

What to do with divine violence?

Judges 11:30-40 New International Version (NIV)

And Jephthah made a vow to the Lord: “If you give the Ammonites into my hands, whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me when I return in triumph from the Ammonites will be the Lord’s, and I will sacrifice it as a burnt offering.”

Then Jephthah went over to fight the Ammonites, and the Lord gave them into his hands. He devastated twenty towns from Aroer to the vicinity of Minnith, as far as Abel Keramim. Thus Israel subdued Ammon.

When Jephthah returned to his home in Mizpah, who should come out to meet him but his daughter, dancing to the sound of timbrels! She was an only child. Except for her he had neither son nor daughter. When he saw her, he tore his clothes and cried, “Oh no, my daughter! You have brought me down and I am devastated. I have made a vow to the Lord that I cannot break.”

“My father,” she replied, “you have given your word to the Lord. Do to me just as you promised, now that the Lord has avenged you of your enemies, the Ammonites. But grant me this one request,” she said. “Give me two months to roam the hills and weep with my friends, because I will never marry.”

“You may go,” he said. And he let her go for two months. She and her friends went into the hills and wept because she would never marry. After the two months, she returned to her father, and he did to her as he had vowed. And she was a virgin.

From this comes the Israelite tradition that each year the young women of Israel go out for four days to commemorate the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite.

Option 1: Ignore it/ God of the Old Testament

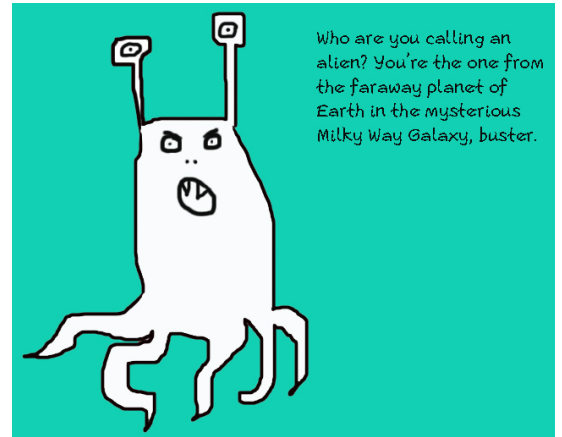


Marcion: Study of the Hebrew scriptures, along with received writings circulating in the nascent Church, led Marcion to conclude that many of the teachings of Jesus were incompatible with the actions of Yahweh, the belligerent god of the Hebrew Bible. Marcion responded by developing a ditheistic system of belief around the year 144. This notion of two gods—a higher transcendent one and a lower world creator and ruler—allowed Marcion to reconcile his perceived contradictions between Christian Old Covenant theology and the Gospel message proclaimed by the New Testament.

Option 2: That was (just) their culture

One of the ways to understand the violence is to see it as being a theological understanding that all significant events find their origin in God.

John 9:2 New International Version (NIV)
2 His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”



Option 3: Seek a trajectory



The idea is to explore the difference between this expression of violence and to local cultural expression. To then argue that that difference expresses a trajectory to follow, rather than endorsing the violence, or even the end result of that piece of text.

On the binding of Isaac

Rabbi Ari Kahn elaborates this view as follows: Isaac's death was never a possibility — not as far as Abraham was concerned, and not as far as God was concerned. God's commandment to Abraham was very specific, and Abraham understood it very precisely: Isaac was to be "raised up as an offering", and God would use the opportunity to teach humankind, once and for all, that human sacrifice, child sacrifice, is not acceptable.

Option 4: Be disturbed

Thunberg dismissed the usual admonishments that climate is complex. She has grown impatient when grown-ups explain to her that structural reform is hard, sensitive, intricate, takes time, and that nothing in life is black and white. “That is a lie,” she countered. “Either we prevent temperatures from rising above 1.5 degrees (Celsius), or we don’t. Either we avoid chain reaction of unravelling ecosystems, or we don’t. That’s as black or white as it gets.

“I often hear adults say: ‘We need to give the next generation hope’,” she concluded. “But I don’t want your hope. I want you to panic. I want you to feel the fear I do. Every day. And want you to act. I want you to behave like our house is on fire. Because it is.”

