

FOR THE LOVE OF GOD + -

A GENOCIDAL GOD? VIOLENCE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Content Warning: While this segment does not display any graphic images, it does contain mature themes, including references to murder and rape, and thus may not be appropriate for younger students.

This segment comes from **EPISODE 1: WAR + PEACE.**

From Jesus' command to "love your enemies" to the idea of "holy war" is a giant leap. Yet from the Old Testament through to the Crusades and the inquisitions, Christian history is full of violence. This segment tackles the challenging topic of violence in the Old Testament.

THEME QUESTION

Do you associate the God of the Bible more with war or with peace? Why?

ENGAGE

1. Look at the following images and read the descriptions below. Discuss as a class whether you have heard of these crimes before and whether you know any additional information about them.



A tree in the Cambodian Killing Fields that babies and young children were smashed against and killed as their parents were accused of crimes against the Khmer Rouge government. They were killed in order that they wouldn't grow up and try to avenge their parents' deaths.

Image: Killing tree against which babies were executed by shankar s. available at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/shankaronline/14250895124> under a Creative Commons BY-NC-ND 2.0 Licence



CCTV footage of two-year-old James Bulger being abducted from a UK shopping centre by two ten-year-old boys, Jon Venables and Robert Thompson. The boys tortured and killed Bulger and his mutilated body was found on a nearby railway line two days after his murder.



A memorial set up to pay tributes to the victims of the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting on 14 December 2012 in Newtown, Connecticut in the United States. On this day, a 20-year-old man Adam Lanza shot and killed 20 children (all aged 6 or 7) and 6 adult staff members.

2. In light of these cases, discuss: Do you think some crimes are unforgivable? Why or why not?
3. How do the following situations make you feel?
 - a. An innocent person is murdered.
 - b. Someone who has committed a great injustice (such as murder) is never caught and continues to live a comfortable, normal life.
4. Do you think there are ever any situations in which violence is justifiable? Why or why not?



UNDERSTAND AND EVALUATE



WATCH the segment: “A genocidal God? Violence in the Old Testament”
(cpx.video/oldtestament)

1. Draw a picture that represents what the Canaanites were like. What was one of the “unspeakably evil” things they were guilty of? What punishment do you think this practice deserves?
2. The Bible says that God instructed the Israelites to “take the land” from the Canaanites. Why did he give this command? Was it because the Israelites were righteous?
3. What strikes you about Joshua’s encounter with the “commander of the armies of the LORD”? What might this encounter show us about God?
4. What limits did God place on the nation of Israel?
5. Richard Dawkins describes the killing of the Canaanites as an “ethnic cleansing” in which “bloodthirsty massacres” were carried out with “xenophobic relish”. He says “the Bible story of Joshua’s destruction of Jericho, and the invasion of the Promised Land in general, is morally indistinguishable from Hitler’s invasion of Poland”.
 - a. What arguments do John Dickson and Iain Provan make to counter what Dawkins says?
 - b. Are you more convinced by Dickson and Provan, or by Dawkins?
 - c. What questions or concerns do you still have about the destruction of Jericho?
6. What is your reaction to the story of the Levite and his night at Gibeah?



7. What is this story doing in the Bible? What point does John Dickson say it is trying to make?
8. From the stories described in the video, what picture do we get of:
 - a. Humanity in general?
 - b. The character of God?

BIBLE FOCUS

READ Joshua 2:1-24 and Joshua 6:25.

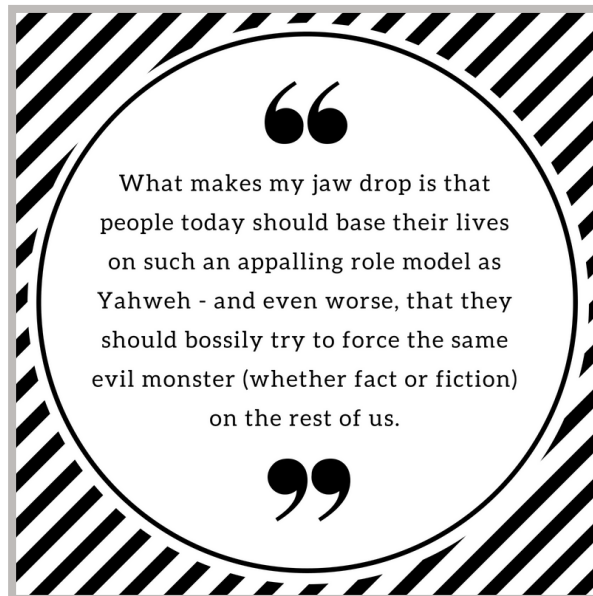
1. What do Rahab's actions and her conversation with the spies show us about what she believed about God?
2. Why do you think Rahab was required to tie a scarlet cord in the window?
3. Improvise and perform the conversation Rahab might have had with her family after the events of Chapter 2.
4. What might Rahab's story show us about God's justice and his mercy?

READ Luke 23:33-43.

5. How might Jesus' death on the cross show us God's view of justice and mercy?

APPLY

1. Throughout history, events like the battle of Jericho have been used to support the idea of a “holy war”. Based on what we have learnt today, do you think this interpretation is justified?
2. Many people have suggested that the “violent” God described in the Old Testament is completely different from Jesus, who taught his followers to love their enemies. Do you agree or disagree with this? Why or why not?
3. Hold a debate on the topic: Does God have the right to judge the behaviour of humans?
4. Write a reply to Richard Dawkins’ comment from *The God Delusion*, drawing on some of the ideas from this class:



EXTEND

1. Watch this interview between CPX’s Simon Smart and Iain Provan of Regent College: [The Old Testament: A Context for Violence \(cpx.video/provan\)](https://www.cpx.video/provan). Post an “online comment” of a few sentences explaining what stood out to you or made you think, and any questions you had.