A Lens of Love

Reading the Bible in Its World for Our World

Jonathan L. Walton

WJK
Westminster
John Knox Press
LOUISVILLE • KENTUCKY

Contents

Acknowledgments ix

Part I: The Promise of Moral Imagination

1. Is There Room? Faith and Intellectual Curiosity 3
2. Taking the Bible Seriously: The Ethics of Biblical Interpretation 22
3. Seeing as God Sees: Putting on the Lenses of Love 38

Part II: The Power of Sacred History

4. Explaining the Inexplicable: Sacred History and Suffering in the Dynastic Literature 59
5. Origins, Apologies, and Attacks: Political Allegory in the Pentateuch 76
6. Is God Racist and Sexist? Inappropriate Metaphors and Perverted Interpretations 95

Part III: The Practice of Subverting Authority

7. Setting the Captives Free: A Gospel Ethic 115
8. Reading Someone Else's Mail: The Pauline Epistles 138
9. Faith over Fear: A New Testament Ethic of Resistance 159
10. Speaking Truth to Power: A Subversive Gospel Ethic 178

Glossary 187
Index 191

6

Is God Racist and Sexist?

Inappropriate Metaphors and Perverted Interpretations

> You can safely assume you've created God in your own image when it turns out that God hates all the same people you do.
>
> —Anne Lamott

> I imagine that one of the reasons people cling to their hates so stubbornly is because they sense, once hate is gone, they will be forced to deal with pain.
>
> —James Baldwin

Hate-Based Tales

The previous chapters introduced the different aims of biblical stories. Some narratives, for instance, employ allegory to explain social patterns, defend political leaders, and even demonize entire groups of people. These different aims create an interpretive problem. On the one hand, we have a sacred book that informs our faith as believers. On the other hand, this same book is full of tales that reveal ancient social arrangements and cultural battles that many of us find abhorrent.

How do we reconcile mean-spirited, even hateful, biblical

narratives with what we believe about a God who typifies love and grace? What do we do with Scripture that depicts God as a despiser of people based on their religion, tribal identity, or region of birth? How should we view a God who seems to sanction the subjugation, abuse, and even rape of women? If we follow biblical writers' descriptions of God in the ancient world, only one reasonable conclusion remains: God is sexist and racist.

No level of theological apologetics can defend God from such a claim *if* we conflate Scripture with God. Nor can we defend God from charges of ethnic supremacy and misogyny *if* we believe the Bible to be the last and final revelation of God in our world—hence, the reason why it was important for me to claim my understanding of Scripture at the outset of this book. As I stated in chapter 2, the Bible, though sacred, is neither divine nor the final word on God. The God I serve is so much bigger, better, broader, more loving, more inclusive, and more generous than any human writer could ever depict.

It is true that the Bible evokes a sense of awe and helps point us toward God. We must also acknowledge that the biases, claims to power, and political concerns of ancient communities ultimately informed what was passed down to us in Scripture. Biblical stories represent how the ancients viewed their world. Thus, the Bible served, and continues to serve, at least two purposes. It paints a picture of a God who provides comfort to the afflicted, encourages the oppressed, and is a champion of those living on the underside of empire. And it paints a picture of a God who hated all of the people whom the writers hated.

With these understandings in mind, I would like to use this chapter to consider three things. First, we will examine two particularly horrifying passages from the Pentateuch and how, tragically, they were entirely consistent with the worldview of some writers of the ancient Near East. The two stories are God's command to "utterly destroy" all of the inhabitants of the promised land in Deuteronomy 7:1–6, and Lot's offering up of his daughters to be raped by the townsmen of Sodom in

Genesis 19:1–9. More than these stories illustrate the writer's view of God, they reveal how the ancients viewed "the other." Second, I want us to consider historical and contemporary examples of what happens when we follow biblical writers down the rabbit hole of their creative narratives and hyperbolic rhetoric. We should not accept uncritically allegorical etiologies and apologies from the ancient world as prescriptions for our world. History reveals to us that this sort of approach to the Bible only leads to suffering and further injustice. These interpreters use Scripture to bruise and bludgeon rather than comfort and heal. Finally, I want to offer reading strategies that might enable us to provide viable counterreadings of problematic narratives that are more consistent with the overarching themes of love and justice.

Hyperbole and Histrionics

Biblical writers were bold and brazen. They did not adhere to the modern disciplinary standards of historiography: they did not fear charges of academic dishonesty for plagiarism, and they were not concerned with anyone showing up with archaeological evidence or scientific discoveries that would unequivocally refute their accounts. In some ways, they were like the Eatonville, Florida, storytellers recorded in Zora Neale Hurston's *Mules and Men*. The better the "big old lie," the greater the chance that somebody just might believe it.

Let's analyze an origin story concerning the Canaanites that extends from the Noah account in Genesis 9. This tale does not include rising water, but rather a puzzling domestic dispute that takes place after the flood recedes. Noah disembarks from the ship, plants a vineyard, and becomes intoxicated from the wine. Noah's youngest son, Ham, discovers his father in a naked, inebriated stupor. Ham collects his two brothers, Shem and Japheth, who proceed to walk backward toward their father to cover up his body, after which they depart the tent in the same manner. Noah wakes up livid with Ham. The reasons

are unclear, but Ham may have embarrassed Noah, whereas Shem and Japheth demonstrated discretion.

Whatever the reason, though, we witness one of the greatest overreactions in the history of parenthood. Noah curses Ham and his descendants forever. "Cursed be Canaan; lowest of slaves shall he be to his brothers." It just so happens that Ham is the father of the people who will come to be known as the Canaanites—the people who will be the children of Israel's sworn enemies and occupiers of the same land that God ultimately promises to Abraham. Thus, this story is a polemical allegory to justify the nation's disdain for and displacement of the Canaanites that will take place generations later. The Canaanites were doomed from the start. Their bloodline is cursed due to the original sin of their father, Ham. Hence, no punishment is too extreme nor treatment too harsh.

Beyond serving as a justification for how the children of Israel ought to mistrust and mistreat their neighbors, the story of Ham as the father of the Canaanites sets the stage for something even more nefarious. The cursing of the Canaanites helps to legitimate one of the most inhumane and xenophobic passages in Scripture:

> When the Lord your God brings you into the land that you are about to enter and occupy, and he clears away many nations before you—the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations mightier and more numerous than you—and when the Lord your God gives them over to you and you defeat them, then you must utterly destroy them. Make no covenant with them and show them no mercy. Do not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, for that would turn away your children from following me, to serve other gods. Then the anger of the Lord would be kindled against you, and he would destroy you quickly. But this is how you must deal with them: break down their altars, smash their pillars, hew down their sacred poles, and burn their idols with fire. For

> you are a people holy to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the earth to be his people, his treasured possession. (Deut. 7:1–6)

This text is abhorrent. Its genocidal language and murderous descriptions of God cannot be justified in our time or its own. Yet the language is relatively easy to explain when one views Israel as a product of tribal culture of the ancient Near East. A sociohistorical approach would allow us to take a step back from the biblical narrative and into the world in which such a narrative was produced and thus disrupt any simplistic interpretation.

The people who came to constitute Israel emerged as a tribal coalition in the late Bronze Age (1570–1200 BCE). Tribes were largely an extension of household kinship structures that gathered into informal social networks that identified a common ancestor and/or god(s). In one instance, Ephraim may refer to the "house of Joseph," which constitutes the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh together. This identity unit was independent of territory. Additionally, there are times that tribal identity refers to geographic territory. Tribes competed for and negotiated land like any other limited resource. Throughout the Hebrew Bible, tribes shift their associations and allegiances. For example, the tribe of Ephraim joined with King David of Judah in order to unite the kingdom of Israel. Nevertheless, the tribe eventually united with other northern tribes to support one of their own, King Jeroboam, when he broke away from Judah in order to establish the northern kingdom of Israel.

Because alliances and allegiances change over time, tribal leaders actively patrolled the boundaries of identity and erected sharp divisions to demarcate "us" versus "them." They used a sacred line between cosmos (our world) and chaos (disorder) to set the boundaries of identity. Often, the only way for a people to protect their cosmos is to destroy any real or imagined "evil other." Moral order is maintained. We see this in the sacred histories that circulated. It is not enough to escape

from slavery in Egypt; Yahweh has to drown Pharaoh and his army. It is not enough for God to establish ritual laws for the Hebrews; God has to kill off an entire generation that lived in Egypt before the people can enter the promised land. Cultural purity became a prerequisite for God's blessing.

This fear of the other also had implications for daily life. Community leaders encouraged intratribal marriage to keep people from marrying outside of the group. Ethnic difference was emphasized and exaggerated to promote belief in the distinctiveness of a people. And matters of difference were embellished to underscore the point that neighbors were enemies who played on a different team. This is why stories about the total defeat of one's enemy were as common in the ancient Near East as headlines like "Packers Crush the Bears" are on ESPN.com today.

Should we be sickened by the genocidal language in Deuteronomy? Absolutely. Should we be surprised by it? Absolutely not. People in the ancient world were no more tribal than many of us in modern society today. Consider political chants to "build a wall" to keep out immigrants or executive orders that attempt to ban entrance to the United States for people living in seven predominantly Muslim countries. Less than policy prescriptions, these are mostly rhetorical methods to establish an in-group identity among specifically targeted white Americans. Both xenophobia and in-group bias remain a central feature of modern life.

A cursory glance at the contours of modernity reveals that the roots of race-based slavery and racial injustice in the Americas carry the lasting marks of these indefensible biblical myths. With regard to the institution of slavery in the United States, few stories were referenced as often as the cursing of Ham in Genesis 9. As slavery became increasingly associated with people of African descent in the seventeenth century, defenders of slavery yanked the curse of Ham from the pages of Scripture and applied it to their context. The myth became both a lens and a mirror through which white male property

owners could view their world and themselves. This lens was especially strong in the antebellum South due to the high place of honor in that society.

On the one hand, the values of Christianity and protection of the household shaped southern society insofar as many regarded characters like Noah, Abraham, and Lot as strong examples of southern white manhood. On the other hand, since advocates of slavery went out of their way to depict Africans as lacking in self-control, sexually deviant, and deficient in mental capacity, they could advance the argument that Africans were born into servitude. Like Ham, Africans were apparently cursed, fated to live under the authority of other races. Many southern white men saw it as their moral obligation to keep Africans enslaved to maintain law and order in the United States.

The writings of Josiah Priest provide a clear example. His *Bible Defence of Slavery and the Origin, History, and Fortunes of the Negro Race* (1851) traces racial differences on the planet back to Noah. According to Priest, God caused Japheth "to be born white, while HE caused Ham to be born black." On the temperament of black people, Priest speaks of

> violence of temper, exceedingly beastly lusts, and lasciviousness in its worst feature, going beyond the force of the passions as possessed in common by the other races of men. Second, the word signifies deceit, dishonesty, treachery, low-mindedness, and malice. . . . What a group of horrors are here couched in the word Ham, all agreeing, in the most surprising manner, with the color of Ham's skin, as well as his real character as a man, during his own life, as well as with that of his race, even now.

Priest equates the name Ham with blackness and associates negative character traits with black skin. He thereby concludes that since the reestablishment of humanity after the flood, people of dark skin were condemned by God to serve the lighter races, just as Ham was sentenced to serve Japheth. According

to this line of reasoning, the history of European conquest and the North Atlantic slave trade all begins with Noah passing out sloppy drunk.

Priest also traces variations of color and hair texture among people of color back to divine design. For Priest, color variation in the antebellum South had nothing to do with the prevalent practice of white male slaveholders maintaining mixed-race families with enslaved black women. Priest contends that the differences between light and dark skin and "straight" versus "woolly" hair connect to mental capacity. As was common in the nineteenth century, he claimed that "the straight-haired Negro has ever been found to be more intellectual, enterprising, and comely to look upon than the other race, who, from the earliest of times have been made of slaves."

This conception of race based on Genesis 9:20–27 reached beyond the borders of the United States and the antebellum South. "Scientific" racists and members of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa promoted the belief that "Bantus"—a general label for over five hundred different ethnic groups in Central and South Africa—were descendants of Ham. Theologians and politicians appealed to this crude racial distinction to justify apartheid laws in the twentieth century, including the Bantu Education Act of 1953 that legalized not only racial segregation but also directed black children toward positions of nonskilled labor.

German and Belgian colonizers appealed to this same logic in the Great Lakes region of East Africa at the turn of the twentieth century. White European race theorists labeled the Tutsis in Rwanda, with their supposed resemblance to Europeans due to their lighter skin color, as a lost race of Christians of Ethiopian descent. The Hutus, on the other hand, were labeled children of Ham as a result of their darker hue. Tutsis were provided with greater levels of access to power, and Catholic schools, which dominated the colonial education system, openly discriminated against the Hutus. Invariably this led to a two-tier track of employment, as Tutsis enjoyed administrative

and political jobs while the Hutus were forced into manual labor, often as plantation workers.

This sort of tribal division based on phenotype, which was arbitrary at best, sowed the seeds of resentment for decades. When the monarchy dissolved and Belgian troops withdrew from Rwanda in 1962, a power vacuum emerged. Consequently, a quarter of a million people died as a result of armed conflicts over the next few decades, culminating in the 1993 genocide of Tutsis by the Hutu majority. Even here the Hamitic myth oversaw the murderous blades of Hutu soldiers butchering Tutsi families en masse. When Hutu leader Léon Mugesera called on all Hutus to send the Tutsis back to Ethiopia, there was no mistaking what he meant. The German and Belgian imperialists were long gone, but the myth of Ham that they introduced to divide the country remained in the cultural air.

Carrying the Weight of Sexual Violence

The second narrative for us to analyze involves Abraham's nephew Lot and Lot's daughters. This is a mind-boggling tale of power, violence, and abuse. It begins with the arrival of two angels to the city of Sodom. Lot is not aware of their heavenly identity, yet as an act of hospitality, he repeatedly pleads with them to stay at his house. He organizes a feast for them, after which he prepares to retire for the evening. Chaos soon erupts:

> But before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man, surrounded the house; and they called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, so that we may know them." Lot went out of the door to the men, shut the door after him, and said, "I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly. Look, I have two daughters who have not known a man; let me bring them out to you, and do to them as you please; only do nothing to these men, for they have come under the shelter of my roof. (Gen. 19:4–8)

The writer captures humanity at its worst. Sodom represents an utterly depraved people. Most biblical commentators agree that the overarching aim of this text is to demonstrate Lot's pious attempts at hospitality. By extending this level of grace toward the visitors, Lot strikes an extreme contrast against the otherwise inhospitable people of Sodom. For this reason, one might argue that the primary protagonist of this story is not Lot but Lot's uncle Abraham. Why? The answer is in the previous chapter.

Genesis 18 offers Abraham, the father of the faith, as an exemplar of hospitality and righteousness. It begins with Abraham receiving angelic visitors. It is evident that the Lot story mirrors the language and description of the Abraham story. Whereas Lot was sitting at the entrance of the city, Abraham is sitting at the entrance of his tent. When Abraham sees the visitors, he runs toward them and bows down to the ground, similar to Lot's reaction in Genesis 19. Abraham pleads with the visitors to stay, and he prepares a feast for them. Abraham is a noble man of honor who demonstrates to the visitors that he has what my mother used to call "good home training." Abraham models radical hospitality and righteousness and is thereby lifted up as an honorable model of excellence for his nephew Lot to emulate in his own household.

After this scene, Genesis 18:16–33 presents Abraham as a public defender negotiating a plea agreement with God on behalf of the city of Sodom. Abraham is obviously concerned about the city because of Lot and his family. Abraham also appears to be testing the fidelity of God to the righteous. No matter how wicked the crowd, God will not forsake those who live faithful and honorable lives. This sets up the scene in the next chapter where the storyline is not just about the wickedness of the city that merits destruction, but the promises of God to protect the virtuous.

The wickedness of Sodom is complete. The author reveals that all men of the city, "both young and old, all the people to the last man," show up at Lot's door. Lot's lone attempt at

hospitality is useless against such a ravenous culture of inhospitality. Whereas Lot sought to host, the townsmen sought to harm; insofar as Lot represents honor, the townsmen represent abuse. Nothing can appease their passions. They demand for Lot to open the door and bring out the visitors so that they may "know them," which is a euphemism for sexual encounter. This is where the text gets particularly problematic, as it seems that the author is willing to have Lot meet the crowd's demented extreme with his own unthinkable offer. The Bible is silent on what Lot was feeling at this moment, which makes the picture that much more disturbing. To defend the honor of his house and protect his guests, Lot resorts to the desperate act of offering his virgin daughters to the gang to be raped. Are we to believe that the safety of any male guest and the honor of any male host is more important than protecting one's own daughters? It sure seems so.

And what about Lot's daughters? Put on the lenses of love and look their way. We cannot ignore what Lot's daughters may have been feeling at this point. They have no voice. They have no say. Yet they are listening through the door as their father offers them up as a sexual "peace offering" to pacify the crowd. Lot deems his daughters as less valuable than the male visitors. Lot gives up their bodies for male consumption with little regard for his daughters' desires, wants, or feelings. I tremble at the thought of what it must feel like to be so vulnerable and powerless. Unfortunately, this is the experience of so many who have endured the horror of sexual violence. There is often a double injustice, as victims, particularly young women like Lot's daughters, are twice victimized: they are victims of their assailant and of a larger culture that often pressures them into silence (not to mention the added pain of experiencing such violence at the hands of a parent). As one who serves at a major university, I find these interrelated problems of assault and silencing to be particularly acute. The prevalence of sexual assault on college campuses and universities is made more deplorable by campus cultures where victims do not feel protected.

Recently the Association of American Universities (AAU) released data from a sexual conduct survey in which students from twenty-seven universities, including Harvard, participated. Among the more than 60 percent of Harvard College female seniors who responded to the survey, about one-third report having experienced some form of "nonconsensual sexual contact" since entering college. Moreover, half of those women who experienced nonconsensual contact reported it as experienced or attempted penetration. In spite of these statistics, few sexual assaults on campus are reported to the authorities. Depending on the type of behavior, only between 5 to 28 percent of victims reported their assault to campus officials or law enforcement officers. The apparent variance between those who reported sexual assault in the survey and those who felt comfortable coming forward to report their attack to campus officials is telling. Somehow our campuses have sent the message that victims of sexual assault do not have a voice. In some ways, we have told victims that we do not take their pain seriously.

Fortunately, there are some courageous women in our society who will not be silenced. Emma Sulkowicz, a visual arts major, turned the pain of her experience into performance art in order to make a point to campus administrators at Columbia University in New York City. She took to *Time* magazine to describe her account of rape at the outset of her sophomore year and what she alleges was the university's mishandling of her case. Despite two other students who alleged that the same male classmate assaulted them as well, the man was not expelled from the university. Thus, Sulkowicz took to toting around her mattress everywhere she went on campus as a symbol of her burden. She titled her performance, which she turned into her senior thesis, "Carry That Weight." From August to when she walked across the stage at Senior Class Day in May, Sulkowicz carried the mattress. Her thesis soon became a rallying cry for campus activists across the country. Student protestors even created "Carry That Weight Together," a National Day

of Action to stand in solidarity with all victims of sexual abuse. Whether Lot's daughters, young women on our campuses, or women in our churches, too many carry the weight of abuse alone and in silence.

There is one final point I wish to make about this story of Lot and his daughters. The reason I have underscored its emphasis on hospitality is due to modern associations of Sodom with homosexuality. Beginning in the eleventh century CE, interpretations of this story reflected the sexual obsessions of the Catholic Church in the Middle Ages. Such a view ignores that, historically, gang rape was the means by which warring nations shamed defeated opponents, a sordid expression of violence and hatred. This continues throughout our world today. So to equate such sexual violence with either heterosexual or homosexual activity is to miss the point of the narrative altogether. The story of Sodom in Genesis 19 is about inhospitality and sexual violence. To argue that this story is a condemnation of same-sex desire is to underscore the unthinkable point that Lot's offering up his daughters to the male crowd for a "hetero" gang rape is more acceptable.

This text makes clear that in the mind of the author, control over the lives of girls is completely a male prerogative. To proffer the rape of girls in order to illustrate the extreme measures Lot was willing to take to defend his honor and be hospitable to male guests should leave all of us sick to our stomachs. There is no defense. Nor is any apology sufficient. At some point, as people of faith, we just have to be willing to say that on some matters the biblical writers were wrong. Period. Some illustrations and metaphors, even if culturally acceptable in their world, are deplorable and wrong in our world.

Texts of Terror

To underscore the point that some illustrations and metaphors in the Bible are always inappropriate, let's conclude this chapter with a few more examples. Biblical scholar Phyllis

Trible famously discusses them in her book *Texts of Terror.* For instance, the writings of the Hebrew prophets are saturated with sexual and violent imagery to represent God's commitment to an otherwise obstinate nation. In Ezekiel 16, the writer likens Jerusalem to a little girl born of an Amorite father and a Hittite mother (both avowed enemies of Jerusalem). The mother abandoned the baby in the blood of her birth in the land of the Canaanites. God took pity on her, cleaned her, raised her, and when her "breasts were formed," God adorned her in beautiful leather, linen, and expensive jewels. But the girl became obsessed with her beauty and the attention it commanded. She became a harlot and began giving herself to other nations, not out of need, but to satisfy her lustful desires.

Ezekiel 16 describes God as a committed husband—a husband who demonstrates his love by exploding in wrath:

> I will gather all your lovers, with whom you took pleasure, all those you loved and all those you hated; I will gather them against you from all around, and will uncover your nakedness to them, so that they may see all your nakedness. I will judge you as women who commit adultery and shed blood are judged, and bring blood upon you in wrath and jealousy. I will deliver you into their hands, and they shall throw down your platform and break down your lofty places; they shall strip you of your clothes and take your beautiful objects and leave you naked and bare. They shall bring up a mob against you, and they will stone you and cut you to pieces with their swords. They shall burn your houses and execute judgments on you in the sight of many women; I will stop you from playing the whore, and you shall also make no more payments. So I will satisfy my fury on you, and my jealousy shall turn away from you; I will be calm, and will be angry no longer. (Ezek. 16:37–42)

According to this image, God's key attributes are male dominance, power, and control. In multiple ways, this passage reinforces an understanding of the female body as primarily

an object for male protection and domination. The narrative advances the belief that love and care come with the price of submission, obedience, and abuse.

The pronouncement also elucidates a relationship between male dominance and sexual violence. Few health professionals regard rape as primarily about passionate desire but instead about power and control. A rapist seizes control over the life of the victim. Rape is thus a declaration of war against another's body with the sole purpose being to conquer and subdue. It is a dangerous and egregious error for anyone to employ a marital metaphor that depicts God as a jealous husband filled with rage. As Scripture, such a scene religiously authorizes the public humiliation and mutilation of any female body that dishonors masculine power. Nothing can or should justify this type of behavior.

Another dimension of domestic violence involves the emotional roller coaster from rage to reconciliation that characterizes many abusive relationships. Recall a common image of the abusive partner, who shifts from inflicting physical harm to showering his spouse with expensive gifts and flowers. There is a paradoxical message here that to express love one must first show violence. Love is always bound with pain. We see such an example in the second chapter of Hosea. Hosea is the eighth-century BCE prophet known for his harsh moral pronouncements against the nation of Israel. We find one of the earliest written examples of the marriage metaphor between God and the nation in the book of Hosea. The metaphor takes the form of Hosea's biography, as God commands the prophet to marry a woman of ill-repute named Gomer. The couple has a son and a daughter together, and a third child is born under questionable circumstances.

This marriage symbolizes God's covenant relationship with Israel. The entire second chapter provides a narrative of how Hosea will deal with Gomer. He declares that Gomer (Israel) will pursue all of her lovers to no avail and then realize that it was Hosea (God) who purchased her grain, wine, oil, and lavish

silver and gold. Hosea then describes how he will "uncover her shame in the sight of her lovers, and no one shall rescue her out of my hand" (2:10). And after he strips away all of her possessions, he shifts his position from violent rage to seductive persuasion: "I will now allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her" (v. 14). So just as God's rage is woven into the fabric of God's love and devotion, so is rage woven into the husband's love for his wife.

One has to wonder whether biblical writers were projecting the insecurities of patriarchs in the ancient Near East who feared losing control of their household and thus their social honor. This sort of vulnerability might help to explain, though not excuse, the prevalence of the marriage metaphor in the Hebrew Bible in which God is a dishonored husband trying to maintain his obligation to Israel, a sexually lascivious wife. Fear of losing control of one's wife and status in the community animated intense jealousy. Anything ancient men felt so strongly, surely God must feel the same way about a "whoring" nation. Thus, with this metaphorical point of identification, God legitimates a violent form of love and punishment that can only be considered abusive.

Unfortunately, these particular texts degrade human personality, as there is nothing life affirming about such metaphors for God. Of course, there are others throughout the Bible. They were influenced by the unjust dimensions of their context and do not merit being the last words of God. We have witnessed the damaging impact on the faith when biblical interpreters use the Bible to justify slavery and genocide, or turn a blind eye toward rape, domestic violence, and child abuse. There is no reason for us to ignore or excuse the immorality of these writings any longer.

For Further Reference

Garcia, Hector. *Alpha God: The Psychology of Religious Violence and Oppression*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2015.

Gourevitch, Philip. *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed with Our Families*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1999.

Hill Fletcher, Jeannine. *The Sin of White Supremacy*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2017.

Johnson, Sylvester A. *The Myth of Ham in Nineteenth-Century American Christianity: Race, Heathens, and the People of God*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

Jordan, Mark. *The Invention of Sodomy in Christian Theology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997.

Knust, Jennifer. *Unprotected Texts: The Bible's Surprising Contradictions about Sex and Desire*. San Francisco: HarperOne, 2011.

Trible, Phyllis. *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984.

Weems, Renita. *Battered Love: Marriage, Sex, and Violence in the Hebrew Bible*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995.