Applying Biblical Ethics to Hot Button Issues

Part 1 of 2: How Does Narrative Teach Theology and Ethics?
with Darrell Bock, Daniel Carroll Rodas
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Welcome to The Table, where we discuss issues of God and culture. I'm Darrell Bock, executive director at the Hendricks Center for Cultural Engagement. And today our topic is biblical ethics and our expert today is Dr. Daniel Carroll Rodas, who is a distinguished professor of Old Testament at Denver Seminary and who has done work in particularly 8th century prophets of the Old Testament and ethics. And I think I'll start off by saying, "How do you put those two together?" Where does that come from?

Well, thanks, first of all, for having, Darrell.

You're welcome.

I think those 8th century prophets are full of ethics. I mean poverty and war and the role of religion, how that's all wrapped into that. And so that's one of the reasons I got into it. But also just spending so many years in Latin America, where those ethical issues are in your face.

And the war and the poverty when I was there, especially. Now, the immigration issue. So you have to engage those real life issues. And so that's how it all came together years ago.

And so you've been shifting from dealing with what we might call raw exegesis and those kinds of issues into moving into these areas and their practical areas and wrestling with the hermeneutics of how we move from the 8th century B.C. into our era. Let's talk a little bit about your background, because it's gonna be important, I think, to the conversation we're gonna have. This is hard to do because Danny and I grew up together, so I've known Danny since second grade. But anyway, you went to seminary and then did your doctoral work overseas in Sheffield in England. And then you spent – is it three terms in Guatemala at Seteca in Guatemala City?

Well, we actually went for a term to Central America before Britain.

Okay.
Daniel Rodas
Which is actually good, because it set up a lot of issues that I wanted to get to when I went there. So we were in Latin America for four years, went to Britain, and then we came back for nine.

Darrell Bock
Okay.

Daniel Rodas
So it wasn't a neat and tidy three terms.

Darrell Bock
Three terms, yeah.

Daniel Rodas
It was three plus terms.

Darrell Bock
Okay, and you taught Old Testament at Seteca as well?

Daniel Rodas
Old Testament and biblical ethics.

Darrell Bock
And biblical ethics.

Daniel Rodas
And so you can see even back then that – in fact, my title back then was Professor of Old Testament and Ethics. So what you're seeing is even back then, I was trying to put those two together. My doctoral work was in that as well.

Darrell Bock
Now, my own take on our topic is, is that ethics, although it's obviously prominent in the scripture -how we live is pretty important to scripture -it's kind of a blind spot in the way the Church has thought about and written about and engaged on theology, at least in certain segments of the Church. And my illustration for this is the Nicene Creed. That many churches will have a historic creed that they utter as part of their confession to show their roots back to the past and the Nicene Creed is a classic example of a classic creed.

It's a fundamentally Trinitarian creed and then at the end, there are a few little things added beyond the trinity to kind of round out the confession. But there is not a word in the entire creed that has an ethical element to it. It's strictly this is who I confess God to be.

Daniel Rodas
Yeah.
And I think even if you look at some of our more recent creeds, evangelical creeds from the last century, etc, you'll see the same kind of thing where there's a lot of confession about what we believe factually about certain aspects of theology. But the issue of ethics is not so prominent. And this may not be an entirely fair question, but why do you think that would – why do you think we have that blind spot? Why do you think that omission exists?

Well, it's interesting because what we have is a doctrinal Christianity and in evangelicalism, it's even more specific. It's not only certain doctrinal positions, but it's very Pauline, for instance. So the Old Testament doesn't make much of an appearance. Maybe, again, I'm not a church historian, but the little that I know, the Reformation is borne out of theological debate. It's not borne out of ethical debate and then as the Reformation goes on, as you would know, it begins to splinter.

And the splinters are based on doctrinal differences. I mean, so it's part of the DNA. And I think biblically though, it's not like that. I mean the Old Testament, the prophets, and I can give you verses if you wanted, but I mean Jesus himself – I mean it's about how will they know that you love me? Because you obey me. I mean so the idea of wedding obedience and an ethical life, not only individual, which is a whole nother discussion.

Right.

But communally. It's something that should be part of our self-definition. But I think, to be honest, that's one of the things that attracts me to certain aspects of Anabaptism. Because the Anabaptists, the Mennonites usually, would very much define themselves ethically.

Right.

Not only doctrinally.
Right. Well, it strikes me as being – I like to make the observation that you can look at a lot of curricula at different seminaries and there is no focused course on ethics. There will be a course on exegesis, a course on church history, a course on systematics, a course on preaching. I mean you can go through a whole myriad of things, but there's no ethical course so that when you come to issues, everything from biomedical ethics to what should you think about war, that kind of thing.

It isn't covered. Another anecdote that you'll identify with, because obviously we both went here to seminary, is when I went through my seminary training, we were in the midst of coming out of the Vietnam War. But I never had a class that ethically discussed what the Bible talked about war.

Darrell Bock

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Daniel Rodas

War. Yeah.

Darrell Bock

We never had a class. So when I got asked about things that are classic in the history of theology, like a just war theory and what do you do with that, it was like I was starting from scratch.

Daniel Rodas

Well, let me follow up with a story.

Darrell Bock

Yeah.

Daniel Rodas

I was in Guatemala and I was there during the time and some of your listeners may not even remember this, but during the time of the Sandinista Contra issue in Nicaragua, right? So I remember being in class. Okay, think about our seminary training.

Darrell Bock

So this is the '80s, right?

Daniel Rodas

This'll be the '80s.

Darrell Bock

Yeah.

Daniel Rodas

So I'm in class and then a student talks to me afterwards who's from Nicaragua. And so he goes, "During the contra issue, at that time it was mandatory military service at age 16." So he's a youth pastor. So your options were to serve for two years at age 16. If you refused, you go to jail for three, or to join the contra, or leave the country.
And I knew a family who put their teenage sons up for adoption as a way of getting them out. So okay, those are your four options and so he goes, "Profe," as we would say in Spanish, "what do I tell my youth group?" Okay, just think about –

Darrell Bock  
Where do you even start?

Daniel Rodas  
Where do you even start?

Darrell Bock  
Yeah. Yeah.

Daniel Rodas  
Because you have to bring in history and sociology and the economics and U.S. foreign policy and what was going on in the Cold War as well as the whole biblical piece. But I mean as you said, our training was never in terms of those issues, which war and poverty, for instance, are huge biblical categories, but you don't see them in systematics. Now, the seminary where I teach, there's a course that's required, kind of culture and engagement or something, but it's very apologetically driven. You see, which is different.

Darrell Bock  
That's right.

Daniel Rodas  
Than ethical engagement, you see?

Darrell Bock  
That's right.

Daniel Rodas  
So again, it's not establishing a coherent – I don't, think that’s my take – a coherent Christian ethical view grounded in the scriptures.

Darrell Bock  
Yeah. I really think that this is a major hole in the way we do our training and in many campuses, it still is. And so what happens is, is that these areas of life that impinge on people, naturally war, poverty, ethical choices, bio, medical decisions.

Daniel Rodas  
Racism.

Darrell Bock  
Racism.
Daniel Rodas: Yeah.

Darrell Bock: I mean the list is long and deep. Most evangelical Christians, well, that doesn't fit in the box. I mean where does that fit in theology proper? So what we wanna do with this particular podcast is to kind of talk about moving towards thinking about the Bible ethically and how you deal with that. You've already sort of set the table by talking about when you approach the question, you not only have the Scripture and what it says, but you've kind of gotta put life in its context.

So let's start there. Let's assume that someone walks up to you and says, "I wanna think about the Bible ethically. Where do I start?" This isn't just a case of “cherry picking” verses.

Daniel Rodas: Right.

Darrell Bock: So where do I start when I think about how to work with the Bible ethically?

Daniel Rodas: Well, you're a New Testament guy. I'm an Old Testament guy. And what I have to deal with, with some people in my field, is that now the Old Testament's very much under suspicion. The whole violence of God discussion. And so you almost have to get to square one. That the Old Testament, in my case, actually is worthy as an ethical resource. Because even, you know, seminary students are asking that question.

Darrell Bock: That's right.

Daniel Rodas: Because we never asked that question.

Darrell Bock: That's right.

Daniel Rodas: We just assumed.

Darrell Bock: Yeah. I say to people all the time that what's happened in the cultural change in the States over the last several decades is the Bible's gone from being an answer to becoming the question.
Daniel Rodas

Yeah. Yeah. So if I were to answer your question, it would have to be at several levels. I think one of the things we need to do, and I'm doing it in this series here at the seminary this week, is look at narratives. I think if we get people engaged in narrative and the stories, they can begin to see how the Bible engages life issues in the stories and its characters. We would say these are historical, but I'm just gonna use that language for a moment.

Darrell Bock

Right. Right.

Daniel Rodas

So I think that helps them to see. The other thing is the whole issue of – two more things. One would be linking it back to the mission of God. I would go back to Genesis 12 being a blessing to the nations and what does that mean, which requires ethical engagement. That's a whole other discussion, but the third piece would be to do a canonical approach.

And so let me give you an example. For instance, if we're talking about poverty, well, there are stories in the Bible about poor people and how they suffer and the various reasons they suffer, whether it's famine, or drought, or war. But this will be like the Pentateuchal narratives, for instance, or some of the narratives in Samuel, Kings. But then what you get, for instance, is legislation dealing with poverty. So we need to get to that point, you see, where you say, "We're not just gonna have an ethical discussion about poverty. We're gonna talk about what are some legislative solutions to this?"

In fact, the Old Testament has this. Can the legislative piece of the Bible help us? Then we would look at the wisdom literature, Proverbs, where you talk about the importance of personal ethical decision making and how it impinges on your economic life and stewardship. And then I would go to the Prophets and talk about a prophetic voice into the systems and into the structures. And so what you're seeing is a full orbed – and this is all just Old Testament.

Darrell Bock

Right.

Daniel Rodas

We could tie it in to the New.

Darrell Bock

Right. Right.
But what you're seeing is a full orbed, multidimensional engagement of the ethical issue of poverty. So you're not cherry picking. You're actually getting a biblical vision that is as complex as the human reality itself.

Now, some people would say, in working with narrative and asking how narrative teaches, and I know this is basic, but I think it's important. They'll say, "Well," and this goes back to your point earlier about oftentimes our ethics are particularly Pauline. “That Epistles teach, but narrative just simply illustrates. It doesn’t really teach.”

And this of course undercuts your ability to build this canonical vision that you're talking about. So let's talk a little bit about how does narrative teach? Does it give portraits of the way in which life is engaged that we're supposed to reflect upon and learn from? How does narrative do it for us?

Well, interestingly, if you look at secular literary theory, they actually work on this. Robert Coles has done some good work, Martha Nussbaum, and what you see is that narrative works in ethics in several ways. One is that it actually pictures the problem. Okay, where you have situations where people are going through things that echo across the centuries.

And you can identify with the situation. But the other thing that's interesting is that even secular theory recognizes that what novels do is engage you in the decision making process. It's kind of like if you're watching a movie and a movie's like a motion picture narrative.

Right. Right.

And when you're watching a movie and you're engaged, I mean you're having this conversation in your head. "Oh, don't do that. Oh, if you do that, this is gonna happen."

Yeah. Yeah.
Daniel Rodas: What the movie is doing is engaging your ethical sensibilities and actually training you. This is why you have to be careful what you watch, because the movie will train your ethical sensibilities for good or for bad. So this literature works the same way. A good literary piece will draw you into the narrative and not only picture for you the scene, but also engage you ethically so that you are actually thinking through what are the options that you would take if you were put in that same place?

And you also see the good and the bad consequences of the choices that the characters are making. So the reading exercise is actually an exercise in ethics. So literary theory sees this. What we need to do is bring this into the biblical discussion more and more because what happens, and even though is this an exegete, sometimes exegetes are bad readers. They're good. They're good engineers.

Darrell Bock: Yeah, they can parse a verb and –

Daniel Rodas: They can parse and –

Darrell Bock: And look for the background.

Daniel Rodas: And do an outline.

Darrell Bock: Yeah.

Daniel Rodas: Or something like that, but they don't really understand how language works, how literature works. In the Old Testament side, I would say the same thing. There were few Old Testament people that I believe actually know how the literature can work for moral training.

Darrell Bock: So what you're saying in effect is that even the way we've done our training of people to study Scripture has not led them into the place where they are encouraged to engage in the kind of ethical reflection based upon the way the literature works in presenting whatever the dilemma is or whatever it is we're dealing with.
Daniel Rodas: And yeah, the whole cultural issue of people—some people don’t read very much anymore. Or they’re used to reading a computer screen, CNN, as a sound bite. But the idea of working through a narrative, of looking at the scene, of engaging a novel. For instance, in a good example of how all this works, Darrell, is a Dickens novel where he's very detailed on the descriptions of the scene, of the characters, and his novels very self-consciously are ethical statements, you see? And so if you properly engage Dickens, even A Christmas Carol is an ethical statement in mid-19th century London, right?

Darrell Bock: Right.

Daniel Rodas: It's not just it's Christmastime. We must have A Christmas Carol.

Darrell Bock: Right.

Daniel Rodas: I mean he's making the statement about the abuse of economic power and the suffering of a poor family. His solution was the rich man comes alongside as the patron and helps them. You see this in all of his novels, right? That was his solution. But we actually sometimes have to train our students to read again, because they're used to sound bites.

They're used to the visual movie. But they actually just stop and read, so when I teach my Old Testament narrative sections, a lot of it is very self-consciously acting it out, very self-consciously raising my voice or speaking in a whisper, you see? And taking on the different characters. And they begin to get into it. And they'll say to me, "I've never seen it this way." It's a shame because they've been taught to read it for principles, not to engage it as literature.

Darrell Bock: Right. And so the whole area, way in which characters are presented and what they reflect and what they represent, what values they carry, that kind of thing, tends to go off to the side. And you've lost your ethical dimension. I mean in some ways, when you come to the prophets, it's a little easier because they're a little more direct.
They're in some ways more like a – they're somewhat more like the things you do see in Epistles, where the challenge of the prophet is kind of in your face. You have to be pretty blind to miss it sometimes. Whereas narrative tends to be a little more subtle and a little harder to get your hands around.

*Daniel Rodas* Yeah. I'll give you an example, the David and Bathsheba story, 2 Samuel 11. I mean the last line of the chapter says something like what David did was displeasing in the eyes of the Lord. There is it.

*Darrell Bock* Yeah. Yeah.

*Daniel Rodas* Okay, but then in 2 Samuel 13, just a few chapters over, you have the rape of Tamar. And so people want that one line. But there is no one line. I mean you see her saying, "Don't do this. This will shame you and me."

But if you keep reading the narrative, this triggers the revenge of Absalom, the rebellion by Absalom. I mean everything starts to unravel, you see? So in the narrative, the narrative is telling you this is horrible because look at all the things that it generated. But the students want –

*Darrell Bock* The one line.

*Daniel Rodas* – the one line, yeah. You see? But there is no one line. Life isn't a one liner, you see? Because you tell people – you have kids. I have kids.

*Darrell Bock* Right.

*Daniel Rodas* And you go, "Boy, you know, if you do this, this is what could happen." And they will find out and learn in the narrative of their lives the same thing in the Bible.
Darrell Bock

So that means we've gotta be better readers and more careful readers, and we've got to think about narrative in a different way. You did something in what you presented today, even though this podcast is gonna go out weeks from now. You did something today that I thought was interesting, that I thought might be worth also getting people to think about how narrative works as we move to talking about ethics, and that is you told the story of Abraham as an immigrant. And normally in our circles, when we go to Genesis, we go to Genesis for the Abrahamic Covenant.

Here's the promise made to Israel. And yeah, Abraham took a little bit of a journey, and it took a while and that kind of thing, but eventually worked its way there and the promise was planted. And that's about all you get out of it. But you were trying to get us to think through if I can say it this way, where Abraham was, where his location was, what he was is God took him through what he went through and how that can be a lesson for us. Can you illustrate that and elaborate that for us for a little?

Daniel Rodas

Yeah. Let me illustrate that and then tell you how I was taught it.

Darrell Bock

Okay.

Daniel Rodas

Okay, and there you'll see the comparison or contrast. What I was telling this morning in chapel was the Genesis 12, where he's been called out of Ur at the end of chapter 11, goes up to Harran and he then he comes into Canaan and receives the promise Abram does in Genesis 12:1:3 and we sit on that, rightly so. And then he begins to move into the land and build altars and call the name of God. All very good, but then you get about verse nine or ten and it says there was a famine in the land and he picks up the clan, because he's the head of a clan, not a nuclear family.

And they begin to make the trek to Egypt because there's food. You have the Nile. So you'll have water, which means you have harvest, which means there is food to eat. And so Egypt was always having to deal with people trying to come in for food. And so we know from archaeology they'd set up a series of forts along their eastern frontier to help monitor the movement. So it's very human, I mean, what's going on. Nothing new on that.

Darrell Bock

That's their border wall, huh?
Daniel Rodas: That's their border wall.

Darrell Bock: Yeah.

Daniel Rodas: And so what happens is they get close to Egypt and does this mean he's coming up to one of these checkpoints for it? Don't know, but he tells Sarai, "Look, if they ask you, tell them you're my sister, not my wife." Now, we know from later in the narrative that they are related, but what you see – he's trying to protect himself, right? But the driving point of the story is that they're hungry and Abram is willing to lie to get across the border and to protect himself in that move.

But what is driving them to go there is hunger. And she's willing to go through with it for the sake of the family. Now, it's very wise. I didn't get into this this morning because I was watching the clock, but as the brother, if anyone wanted Sarai, they would have to ask the brother for permission to marry her. So you could see where at the same time he is protecting her and they're just pushing whatever bad thing happens down the road a little bit.

But I was trying to tell people this morning is that what you see is Abram is hungry, and this is why people move, because they're hungry. And if it means lying to get across a border to feed your family, you're willing to do it, and she's willing to put herself at risk sexually, for being very blunt, for the sake of the family, okay? Now, so you're reading this as an immigrant story, and I work a lot with immigration, as you know, so I've heard these stories. And they're kind of like this, you know, where they lie to get across.

But I know when I went to seminary, the ethical debate was, was what Abram actually said a lie? And so there was all this kind of maneuvering to get Abram off the hook for not actually lying. Or if he did, it wasn't really a bad a lie, right? So what you can see is though it is echoing immigrant stories, when I got taught, it was all about "is it a lie?"

Darrell Bock: Yeah. It's with the search for the moral principal and whether or not it works or not.

Daniel Rodas: Exactly.
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Darrell Bock Yeah.

Daniel Rodas And so what you're seeing is the search for some kind of eternal, moral principal or whatever is totally, I think, missed –

Darrell Bock The narrative.

Daniel Rodas The narrative and the power of the narrative, which resonates with a lot of immigrant stories today.

Darrell Bock And of course the background of being an alien in a strange land emerges out of that story as a core metaphor that actually runs through the totality of Scripture. Well, this is supposed to be a podcast on narrative criticism, so we'll leave it there.

Daniel Rodas Okay.

Darrell Bock But I think the point is well established that sets kind of the parameters for what we wanna discuss, and that is that we really are talking about – when we're talking about ethics and the Scripture, we're really talking about reading the Bible for the whole of what it is doing, for the way in which all of it addresses something, because what happens in ethical discussions is what I find happening. And you can almost pick your issue on this, where you can think, years ago, when we were debating slavery and they were very biblically oriented people who were defending slavery to the death. I mean that's what the Civil War was about.

Daniel Rodas Literally, yeah.

Darrell Bock That's right. Or you think about the way in which gun control is discussed today, or immigration is discussed today, and what happens is people pick their place to start and land their discussion as a principle and in the process then, shut off anything that comes against that. My own take on working and thinking about this is that actually what you have in Scripture is a much more complex and actually lifelike situation. The Scripture addresses the tensions of life and stories tell or address the topic from those tension points.
And so when you assemble a topic as a whole, what you see is you'll see some passages that are kind of to one side of the question and other passages that are to the other side of the question. And the ethical reflection the Bible requires is how do we relate all these bits to one another, as opposed to that's my verse that tells me what to do. You think that's a, in a generic, hermeneutical way, a better way to think about how we approach the issue of ethics?

*Daniel Rodas* Yeah. I would just add two other points.

*Darrell Bock* Okay.

*Daniel Rodas* One is, and I know you would agree with this, but we would talk about trajectories.

*Darrell Bock* Right.

*Daniel Rodas* So it's not just assembling on a flat surface.

*Darrell Bock* Right.

*Daniel Rodas* We're seeing a trajectory from the old into the new. So with the coming of Jesus, things happen. So we need to follow the bits and pieces along their trajectory.

*Darrell Bock* Okay.

*Daniel Rodas* The slavery would be a good example of that. The other thing I would say as a hermeneutical recognition of how our placement affects the picking and choosing and the assembling of the pieces, you see?

*Darrell Bock* So in other words, where we are may actually – well, it does impact the way in which we read and what we're drawn to and what we're drawn away from.
Daniel Rodas

Yes. Yeah, I mean if we stick with slavery, okay, if you had lived in a system that sees this as natural and the way things should be. And if you have a position of power within that system, you will actually read Scripture to defend that, usually unselfconsciously. Because you just think it's normal, you see? And so part of the ethical reading exercise is not only looking at the data of the text and their trajectories, but also stepping back and asking yourself, "Why am I reading this the way I read it?"

I teach a course on reading the Old Testament from the majority world (and a lot of it has to do with ethical things) but my opening exercise, the first day of class, is looking at the reading of the Old Testament in Nazi Germany. And it's a great exercise because they're just – it just makes it so stark. I've gotta stay close to the microphone.

Darrell Bock

Yeah. I know. It's no problem.

Daniel Rodas

It makes it so stark, because then they begin to see just how clearly these choices are being made, you see, and how Jesus now becomes the problem, because Jesus is a Jew, you see? So you've gotta work around that and then well, if you're an Old Testament professor during Nazi Germany and you are a card carrying Nazi, which some well-known Old Testament professors were that we would now even use till today. What do you do with the Old Testament? And so I take into that exercise and then to look at Bonhoeffer as well.

So not only is it a reading exercise in the ivory tower, see, now it becomes a reading exercise of counting the cost of life, which ultimately is where ethics will take you. You've gotta make choices on slavery, on immigration, on women's suffrage, abortion, and now the choices you make and how you read actually may require a cost. And that's something most readers haven't thought about because sometimes the readers, the comfortable suburbanite, where he's never had to – or he or she's never had to gauge the cost of reading, you see. But in ethical issues, ultimately at some time, rather, there's a cost to reading the way you read.
Well, you know, there are two ways I like to illustrate this. One of them involves an experience that involved the class we used to take down to Guatemala together, where I would take students from Dallas and you'd take students from Denver. We'd go to Seteca, mix them with the Latin American students, and we'd talk about for the students we bring in from the States. How is seeing what you're seeing in a majority world country where you're being exposed to poverty like you've never seen it before impacting the way you read text? Well, one thing that almost all the students always would say coming back from that trip is: “I never – not only did I – I knew the scriptures on poverty were there, but I never saw them quite so clearly as I did looking at the kind of poverty that I was seeing in portions of Guatemala.”

But the example I like to raise is a passage in Luke. It's the passage where John the Baptist says to the soldier, "Don't take advantage of the person, and be comfortable with your wage." And in a culture where generally the military is, here in the States, generally respected and viewed positively, you don't deal with a lot of corruption, you don't deal with a lot of abuse. I mean it's there, but it's not the dominant feature of what you think about in the context of the military.

And then going to a country where the issue of the military and how they handle people is very much an issue of integrity and those are kind of very much on the table, all of a sudden I realized if I preach this passage in Dallas, Texas, people in the pew aren't nervous. They get it. They sort of get it. “Oh yeah, it's a nice text.” If I preach that passage in certain parts on Guatemala, my life could be at stake. And so just the sheer movement of location changes what's happening with that passage.

And we sometimes don't get that. We sometimes read our text. We sometimes read the biblical text as if the biblical text is located in the same suburban environment that we live in as opposed to being in the context of a life that the text was actually addressing. And that makes a big difference.

Yeah. I'd say two things. One is following up on the class in another illustration. We would have the experience. I still take students down, but where the Americans will be discussing an American author, who is significant, right?
Darrell Bock  Right.

Daniel Rodas  And the Latins would go, "Who is that?"

Darrell Bock  Yeah.

Daniel Rodas  And so the life and death kind of doctrinal thing up here was totally lost or irrelevant.

Darrell Bock  Yeah. Yeah.

Daniel Rodas  So that's a good exercise. The other thing that I tell my students is this. And this piggybacks on the idea, because a lot of theologizing and critique of the Old Testament is that “God is violent” and all this kind of stuff. But I tell them. I said, "It's so easy to criticize some of the Bible, its life likeness, because it's so uncomfortable, and to discount it, but that's what actually I think shouts out its inspiration, that it is so lifelike."

And I say to my students, "Look. If your theology can work in the streets of Damascus today, then let's just go home. If it works in your suburban university setting, and you go to your office and you put up your computer, and then you go to the cafeteria for lunch and, you go home and read your books and write your reviews, okay. That's Disney World. Beirut and Damascus, that's life. Guatemala City, that's life."

And what we find in the scriptures is that's the life they're engaging. It's the life in the Old Testament where war is part of existence, where famine and drought is regular, where disease is - no doctors. So the harsh edges of life is what is assumed, whereas for us it's the exception. And if we begin to look at the Bible that way, I think it'll be much more powerful than what we sometimes do to minimize its power.