



WORLD VIOLENCE & THE CHRISTIAN

Learning from Encounters of Violence in Biblical History

ABSTRACT

What can we learn about evil from some brutal and murderous episodes in Holy Scripture?

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World Violence and the Christian, Lessons 1, 2

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LESSON 1

Introduction: Scripture: Gen. 4:1-8

1. Introducing a new series. Violent outbursts where people are wounded or even killed has become a daily newsfeed in America.
2. TT officer, Floyd East Jr. was killed by Hollis Daniels, Oct. 9, 2017. The Sutherland Springs, Texas shooting where 26 people were killed and many more were wounded on Nov. 5 2017. October 1, 2017, 58 people were killed at an outdoor concert and 546 were injured in Las Vegas. September 24, 2017, a gunman went into a church of Christ, and pistol-whipped an usher and shot eight people killing one in Tenn. These and like scenes continue to unfold. Mass killings are not limited to guns. October 31, 2017, a terrorist rented a truck and ran over people in New York killing eight. We will never forget September 11, 2001, where terrorists hijacked airliners and flew them into buildings killing 2996 people. 1995, Timothy McVeigh built a Ryder truck bomb and killed 168 in Oklahoma City. The Sandy Hook massacre was on December 14, 2012, but was not the largest mass murder at an American school. May 18th, 1927 in Bath Township, Michigan, Andrew Kehoe set up more than 1000 pounds of dynamite at various parts of the school over a period of several months. He was angry about property taxes and how that impacted the decline of his farm. He killed 45 (which included himself and the killing of his wife) and injured 58. In March 1990, Julio Gonzalez became angry with his girlfriend at a dance club, poured gasoline on the only exit out, lit it on fire with two matches and shut the metal gate which killed 87 people. More examples could be cited (Columbine, 1999, 13 dead; 2012, Aurora, Colorado's cinema tear gas and shooting, 12 dead, 70 wounded, 2009 Fort Hood; 2015 San Bernardino, etc.). With this being said, it might surprise you that the vast majority of violence in history has been carried out by various governments.
3. How is the Christian to understand and cope with a world of violence? Today let's look at some biblical pictures of encounters with violence. We want to study the topic of "evil."

Discussion:

I. Cain & Abel (Gen. 4)

- A. The first violent act is evil against obedient faith—Cain killed Abel because Cain didn't like the fact that his worship was rejected by God. He slew his brother in the field (Gen. 4:8).
 1. Notice what is not mentioned—*the kind of weapon*. That was irrelevant.
 2. It is ironic to me that such a great emphasis is placed on the weapons used by killers and not the evil within the killer. When considering this first murder, it struck me that when it comes to worship, people do not care about the kind of worship that God wants, but rather focus on the effect—*how it makes me feel, how much good it does*, etc. If the modern press was covering Cain and Abel, they would have likely focused on something that God doesn't even mention—the weapon. There would have been a big debate on whether to ban or not to ban whatever weapon was used. The modern press would not focus on the fact that this man was not

teachable, that he was selfish, that he wanted to give God what he willed rather than what was right, that he resisted right teaching.

3. Today, people do not care about the kind of worship God demands and deserves. People only care about the effect it has on them personally. Yet in episodes of violence, they give undue attention to the kind of weapon (especially if it is a gun) and are fairly dismissive of the deeper issues: a life lived with utter disregard for God, for fellow man, for law, for life, for peace, the malignity of sin in his life. As a people, we do not focus on the need to obey the King of kings. And in evil tumults, we do not focus on the core—a life lived with the fear of God absent.
- B. The very first murder in human history pictures a lot.
1. *It pictures man's self-will set in opposition to the Lord's will.* It also teaches that man could control his actions but simply chooses to sin. He was not born this way, he became this way.
 2. *It identifies that murder begins with a heart filled with sin with anger (Gen. 4:6; Matt. 5:21, 22a).*
 3. *It depicts that a lack of respect for God can turn one hostile toward the righteous.* Be not dismayed when a wicked man attacks a righteous man. (1 Jn. 3:11-13).
- C. *When is evil, evil?* What makes evil, evil? When does evil begin? It begins not with the violence, premeditation, the choice of weapon, but with the rejection of God's authority and rule. Cain was "of the wicked one," but why and when? The answer to these questions is succinct, "When one departs from God or is living away from God" (see Heb. 3:12). This is the fundamental fountainhead of evil. Cain departed from God because of self-will. Such is often root and cause of many kinds of crimes and grievances.
1. Encounters with evil are not always physically violent!
 2. *Evil is seeded in a heart that is ruled by self-love, hatred, and fundamentally a rejection of God's rule of life (cf. 2 Jn. 1:9-11, emp. v. 11).* It may flower into premeditation, blasphemy, slander, betrayal, and brutal murder, but is not limited to such any more than righteousness is limited to singing and talking about Jesus.
 3. Have you considered why demons are called "evil spirits" (see Lk. 8:2). Likely, they are fallen angels who allied themselves with the devil, "the evil one" (Matt. 25:41; 6:13). We might think of them as evil by their effect or harm inflicted on people (ex: Mk. 9:17-22). But that was the outgrowth of their evil departure from the authority of Christ (they sinned and rejected the rule of God, 2 Pet. 2:4; they left their domain, Jude 1:6).
 4. The point I am making is, when it comes to evil, let us not become overly fixated on the disturbance that is caused or the weapon used, (such as a rock when thrown into a placid pond), but rather, give attention to what makes evil.
 - a) Let us not define evil in a limited way "the presence of physical violence." That is simply the outgrowth of evil.
 - (1) Everyone focuses on the stir, the commotion, the disturbance, the upheaval and they look, as it were, to find a neat little scapegoat to corral their fears in—the *weapon*!
 - (2) This is seen in the headlines of what happened in Sutherland, where one news outlet had "Deadly Church Shooting" with "SHOOTING" in a very large font in bold. They often refer to such a one as "a gunman" but never do they refer to the one driving a truck over people as "the truck man" or the "pipe-bomb man" or "the ax-man." People think that if you take away the abilities to shoot, you take away the evil and

take away the violence. Rather, when God is banned from the government that is evil...the school, that is evil...the family...an environment suits evil to grow.

b) Evil resists God's will.

(1) *Where is evil first found in Genesis 4?* Is it 4:9? 4:8? 4:6? Why not 4:3? This offering was not by faith as Abel's offering was (Heb. 11:4; Rom. 10:19). Abel obtained witness (or a good report) that he was righteous. What testimony did Cain's offering give then? Evil rejects the rule of God. Why should an evil man be overly impressed with the rule of men (the government)?

(2) Why should one feel compelled to love his fellow man when he has no love for God? This is why God ordained the government

c) Evil is enticing. Let's not think that we can never become drawn into it. Why the admonition to abhor evil (Rom. 12:9) and *abstain from every form of evil* (1 Thess. 5:22)?

II. Lamech and the fruit of evil (Gen. 4)

A. *A foe to the home.* The second murder is tied to the assault on the family. In the seventh generation from Adam, through the lineage of Cain, Lamech broke the model of one man to one woman and introduce polygamy (Gen. 4:19). Evil is a foe to the home (Mal. 2:16).

B. *A foe to my neighbor.* The second murder is tied to vengeance. Here we have the oldest preserved poem and it boasts vengeance. Evil seeks personal vengeance.

1. Lamech violently murdered a young man in revenge for merely wounding or bruising him (Gen. 4:23, 24). It would be similar to the situation where a man gets whipped in a fist fight to then pulls out a weapon to slay his opponent.

2. Lamech's son invented instruments of iron and bronze (Gen. 4:22). Likely, Lamech found these useful to give him an advantage over any adversary.

3. He wanted his wives to know that as well which may further underscore the corruption of marriage.

C. *A foe to my heart.* This second murder is tied to pride. Evil promotes a proud heart. Lamech's refers to the judgment of God on Cain where seven lives will be taken upon the one who kills Cain (4:15). Yet Lamech position himself above God. He asserts anyone who hurts him will suffer worse than Cain—seventy-sevenfold.

Conclusion: Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord. The sinner will not prosper before Him (Eccl. 8:12, 13).

Lesson 2: Scripture Reading: 2 Timothy 3:1-5. We are going to continue looking at some murder scenes in the Scripture with some commentary. I first want to visit the world before the flood.

III. Noah's World (Gen. 6:11-13).

- A. Prior to the destruction of the world, God saw the intensity of man's wickedness. This violence was not a "bronze and iron" problem (Gen. 4:22), but a heart problem (Gen. 6:5, 6). People today focus on the symptoms and devastation of violent acts and seek to blame something. Usually, it is guns.
- B. Misnaming and scapegoat talk.
 - 1. While there is such a thing as "gang violence" the term "gun violence" is a misnomer. What happened in New York was not Truck Rental Violence. What happened on 9/11 was not box cutter violence or airplane violence. What I referred to in Michigan was not dynamite violence. It is just plain evil human violence.
 - 2. When a woman is abducted off the street do we refer to it as "van abduction" as if a van committed the crime? Does a van kidnap, rape, and kill people? The gun, the knife, the gasoline, the dynamite, the baseball bat are only instruments that are designed for lawful use but wicked men hijack them to perpetuate a crime. If you stab someone with a pencil, is such not pencil violence? Do they need to be outlawed?
 - 3. Let the focus be on the criminal, not the instrument he uses. Eccl. 7:29, "Truly, this only I have found: That God made man upright, But they have sought out many schemes." Who is guilty? Man is! The man who sought out many evil schemes is where the hammer of justice should fall not on law-abiding truck renters, not law-abiding fuel users, law-abiding baseball players, or law-abiding gun owners.
- C. Violence stems from a heart problem, not a weapon. Paul wrote, "because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened" (Rom. 1:21). There will be those who have evil hearts who will devise murder, rape, kidnapping, and the like.
 - 1. David, Psalm 58:1, 2, "Do you indeed speak righteousness, you silent ones? Do you judge uprightly, you sons of men? No, in heart you work wickedness; You weigh out the violence of your hands in the earth."
 - 2. Solomon, Sandwiched between bloodstained hands and evil feet is a heart that devises wicked plans. "... Hands that shed innocent blood, A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that are swift in running to evil (Prov. 6:17, 18).
 - 3. Isaiah 59:4, "No one calls for justice, Nor does any plead for truth. They trust in empty words and speak lies; They conceive evil and bring forth iniquity." Where is evil conceived but the heart? From what is evil implemented? The hands and feet (Isa. 59:6-8).
 - 4. Jeremiah 22:17, "Yet your eyes and your heart are for nothing but your covetousness, For shedding innocent blood And practicing oppression and violence."
 - 5. Jesus, Mark 7:20-23, taught that what comes out of a man's heart defiles him. He specifically named murder.

IV. Many other episodes of violent encounters can be discussed. What makes for perilous times? Notice the fountainhead for these sins, including "*brutality*" (not tame, savage, fierce, Thayer). Looking at the list below, what do you think serves as the basis for each episode using 2 Timothy 3:1-5?

- A. **Sodom's abusive treatment** (Gen. 19). – lovers of themselves, proud, unloving, brutal, despisers of good (Gen. 19:7, 9), lovers of pleasure.
- B. **Simeon and Levi's cruelty** (Gen. 49:5-7). This refers to the events of Genesis 34 where a prince named Shechem fell in love with Dinah, their sister, and violated her. When he asked for her hand in marriage, her brothers told him that he and all the males needed to be circumcised. This the brothers did, not because they were forgiving, but because they were deceitful and when the Shechem and his fellow citizens were in pain from the circumcision, these two brothers rushed upon them and slew not only Shechem and his father but all the men of the city. They took their animals and wives as well. What words describe Simeon and Levi here? Lovers of money, proud, disobedient, unloving, unforgiving, brutal, traitors, headstrong, haughty. Yet they had a form of godliness when they spoke of circumcision. They could see the error in treating their sister like a harlot (Gen. 34:31) but they could not see the error of their temper, murder, deceitful plotting, and stealing.
- C. **Abimelech's butchering seventy of his half-brothers (Judg. 9:1-5)**. Lovers of themselves, unloving, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors.
- D. **The gang-rape and murder of Gibeah (Judg. 19)**. Lovers of themselves, unholy, without self-control, brutal, lovers of pleasure.
- E. **The massacre of 85 priests by Doeg and Saul at Nob (1 Sam. 22)**. Lovers of themselves, blasphemers, unholy, slanderers, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong.
- F. **The butchering of babies by Herod (Matt. 2:1-16)**. Herod was troubled over the news rather than thankful. He saw the Christ as a rival, not a savior. This same spirit of jealousy works today in families where one spouse starts to learn and serve Jesus while the other says, "the church is taking you away from me." He used the intel he gained from the wise men in a sinister plot. Herod, he wanted to eliminate the opposition and so he sent the executioner to kill all the male babies in Bethlehem and in all its districts. J. W. McGarvey wrote, "This brutality was in keeping with Herod's character. Jealousy as to his authority led him to murder two high priests, his uncle Joseph, his wife, and three of his own sons, besides many other innocent persons" (TFG). This should give a biblical perspective of how devastating evil can become. Evil attacks the good and innocent. Yet, Herod had the *appearance* of godliness in that he inquired of the Scripture and claimed that he wanted to worship the Messiah. But all of this was to kill the Child Jesus. Herod was a lover of himself, unthankful, unholy, unloving, brutal, a despiser of good. Most of the Sandy Hook murders were young children, six and seven years old. We cringe at such brutality. Many stood horrified when they learned that the shooter at Sutherland Springs shot an eighteen-month-old as well as a pregnant woman. That is the spirit of Herod. These deaths are just as brutal and just as evil as the massacre of the unborn that takes place in abortion clinics. It is done by those who are brutally self-willed and despisers of good.
- G. **The Galileans whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifice (Lk. 13:1, 2)**. Here is another worship scene where people were murdered with their religion.
- H. **The crucifixion of Jesus**. Nothing showcases the depth of evil as the that of the crucifixion of the Messiah. He went about doing good. He lived a pure and harmless life, never preyed on anyone, lifted people up from despair, cast out demons, raised the dead, comforted those who mourned, taught accurately the things of God and yet was brutally beaten, humiliating undressed, mocked, and crucified before all the world between two thieves to add further insult.

1. *He was despised by despisers of good (Isa. 53:3).*

2. *His enemies slandered* for we "esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted (Isa. 53:4; cf. Matt. 27:41-44). Yet Jesus lived His life without any deceit in His mouth (Isa. 53:9). These men also had the appearance of godliness for they are called "chief priests." They brought charges of blasphemy against Him which is something a religious person would be sensitive to (Matt. 26:63-66).
3. *He was murdered* Isa. 53:8
4. *They were fiercely brutal for they flogged Him, "by His stripes we are healed"* (Isa. 53:5). Their brutality not only played out in the scourging (Jn. 19:1), but also in twisting the crown of thorns on His head, spitting on Him, and striking him on the head with a reed (Matt. 27:29, 30). They nailed His body to a wooden cross suspended up in the air which would lead to bleeding to death and or suffocation. Yet Jesus lived a life that was not violent, "Because He had done no violence" (Isa. 53:9).
5. *From self-will* Isa. 53:6, says, "we have turned everyone, to his own way". Pilate understood the self-will of the accusers because he knew they handed Him over because of envy (Mr. 15:10). Yet he was equally ruled by self-will for in his want to gratify the crowd, he released Barabbas and delivered Jesus be crucified (Mk. 15:15).
6. There is a difference very important difference in the murder of the Messiah than the murders the others in Scripture or of those in our day. He was God in the flesh but other people are killed, beaten, raped solely because of the evil selfish will of the perpetrator. The victim often has very little say in the matter. But Jesus permitted Himself to be beaten and murdered for my evil (Isa. 53:5, 8). He took it all because of my transgressions. No one else can make that claim. The abuse that He suffered was to purge my sins. The abuse which the apostles suffered was similar to what Christ did (1 Cor. 4:9-13).

Conclusion:

1. Atheists only want to be delivered from physical pains and assume any tragedy proves there is no God.
2. One person said on FB, "Why won't your God protect his sheep in his own house? Either he doesn't exist or he does and watched innocent people get gunned down." These people do not see that it is primarily eternal anguish and death that Jesus works to save us from, not temporary suffering. Why do atheists not care that God did not spare His Own Son from intense suffering so that they could choose eternal life? Paul argued that such proves that God is "for us," (Rom. 8:31, 32). Would they not also have to contend that God did not care for His Son? Paul affirms it was to give us "all things" which has a perspective of future glory (Rom. 8:17, 18).
3. Jesus did not come to make this life easy or to deliver us from the pains of this life. He came not to deliver us from suffering, but from the present evil age (Gal. 1:4).
4. We ought to pray that the word will have a swift course into the hearts of men and that we might be delivered from evil men (2 Thess. 3:1-3).