



## YAHWEH, A GOD OF VIOLENCE?

Understanding Justice, Retribution  
and the Character of God  
in the Old Testament

**Harold Palmer**

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ISBN (13) (Paperback): 978-1-68109-028-3

ISBN (10) (Paperback): 1-68109-028-7

ISBN (13) (Kindle): 978-1-68109-029-0

ISBN (10) (Kindle): 1-68109-029-5

ISBN (13) (ePub): 978-1-68109-030-6

ISBN (10) (ePub): 1-68109-030-9



LogosLight™

*an imprint of* TellerBooks™

TellerBooks.com/LogosLight



[www.TellerBooks.com](http://www.TellerBooks.com)

Manufactured in the U.S.A.

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LogosLight books also examine the role of Judeo-Christian thought on the formation of Western civic institutions, the moral foundations of just societies, and the role of faith in civil governance.





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## ABBREVIATIONS

### *English Translations of the Bible:*

ASV.....	American Standard Version
BBE.....	Bible in Basic English
Darby.....	Darby Bible
ESV.....	English Standard Version
ISV.....	International Standard Version
KJV.....	King James Version
MKJV.....	Modern King James Version
NIV.....	New International Version
NKJV.....	New King James Version
RSV.....	Revised Standard Version

### *Books of the Bible:*

1Ch.....	1 Chronicles
1Co.....	1 Corinthians
1Jn.....	1 John
1Ki.....	1 Kings
1Pe.....	1 Peter
1Sa.....	1 Samuel
1Th.....	1 Thessalonians
1Ti.....	1 Timothy
2Ch.....	2 Chronicles
2Co.....	2 Corinthians
2Jn.....	2 John
2Ki.....	2 Kings
2Pe.....	2 Peter
2Sa.....	2 Samuel
2Th.....	2 Thessalonians
2Ti.....	2 Timothy
3Jo.....	3 John
Acts.....	Book of Acts
Amos.....	Book of Amos
Col.....	Colossians

Dan .....	Daniel
Deu .....	Deuteronomy
Ecc.....	Ecclesiastes
Eph .....	Ephesians
Est .....	Esther
Exo .....	Exodus
Eze.....	Ezekiel
Ezr .....	Book of Ezra
Gal.....	Galatians
Gen.....	Genesis
Hab .....	Habakkuk
Hag .....	Haggai
Heb.....	Hebrews
Hos .....	Hosea
Isa.....	Isaiah
Jas.....	James
Jer.....	Jeremiah
Job .....	Book of Job
Joel .....	Book of Joel
John.....	Gospel of John
Jon .....	Jonah
Jos .....	Joshua
Jude .....	Book of Jude
Jdg.....	Judges
Lam .....	Lamentations
Lev .....	Leviticus
Luke .....	Gospel of Luke
Mal .....	Malachi
Mark .....	Gospel of Mark
Mat .....	Gospel of Matthew
Mic .....	Micah
Nah.....	Nahum
Neh.....	Nehemiah
Num.....	Numbers
Oba.....	Obadiah
Phm .....	Philemon
Php .....	Philippians
Pro .....	Proverbs

Psa.....	Psalms
Rev .....	Revelation
Rom.....	Romans
Ruth.....	Book of Ruth
Son .....	Song of Solomon
Tit.....	Titus
Zec.....	Zechariah
Zep .....	Zephaniah



## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Genocide, infanticide, the destruction of entire peoples—these are among the acts of violence commanded or condoned by Yahweh, the God of the Old Testament. Examples abound throughout the Pentateuch and beyond of violence perpetrated by the Israelites at the beckoning of God. Entire cities and peoples, including Sodom, Gomorrah, Jericho, Amalek and Midian, are destroyed directly or indirectly by God. The Israelites are commanded to “kill both man and woman, infant and nursing child, ox and sheep, camel and donkey” (1Sa 15:1-3). God instructs the Israelites to “conquer and utterly destroy [and] show no mercy to” seven nations (Deu 7:1-2) and to “put to death everyone in the cities, men, women, and dependents” and leave no survivor in Heshbon (Deu 2:31-34).

Can we conclude from these examples that Yahweh is a brutal god of war and violence? Is Yahweh’s character incompatible with that of Jesus, who in the Sermon on the Mount teaches His disciples to “not resist an evil person,” “turn the other cheek,” “love your enemy” and “pray for those who persecute you” (Mat 5:38-44)?

Some commentators have concluded from the Old Testament’s war accounts that Yahweh is a petty god with an insatiable blood thirst. In this study, Harold Palmer rejects and refutes these



conclusions by approaching the question from a completely fresh angle. He sees the destruction of entire peoples not as a reflection of God's character, but as a reflection of *man's* character. Cities and peoples are destroyed as a natural consequence of their sins, with those having put their faith in Yahweh, such as Rahab, spared from the fate that befalls their community.

The starting point for this study is thus that man was created by God for a purpose and to abide by a moral code. When that code is broken, man, having rebelled against and fallen short of God's perfect moral law, is separated from God. The consequence of this separation is death, and its antidote is the gift of grace, perfected by Christ on the cross.