible gave dignity to her pain.

This was a surprising outcome for the setting of a public lecture, but should not be a surprising event in the life of the local church. The routine omission from our Sunday services of the texts which describe interpersonal, and especially sexual, violence means that such crimes – and their victims – are still being obliterated from memory and excluded from discourse. In pastoral terms, this represents a missed opportunity for remembering and honouring such victims, ancient and modern. Setting these narratives free in our congregations may allow them to have a voice and give words to their lament.

Conclusion

We have seen that some Old Testament violence is described, but not approved. I have argued that this can be viewed as a positive thing, and that the description of some acts of violence is an important exercise in truth-telling and in giving a voice to the victim. We have discussed some ways to identify when the text is giving us the clues to read it in this way. However, my second and third points above may have caused some dismay. How are non-specialists to discover concealed or implicit criticism in the text? By definition, they will be hard to detect.

This perhaps serves as a reminder that we read the Bible as part of a reading community and that an important voice in that community (though not the only one) is the voice of the Christian scholar. It is difficult for the non-specialist to discover implicit or concealed criticisms – indeed, it can be difficult for specialists, too. But the use of a good commentary can help direct our attention to some of these features. For example, the case study above – where we saw how the opening verses of Exodus show us Pharaoh opposing the creation mandate – can be found, among other places, in Peter Enns' commentary on Exodus from the 'NIV Application Commentary' series.⁵⁴ Sometimes, the voice of an expert is very helpful.



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Resourcing individuals, groups and leaders in churches for their own spiritual journey and for their ministry

Church outreach in the local community

Offering two programmes that churches are embracing to great effect as they seek to engage with their local communities and transform lives



Teaching Christianity in primary schools

Working with children and teachers to explore Christianity creatively and confidently

Children's and family ministry

Working with churches and families to explore Christianity creatively and bring the Bible alive

parenting for faith

Visit brf.org.uk for more information on BRF's work

brf.org.uk

The Bible Reading Fellowship (BRF) is a Registered Charity (No. 233280)

DO YOU FIND THE VIOLENCE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT A PROBLEM?

DOES IT GET IN THE WAY OF READING THE BIBLE - AND OF FAITH ITSELF?

While acknowledging that there are no easy answers, in *God of Violence Yesterday, God of Love Today?*, Helen Paynter faces the questions head-on and offers a fresh, accessible approach to a significant issue. For all those seeking to engage with the Bible and gain confidence in the God it portrays, she provides tools for reading and interpreting biblical texts, and points to ways of dealing with the overall trajectories of violence.

Following a first career in medicine, **Helen Paynter** is now a Baptist minister, Director of the Centre for the Study of Bible and Violence at Bristol Baptist College, and Editor of BRF's *Guidelines* Bible reading notes. Helen is passionate about helping people get to grips with the Bible, because she has seen its power to transform lives. She loves to study it, preach it, teach it, and encourage others to study and understand it.



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