

Mercy in Violence?
A Case Study of Judges 4 and 5 Vis-à-Vis Contemporary Situatio
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Abstract

The article aims to contribute to a contemporary reflection on how the mercy of God, hesed in the Hebrew Bible, can be appropriated in our contemporary situations of violence and injustice. The Hebrew Bible presents God as both merciful and a punisher (Ex 34:6-7). Our analyses of the three characters in Judges 4 and 5: Yahweh, Deborah and Jael, and the main events described in the two chapters – the Canaanite oppression of the Israelites and the Israelites’ response to it, and insights from some theologians, Papal teachings and Church documents, have shown that every situation demands discernment and prayer. There is no easy answer. Every case has to be judged in the light of the Word of God, primarily guided by God’s mercy and justice.

Introduction

*The Lord reveals himself to Moses as
“The Lord, the Lord, a God gracious and merciful,
slow to anger and abounding in love and fidelity,
continuing his love for a thousand generations
and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin;
yet not declaring the guilty guiltless,
but bringing punishment for their parents’ wickedness
on children and children’s children to the third
and fourth generation” (Ex 34:6-7).*

The text presents the God of the Hebrew Bible as one who is both merciful and a punisher. He is gracious, merciful, slow to anger and abounding in love and fidelity, yet he punishes the guilty – from the parents till the fourth generation.

This paper analyzes three characters in Judges 4 and 5: Yahweh, Deborah and Jael, and the main event described in the two chapters – the Canaanite oppression of the Israelites and the Israelites’ response to it. The result of this analysis serves as a starting point of reflection on how

to respond to contemporary situations of violence and injustice in the light of insights from some theologians, Papal teachings and Church documents.