

The Ethics of Violence in the Old Testament

Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary

Fall 2015

Mondays, 2-5 PM

Instructor: Tyler Mayfield
tmayfield@lpts.edu
(502) 992-9375

Office: Schlegel 315
Office Hours: email for appointment

“The overwhelming image of God in the Bible is that of a brutal, violent, and vengeful judge. In a world being torn apart by violence, there is no more urgent task than to counter the Bible’s frequent and nauseating portraits of a ruthless and violent deity. The cruelty of God, however, is a problem that almost no one is willing to face squarely, including Christian interpreters.”

Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer in *Jesus against Christianity: Reclaiming the Missing Jesus* (Harrisburg, Pa: Trinity Press International, 2001), 21.

“All too often we equate piety and devotion with passive obedience to the biblical texts. Resistance, however, can be a sign of a deep piety. While devout people do certainly listen to and read the Bible, they also actively engage it.”

Carol Hess in *Caretakers of Our Common House: Women’s Development in Communities of Faith* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 202.

“Ignoring violent texts is like camping on the bank of a crocodile-infested river. It is dangerous. It is naïve in the extreme. These Leviathan-like texts should be treated with the utmost respect and caution. They can erupt with violent force when it is least expected.”

William W. Emilsen and John T. Squires in “Introduction,” in *Validating Violence—Violating Faith? Religion, Scripture and Violence*, ed. William W. Emilsen and John T. Squires (Adelaide: ATF, 2008), xiii.

Course Description

This course introduces the challenging ethical topic of divine violence—violence performed by God and on God’s behalf—in the Old Testament. This is a major theme in ancient Israelite religion and politics and a major concern for contemporary readers. Understanding the Old Testament, especially its God, requires comprehending the ways in which God is represented as participating in violence. Biblical authors chiefly present God’s role in violence without critique, portraying God as a warrior who fights for Israel, as a war leader who commands Israel also to fight, as an indiscriminate executor of individuals and groups, as judge who requires the death penalty for certain disobediences, and as a husband ready to inflict harm on his wife.

This biblical elective course focuses attention on problematic biblical passages in order to understand and claim—not ignore—their theologically and ethically problematic nature as well as seek new theologically rich and ethically responsible understandings of the texts.

Prerequisite: Scripture I

Course Objectives

Students completing this course will be able to:

- 1) Name and describe the ethical and theological problems presented in a selection of Old Testament texts that portray violent actions—human and divine. (Assignments #1, #2, #3)
- 2) Evaluate selected scholarly interpretations of these problematic biblical texts. (Assignments #2, #3)
- 3) Construct new theological readings of these problematic texts. (Assignments #1, #3)

These course objectives relate mainly--

To four SLOs in the MDiv program:

SLO1: Students will be able to interpret Scripture critically and imaginatively.

SLO8: Students will demonstrate the ability to think theologically, strategically, imaginatively, and contextually about ethical issues.

SLO15: Students will be able to talk intelligently and articulately about what they believe to others.

SLO16: Students will be able to reason, write, and speak clearly.

To two SLOs in MAR program:

SLO1: be able to interpret Scripture critically and imaginatively

SLO4: demonstrate the ability to think theologically, strategically, imaginatively, and contextually about ethical issues

To two SLOs in MFT program:

SLO 3: Graduating students will be able to think ethically and make appropriate clinical ethical decisions.

SLO 5: Graduating students will be able to use a theologically informed and clinically appropriate framework to integrate religious and spiritual factors in to the practice of Marriage and Family Therapy.

Required Books (on Library Reserve)

- 1) Davies, Eryl W. *The Immoral Bible: Approaches to Biblical Ethics* (New York & London: T&T Clark, 2010).
- 2) Douglas S. Earl, *The Joshua Delusion? Rethinking Genocide in the Bible* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade, 2010).
- 3) L. Juliana M. Claassens, *Mourner, Mother, Midwife: Reimagining God's Delivering Presence in the Old Testament* (Louisville; Westminster John Knox, 2012).

Assignments & Evaluation for a Seminar Style Class

1) **Attendance & Participation.** (25%) See Appendix A for Rubric.

According to the Seminary catalog, students are expected to attend “all scheduled meetings of the courses” excepting illness or “other valid reasons.” In case of illness or emergency, students are asked to notify me of their planned absence from class preferably prior to the session.

Students should come to class each day eagerly ready to discuss the assigned readings. Active participation includes, but is not limited to, activities such as listening carefully to others’ presentations and thoughts, taking notes, asking relevant questions, responding to others’ comments, and inviting others into the conversation. It does not include dominating a group or class discussion.

Students may want to take notes (jot down questions, write up summaries, etc.), while reading the assigned texts outside of class so that they have resources in class to use to speak about various subjects.

2) **Weekly 2-page Papers.** (50%) See Appendix B for Rubric.

Students will write a 2-page paper in preparation for each class session (excepting the first class); so, 10 papers total. These papers respond to a specific question or prompt given ahead of time. A hardcopy of the paper is due in class each week. Students will use the paper in class to contribute to class participation (in addition to their notes; see above) and will turn it in for grading at the end of class.

3) **Group Class Presentation** (25%) See Appendix C for Rubric.

Students will present in pairs a 30 minute presentation (followed by a 10 minute discussion) on a particular biblical text. Students will research the biblical text using at least 4 commentaries and 2 journal articles minimum. The presentation should focus on the ethically problematic issues within the class as it relates to violence in particular. Some general historical and literary background about the passage will need to be presented, but these matters should not be the entire focus. The presentation should also provide multiple possible readings of the biblical text, including constructive, theological readings.

Course Policies:

Academic Honesty: All work turned in is expected to be the work of the student whose name appears on the assignment. Any borrowing of the ideas or the words of others must be acknowledged by quotation marks and by citation of author and source. Use of another's language or ideas from online resources is included in this policy, and must be attributed to author and source of the work being cited. Failure to do so constitutes plagiarism, and may result in failure of the course. Multiple occurrences of plagiarism may result in dismissal from the Seminary. Students unfamiliar with issues relating to academic honesty can find help from the staff in the Academic Support Center and should make use of the available resources at an *early* date, since violations of seminary policy on academic honesty can lead to a failing grade for the course.

Citation Policy:

Citations in your papers should follow the Seminary standard, which is based on these guides:

Kate Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 7th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007.

The Chicago Manual of Style, 15th ed. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2003.

Accessibility and Accommodation: Students requiring accommodation for a physical or learning disability should be in contact with the Director of the Academic Support Center (kmapes@lpts.edu) within the first few days of the course and should speak with me as soon as possible to arrange appropriate adjustments.

Inclusive Language: Our use of language, personally and as a community, is a powerful tool of both healing and oppression. In order to establish a more egalitarian environment and in accordance with seminary policy, students are to use inclusive language in class discussions and in written and oral communication by using language representative of the whole human community in respect to gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, and physical and intellectual capacities. Direct quotations from theological texts and translations of the Bible do not have to be altered to conform to this policy. Avoid language for people that excludes part of the population or perpetuates stereotypes. Do not assume masculine gender when the gender of the person is unknown. See [http://www.lpts.edu/Academic Resources/ASC/avoidinggenderbiasinlanguage.asp](http://www.lpts.edu/Academic_Resources/ASC/avoidinggenderbiasinlanguage.asp).

When referring to God, students are encouraged to use a variety of images and metaphors. The God of the Hebrew Bible is envisioned in both personal and non-personal ways, as well as masculine and feminine terms. Naming God exclusively as "He" does not capture this splendid diversity.

Policy on late work: All written assignments are due on the date given in the syllabus. Assignments submitted late will be penalized in the grading by one letter grade increment for every day (a B+ paper becomes a B if one day late, a B- if two days, a C+ if three days, etc.). Assignments submitted more than ten days after the due date will not be accepted.

Use of electronic devices in class: I ask that we create a time and space in the classroom to set aside such distractions as email, Facebook, and texting in order to engage our minds and hearts. Do not send or read text messages during class. Cell phones should be turned off. In the event that you have a legitimate need to be accessible during class, you may ask me for an exception to this rule. Laptops should not be used if you cannot trust yourself to restrict your use to note-taking. You may not access the Internet during class time. Any misuse of electronic devices during class time, including checking of email or social networking sites, will be grounds for dismissal from the session and will negatively affect the course grade.

Course Schedule

INTRODUCTION

Monday, September 14

1. Introduction to course/syllabus
2. Defining terms, a few examples
3. Introduction to Violence in the Old Testament

Monday, September 21

1. Christian Ethics, Violence, and Pacifism
2. Biblical Ethics and Hermeneutics

Class Readings:

Cahill, Lisa Sowle. *Love Your Enemies: Discipleship, Pacifism, and Just War Theory* (Fortress, 1994): 1-14, 205-230. [CAMS]

Seibert, Eric. *The Violence of Scripture: Overcoming the Old Testament's Troubling Legacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012): 61-72. [CAMS]

Green, Joel and Jacqueline Lapsley, eds. *The Old Testament and Ethics: A Book-By-Book Survey* (Grand Rapids: BakerAcademic, 2013): 14-36. [CAMS]

GOD THE DIVINE WARRIOR

Monday, September 28

1. Exodus and the Warrior God: Y-WH is a Warrior
Exodus 14:1-31
2. ANE Divine Warriors
3. **Class Presentation*: Exodus 15

Class Readings:

Miller, Patrick D. "God the Warrior: A Problem in Biblical Interpretation and Apologetics." *Interpretation* 19.1 (1965): 39-46. [CAMS]

Kang, Sa-Moon. *Divine War in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1989): 31-42, 114-125, 197-204. [CAMS]

Davies, Eryl W. *The Immoral Bible: Approaches to Biblical Ethics* (London: T&T Clark, 2010): 11-13.

Monday, October 5

1. Reimagining God's Delivering Presence
2. *Class Presentation: Texts in Isaiah regarding God as Mother

Class Readings:

Claassens, L. Juliana M. *Mourner, Mother, Midwife: Reimagining God's Delivering Presence in the Old Testament* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012).

Seibert, Eric. *The Violence of Scripture: Overcoming the Old Testament's Troubling Legacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012): 54-57. [CAMS]

Davies, Eryl W. *The Immoral Bible: Approaches to Biblical Ethics* (London: T&T Clark, 2010): 22-43.

GOD THE GENOCIDAL GENERAL

Monday, October 12

1. Holy War Legislation: Ex 23:20-33; Deut 7 and 20.
2. Conquest I (Joshua) and Holy War: Herem and Jericho
3. *Class Presentation: Joshua 5:13-6:27

Class Readings:

Kang, Sa-Moon. *Divine War in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1989): 80-84, 142-147. [CAMS]

Earl, Douglas S. *The Joshua Delusion? Rethinking Genocide in the Bible* (Eugene: Cascade, 2010), chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 1-45)

Seibert, Eric. *Disturbing Divine Behavior: Troubling Old Testament Images of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009): 140-144. [CAMS]

Monday, October 19

1. Conquest II (Joshua) and Holy War: Herem and Ai
2. Conquest III (Judges) and Holy War
3. *Class Presentation: Joshua 7:1-8:29
4. Judges 1:1-2:5

Class Readings:

Kang, Sa-Moon. *Divine War in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1989): 147-151, 165-173. [CAMS]

Earl, Douglas S. *The Joshua Delusion? Rethinking Genocide in the Bible* (Eugene: Cascade, 2010), chapters 3 and 4 (pp. 46-99)

Monday, November 2

Reimagining the Coalition of Violence

Class Readings:

Warrior, Robert Allen, "Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians: Deliverance, Conquest, and Liberation Theology Today," in *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World* (eds. R. S. Sugirtharajah; Maryknoll, New York/London: Orbis/SPCK, 1995): 277-285. [CAMS]

Seibert, Eric. *The Violence of Scripture: Overcoming the Old Testament's Troubling Legacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012): 73-92. [CAMS]

Seibert, Eric. *Disturbing Divine Behavior: Troubling Old Testament Images of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009): 169-181. [CAMS]

Davies, Eryl W. *The Immoral Bible: Approaches to Biblical Ethics* (London: T&T Clark, 2010): 44-62.

GOD THE MURDERER

Monday, November 9

1. The Flood: Genesis 6-8
2. Divine Death Penalty Laws: Exod 21:15-17; 31:15b; Lev. 20:10, 13a, 15-16, 27; 24:16-17
3. * *Class Presentation:* Nadab and Abihu's Unholy Fire: Lev. 10:1-2

Class Readings:

Schlimm, Matthew Richard, *This Strange and Sacred Scripture: Wrestling with the Old Testament and Its Oddities* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015): 62-83. [CAMS]

Fretheim, Terence E. "The God of the Flood Story and Natural Disasters," *Calvin Theological Journal* 43.1 (April 2008): 21-34. [through ATLA database]

Davies, Eryl W. *The Immoral Bible: Approaches to Biblical Ethics* (London: T&T Clark, 2010): 63-100.

Monday, November 16

1. Deaths in the Wilderness: Num 14:36-37; 16:46, 49; 21:6
2. Uzzah and the Ark of the Covenant: 2 Sam 6
3. **Class Presentation:* 1 Samuel 15 Saul and the Amalekites

Class Readings:

Long, Thomas G. "The Fall of the House of Uzzah...and Other Difficult Preaching Texts," *Journal for Preachers* 7 no 1 (Advent 1983): 13-19. [through ATLA database]

Davies, Eryl W. *The Immoral Bible: Approaches to Biblical Ethics* (London: T&T Clark, 2010): 101-119.

GOD THE ABUSIVE HUSBAND

Monday, November 30

1. Marriage Metaphor in the Prophetic Literature: Hosea 1-3, Jeremiah 16, Ezekiel 24
2. * *Class Presentation:* Hosea 1

Class Readings:

Thompson, John L. *Reading the Bible with the Dead: What You Can Learn from the History of Exegesis That You Can't Learn From Exegesis Alone* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 93-111. [CAMS]

Yee, Gale A. "Faithless Israel in Hosea: She Is Not My Wife and I Am Not Her Husband," in *Poor Banished Children of Eve: Woman as Evil in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003): 81-109. [CAMS]

Monday, December 7

Conclusion

Class Readings:

Davies, Eryl W. *The Immoral Bible: Approaches to Biblical Ethics* (London: T&T Clark, 2010): 120-147.