For readers immersed in contemporary culture, many passages of the Old Testament might seem to portray the God of Israel in bizarre, perplexing, and even scandalous ways. What does one make of depictions of God as being enraged, inflicting sickness, or commanding child sacrifice or the slaughter of cities?

This seminar is intended for students in the latter stages of masters study or in more advanced degree work to facilitate thematic integration of a broad range of biblical texts. We will investigate an array of depictions of God preserved in texts mainly from the Old Testament while also taking up New Testament texts which either allude to them or address similar theological issues. We will seek to understand how these depictions functioned in their ancient cultural contexts, including both Israelite religion and early Christianity. The discussion will highlight two dimensions of such functioning: the sacramental (the way in which human practices and events were believed to manifest encounters with God) and the paradoxical (the way in which apparently contradictory yet authoritative depictions confront the reader with the inability of language to contain God and so point the reader to God’s transcendence). From this investigation we will seek to draw implications for a fundamental pastoral task, that of facilitating an encounter with God amid the ordinariness of life with all its paradoxes.