





# BIZARRE BIBLE

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If you have established the discipline of reading the Bible on a regular basis, surely you have experienced parts of your reading plan where you do an intellectual equivalent of a double take. Every ounce of your being shouts, "Are you KIDDING me!?!"

Yes, the Bible has some really bizarre bits, and the intent of this series is to help you understand what to look for to ensure you are getting a solid understanding of what the Bible is saying. We all interpret the Bible, but we must make sure that we allow it to speak in its own voice, not attempting to dumb-it-down or explain away its raw moments. We are reading this book to understand more about God, not to make excuses for Him.

He does not need our protection, but He calls us to wisdom. Many around us who do not believe in the inspiration of scripture look at these stories as reasons why the Bible is untrustworthy or worse yet, why God Himself shouldn't be trusted. So, this series provides an opportunity to avoid this confusion and to understand what the story is really communicating in the overall structure of the Bible.

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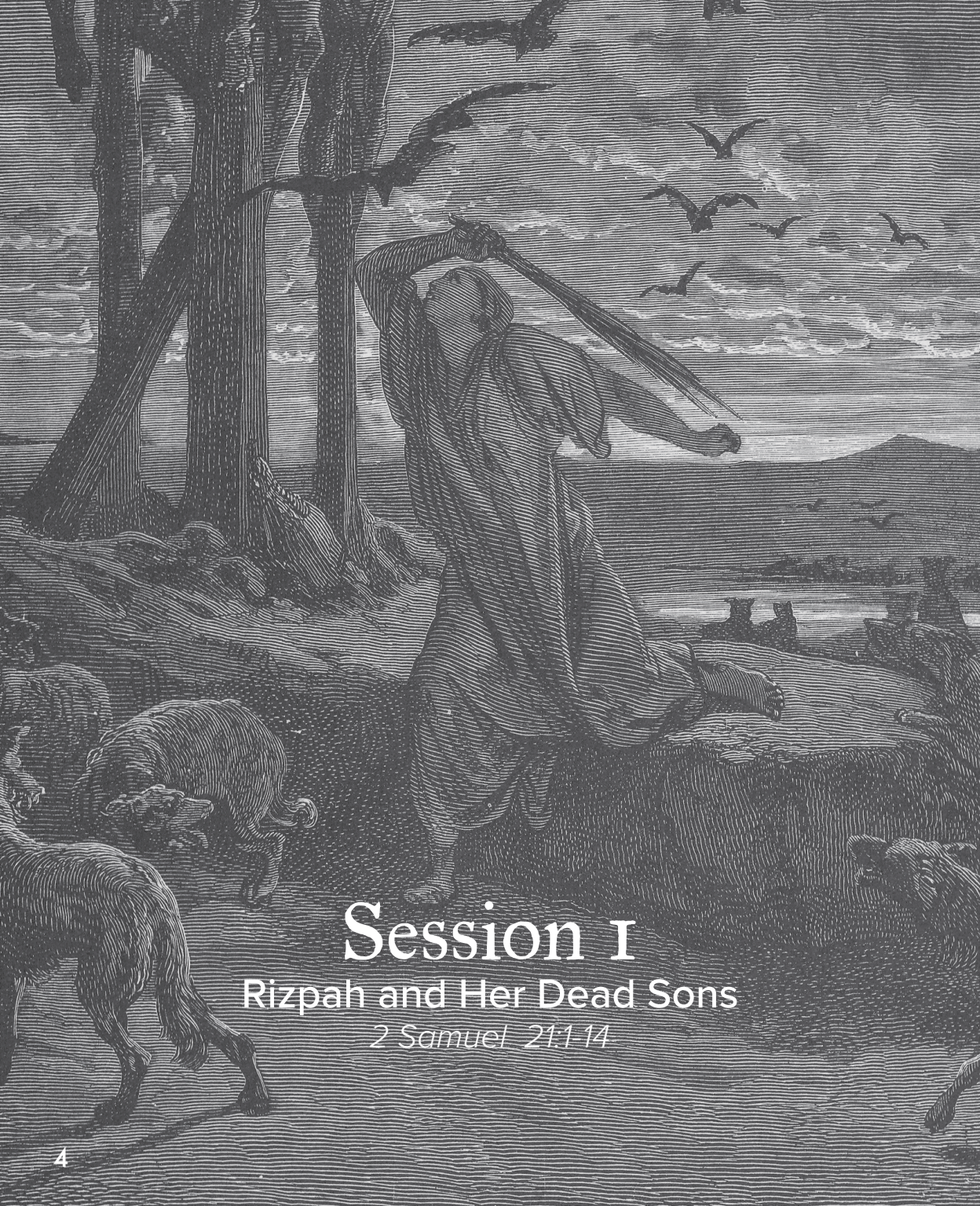




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# Session I

Rizpah and Her Dead Sons

*2 Samuel 21:1-14*



## 2 SAMUEL 21:1-14

Now there was a famine in the days of David for three years, year after year. And David sought the face of the LORD. And the LORD said, "There is bloodguilt on Saul and on his house, because he put the Gibeonites to death." So the king called the Gibeonites and spoke to them. Now the Gibeonites were not of the people of Israel but of the remnant of the Amorites. Although the people of Israel had sworn to spare them, Saul had sought to strike them down in his zeal for the people of Israel and Judah. And David said to the Gibeonites, "What shall I do for you? And how shall I make atonement, that you may bless the heritage of the LORD?" The Gibeonites said to him, "It is not a matter of silver or gold between us and Saul or his house; neither is it for us to put any man to death in Israel." And he said, "What do you say that I shall do for you?" They said to the king, "The man who consumed us and planned to destroy us, so that we should have no place in all the territory of Israel, let seven of his sons be given to us, so that we may hang them before the LORD at Gibeah of Saul, the chosen of the LORD." And the king said, "I will give them." But the king spared Mephibosheth, the son of Saul's son Jonathan, because of the oath of the LORD that was between them, between David and Jonathan the son of Saul. The king took the two sons of Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, whom she

bore to Saul, Armoni and Mephibosheth; and the five sons of Merab the daughter of Saul, whom she bore to Adriel the son of Barzillai the Meholahite; and he gave them into the hands of the Gibeonites, and they hanged them on the mountain before the LORD, and the seven of them perished together. They were put to death in the first days of harvest, at the beginning of barley harvest. Then Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took sackcloth and spread it for herself on the rock, from the beginning of harvest until rain fell upon them from the heavens. And she did not allow the birds of the air to come upon them by day, or the beasts of the field by night. When David was told what Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, the concubine of Saul, had done, David went and took the bones of Saul and the bones of his son Jonathan from the men of Jabesh-gilead, who had stolen them from the public square of Beth-shan, where the Philistines had hanged them, on the day the Philistines killed Saul on Gilboa. And he brought up from there the bones of Saul and the bones of his son Jonathan; and they gathered the bones of those who were hanged. And they buried the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan in the land of Benjamin in Zela, in the tomb of Kish his father. And they did all that the king commanded. And after that God responded to the plea for the land.



# BREAKING THROUGH THE *BIZARRE*

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It is easy to read this story and wonder what is going on. David is intending to protect Israel from famine, but what if the method benefits him? As the author is closing the story of King Saul and his legacy, there is a bigger point that is being made about David, Rizpah, and about their LORD. Because of our cultural distance, we need to exercise caution and look at the context carefully to see what is happening. As we read through the text and consider the background narratives, we can see that the labors of a grieving mother point to a different resolution.





# GETTING TO THE REALITY

1. What is the reason for the famine? Who is responsible?
2. Read Joshua 9:8-21. The Gibeonites tricked Israel into thinking they were from a far-off country. What was Joshua supposed to do? Why did Israel keep their covenant with the Gibeonites if it was based upon lies? How would you have handled the Gibeonites? How might that previous story influence our understanding here?
3. Discuss details from King Saul's reign. What were some defining moments and why?
4. How did David act toward King Saul? Give some concrete examples. Does it seem like he is acting appropriately now?
5. Read 1 Samuel 18:17-19. Who is Merab? How important was she to the relationship between Saul and David?
6. Read 1 Chronicles 22:6-8. Why did God say David could not build the temple? How does this fit with the story in 2 Samuel 21?
7. Read the story of Mephibosheth in 2 Samuel 4:4 and 2 Samuel 9. Why did David treat Mephibosheth well?
8. Read an earlier story about Rizpah in 2 Samuel 3:6-11. Describe her circumstances and what we know about her life including the details here in 2 Samuel 21.
9. When does the famine end? What seems to be the triggering moment?



# READING FOR THE POINT

David understood Joshua's covenant with the Gibeonites, but they were known for deception. He also knew that Saul's bloodguilt was causing Israel to suffer. What action should he take? He listens to the deceivers and gives over seven descendants of Saul for the shedding of their blood—more shedding of blood. It's ironic, that while he keeps his word to his dead friend Jonathan by saving Mephibosheth, the bones of Jonathan and Saul remain unsettled. Does the famine end with this bloodshed? No. It is the humility and grace of Rizpah as she protects her dead sons which moves David to the right action—giving King Saul, Jonathan, and Saul's family line a proper burial. The bloodguilt of humanity cannot be resolved with ongoing bloodshed. A true king takes responsibility for his people and their failures. There is no place where this is better displayed than when the True King, the innocent One, is enthroned on a Roman cross.







# Session 2

## Vengeance and Polygamy

*Genesis 4:17-24*





## GENESIS 4:17-24

Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch. When he built a city, he called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch.

To Enoch was born Irad, and Irad fathered Mehujael, and Mehujael fathered Methushael, and Methushael fathered Lamech. And Lamech took two wives. The name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other Zillah. Adah bore Jabal; he was the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock. His brother's name was Jubal; he was the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe. Zillah also bore Tubal-cain; he was the forger of all instruments of bronze and iron. The sister of Tubal-cain was Naamah.

Lamech said to his wives:

“Adah and Zillah, hear my voice;  
you wives of Lamech, listen to what I say:  
I have killed a man for wounding me,  
a young man for striking me.  
If Cain's revenge is sevenfold,  
then Lamech's is seventy-sevenfold.”



# BREAKING THROUGH THE *BIZARRE*

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What is this story about? We get no direct moral claims as right or wrong, but it is clear that Lamech is a murderous polygamist.

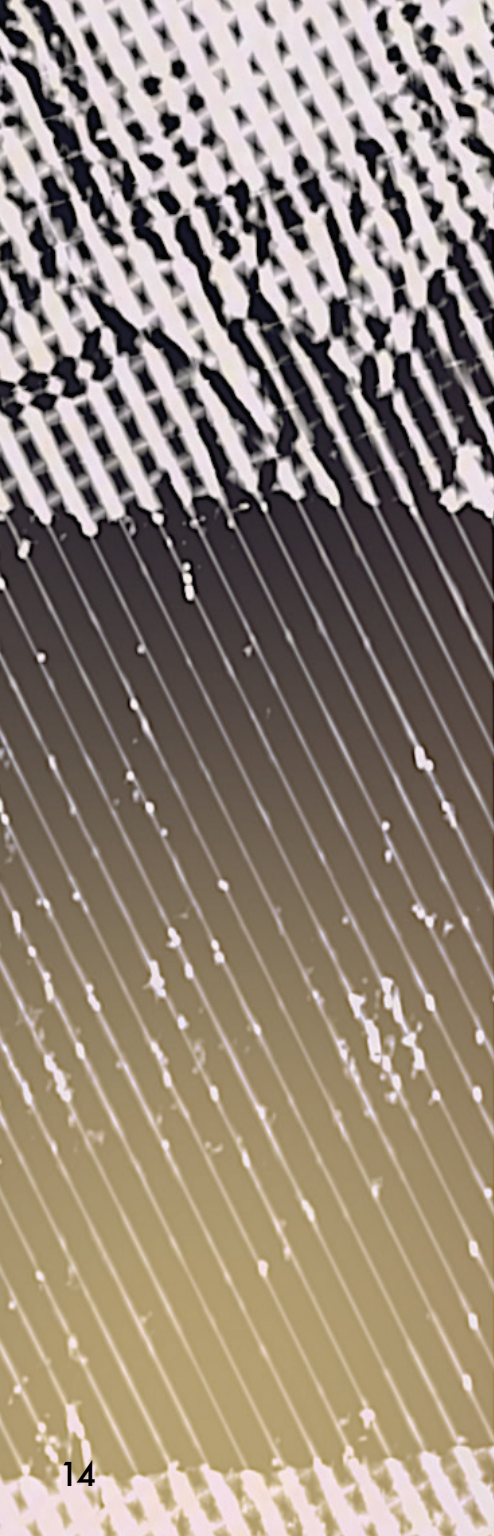
Does that mean that polygamy is acceptable? How about vengeance? How would we know? What should we look for? Even though we get no definitive insights or judgments here, the Bible compels us to understand the context and to “keep reading” so the picture develops. The answers lie in the narratives.





# GETTING TO THE REALITY

1. Read Genesis 2:24. How does God define marriage in this text? Why do you think this institution was the first established in the Bible?
2. Read Genesis 16:1-6. Considering the story of Sarai and Hagar, how does the situation work out? What ends up happening to Hagar (read Genesis 21:9-14)?
3. Read Genesis 29:31-35. Jacob marries two sisters, the daughters of Laban. What is the problem for Leah? Now, read Genesis 30:1-3. What is the problem for Rachel? How many of these problems do you think were caused or at least amplified by polygamy?
4. Read Genesis 4:10-16. Cain suffers consequences, but who will protect him? How does this differ from Lamech's words in v. 24? What might this tell us about Lamech's relationship with the LORD?
5. How would you define "forgiveness"? Is "vengeance" the opposite? Explain.
6. Read Matthew 18:21-22. Why do you think Jesus answers Peter by using the number in this story?
7. How do you respond to Jesus' words from the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6:14?
8. What do you think makes someone "good at forgiveness"? Do you have any of these qualities?







# READING FOR THE POINT

The story of Lamech is the story of humanity's deep dive into sin and separation from the LORD, including his failure to follow God's mandate of a "one flesh" union. He is the seventh generation from Adam and already humanity has become a complete disaster. Jesus knew these old Torah stories and used them to teach Peter a lesson. Forgiving seventy times seven is like saying "never stop forgiving." If you think carefully, there may be people you are having trouble forgiving once, let alone never stopping to forgive. Maybe it is a spouse or an ex-spouse. Maybe a parent or a child. It seems impossible to forgive the way Jesus is commanding. But there is no better picture of this forgiveness than Jesus giving Himself as a "ransom for many." It is a magnificent signpost of what he does for you and me each and every day we miss the mark. He never stops forgiving, so neither should we.



# Session 3

## Elisha and the She-Bears

*2 Kings 2:23-25*



## 2 Kings 2:23-25

He went up from there to Bethel, and while he was going up on the way, some small boys came out of the city and jeered at him, saying, “Go up, you baldhead! Go up, you baldhead!” And he turned around, and when he saw them, he cursed them in the name of the LORD. And two she-bears came out of the woods and tore forty-two of the boys. From there he went on to Mount Carmel, and from there he returned to Samaria.



# BREAKING THROUGH THE *BIZARRE*

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After reading these three verses without any further context, anyone would be shocked. A curse from the LORD and bears maul forty-two boys! As wise readers of scripture, we need to understand context, including biblical locations and the meaning of the words being used. As you study the questions below, clarify the picture and consider the biblical patterns that are being presented.



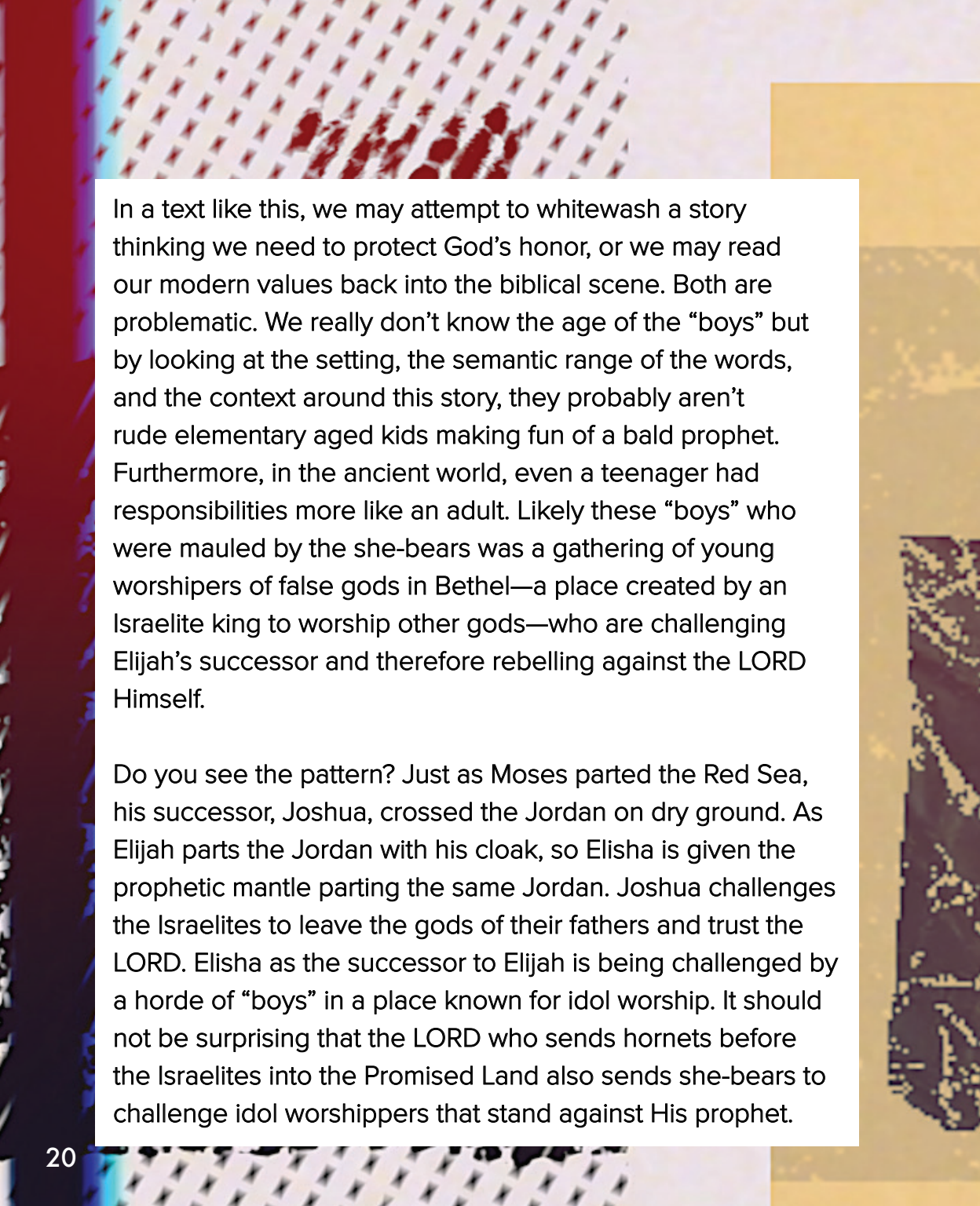




# GETTING TO THE REALITY

1. What are your first impressions of this story? Is there a bad guy? How would a non-believer respond to these three verses?
2. Start by reading all of 2 Kings 2. What is the big story that just happened to Elisha?
3. Location matters. Read 1 Kings 12:25-33. What did Jeroboam build in Bethel? How is Bethel being portrayed?
4. Discuss the life of Elijah. Recall the scene with Elijah on Mount Carmel in 1 Kings 18. What happened there?
5. Read 1 Kings 3:7. The same words describing “small boys” in 2 Kings 2:23 is used. Who says he is a “little child”? What do you think he means?
6. Read 1 Samuel 2:12-17. In verse 17 we have another use of the term translated “boy” in 2 Kings 2, this time translated “young men.” What was the role of Eli’s sons? How does the Bible portray them?
7. The text says the bears “tore forty-two of the boys.” Can this relatively large number of “boys” help us clarify the story? What brings that many people together, let alone that many “small boys”? What might create a congregation of so many “boys”?
8. Read Exodus 23:23-28. How does this compare to the story of Elisha and what happened to the forty-two boys?
9. Compare 2 Kings 2:7-8 and 2 Kings 2:12-14. What do you think the author is telling us through this comparison?
10. Read Joshua 24:14-15. What is the big point that Joshua is making? What did Joshua and Moses have in common?





In a text like this, we may attempt to whitewash a story thinking we need to protect God's honor, or we may read our modern values back into the biblical scene. Both are problematic. We really don't know the age of the "boys" but by looking at the setting, the semantic range of the words, and the context around this story, they probably aren't rude elementary aged kids making fun of a bald prophet. Furthermore, in the ancient world, even a teenager had responsibilities more like an adult. Likely these "boys" who were mauled by the she-bears was a gathering of young worshipers of false gods in Bethel—a place created by an Israelite king to worship other gods—who are challenging Elijah's successor and therefore rebelling against the LORD Himself.

Do you see the pattern? Just as Moses parted the Red Sea, his successor, Joshua, crossed the Jordan on dry ground. As Elijah parts the Jordan with his cloak, so Elisha is given the prophetic mantle parting the same Jordan. Joshua challenges the Israelites to leave the gods of their fathers and trust the LORD. Elisha as the successor to Elijah is being challenged by a horde of "boys" in a place known for idol worship. It should not be surprising that the LORD who sends hornets before the Israelites into the Promised Land also sends she-bears to challenge idol worshippers that stand against His prophet.



# READING FOR THE POINT









# Session 4

## Struck Dead In The New Testament

*Acts 5:1-11*

But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, and with his wife's knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God." When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him.

After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. And Peter said to her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much." And she said, "Yes, for so much." But Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out." Immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. When the young men came in they found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things.



# BREAKING THROUGH THE *BIZARRE*

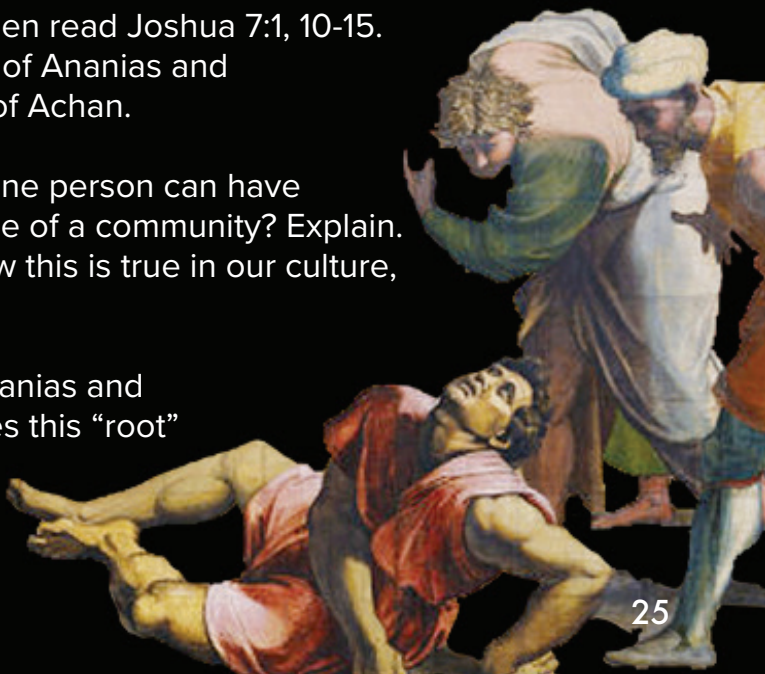
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It may seem like much of the disturbing death and destruction scenes happen only in the Old Testament. In fact, this thinking can lead to the error that Jesus is somehow softer and gentler than the God of the Old Testament. This scene in Acts should caution us about this thinking and it should remind us that God is Holy and Just, so our living should reflect the same.



# GETTING TO THE REALITY

1. The opening word is “but” which creates both a link and a contrast to the previous section. What is the story that precedes the story of Ananias and Sapphira? Who is it about and what is it saying about the person?
2. Were Ananias and Sapphira punished because they weren’t generous enough? Explain.
3. Read Luke 4:5-8 and Luke 22:3-6, 31-32. Luke wrote both the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles. Describe the theme that these Lukan verses share and how it links to the Acts passage this session.
4. What do you think Peter means when he says Ananias “lied to the Holy Spirit”? For a Christian, who would normally “fill” a person’s heart?
5. When taking Jericho, the Israelites are warned. Read Joshua 6:18 and then read Joshua 7:1, 10-15. Describe the similarities of Ananias and Sapphira with the story of Achan.
6. Do you think the sin of one person can have implications for the whole of a community? Explain. Share an example of how this is true in our culture, regardless of faith.
7. What is at the root of Ananias and Sapphira’s sin? How does this “root” sometimes surface in your own thinking and actions?







# READING FOR THE POINT

There are particular moments in the Bible when we take notice.

This story might be one of them. The God of the Bible knows the human heart and wants to save it. A story like this reminds us—even after the death and resurrection of Jesus—that God is still holy and His justice will prevail. The simplest understanding we can take from this text is that humanity is broken, and people can fake it. They can seem like insiders but are rotten within. Either the Spirit leads our hearts, or we are still children of darkness.

There is no in-between





# Session 5

## The Levite's Concubine

*Judges 19:22-30*



# Judges 19:22-30

As they were making their hearts merry, behold, the men of the city, worthless fellows, surrounded the house, beating on the door. And they said to the old man, the master of the house, "Bring out the man who came into your house, that we may know him." And the man, the master of the house, went out to them and said to them, "No, my brothers, do not act so wickedly; since this man has come into my house, do not do this vile thing. Behold, here are my virgin daughter and his concubine. Let me bring them out now. Violate them and do with them what seems good to you, but against this man do not do this outrageous thing." But the men would not listen to him. So the man seized his concubine and made her go out to them. And they knew her and abused her all night until the morning. And as the dawn began to break, they let her go. And as morning appeared, the woman came and fell down at the door of the man's

house where her master was, until it was light.

And her master rose up in the morning, and when he opened the doors of the house and went out to go on his way, behold, there was his concubine lying at the door of the house, with her hands on the threshold. He said to her, "Get up, let us be going." But there was no answer. Then he put her on the donkey, and the man rose up and went away to his home. And when he entered his house, he took a knife, and taking hold of his concubine he divided her, limb by limb, into twelve pieces, and sent her throughout all the territory of Israel. And all who saw it said, "Such a thing has never happened or been seen from the day that the people of Israel came up out of the land of Egypt until this day; consider it, take counsel, and speak."



# BREAKING THROUGH THE *BIZARRE*

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This is one of the most brutal stories in the Bible. It is worse than a modern slasher movie. Why would such a horrendous event be included? The truth is, the Bible does not sugar-coat the brokenness of humanity. A woman who has been tortured and killed becomes an image of how far those that were supposed to be “the people of God” have fallen.



# GETTING TO THE REALITY

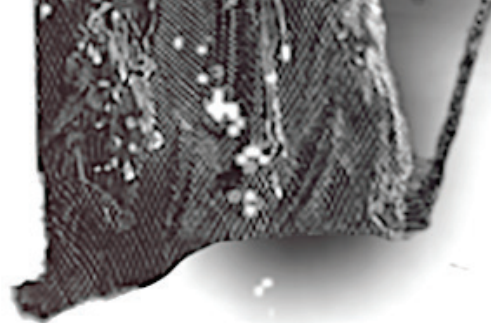
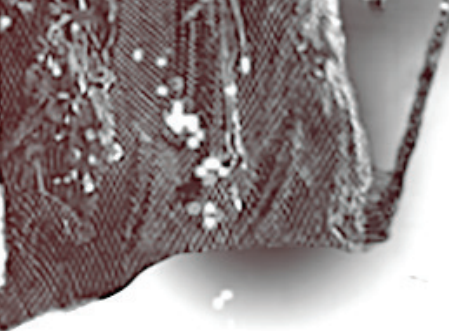
1. Describe the horrific nature of this story. What do you think of the fact that the Bible contains stories like this?
2. Read Judges 19:1, 10-15. Where did this story happen? Who are the parties involved?
3. Read Numbers 3:5-13 and Deuteronomy 10:8-9. What was the job of a Levite?
4. Judges 19 starts with the words, “in those days, when there was no king in Israel...” This phrase repeats at several locations in Judges. Who was supposed to be the King of Israel? Read 1 Samuel 8:4-8 and Psalm 24.
5. Now read the story in Genesis 19:1-11 and compare it to Judges 19. What is the author of Judges saying?
6. When you become offended, do you believe the things that offend you also offend God? Give specific examples. How do we know if the things that offend us are offensive to God?
7. Identify some ways that we as Christians live life just like non-Christians in our world. How should we live differently?





# READING FOR THE POINT

The point of the Book of Judges is to demonstrate how God's people continue to fall into sin, and how God continues to rescue them by raising up judges. This story is at the end of the vicious cycle which reveals that even though God saved them and provided for them, they look no different than the enemy nations all around them. They are not a kingdom of priests but are more like murderous villains bound for civil war. In fact, if you look at the comparative story in Genesis 19, they are just like the people of Sodom before God destroyed them. God's people need a King. The interesting thing is the very next book in the Bible is Ruth, a story of a Moabite woman—a non-Israelite, outsider—who is faithful, marries an Israelite, and becomes the great-grandmother of King David. Fast-forward to the New Testament and we see how God continues to faithfully chase after his wayward people to bring them back. You see, we need a King, and the ultimate One takes his throne by being lifted up on a Roman cross to save his people from cosmic evil and themselves.







*BIZARRE*



# BIBLE







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