

## Violence in the Bible

### 1. The Problem of Violence in the Bible

- Paradigmatic difficult texts
  - Ps 137
  - Deuteronomy 7v I -6 — Canaanites Conquest
  - Joshua 6v15-18
- Impact of "violence" texts for today
  - Apologetic implications — You can't believe in a God like that! Theological implications — God's can't really be like that!
  - Interfaith implications — The Bible is more violent than the Quran/Islam Political implications — Does God want us to do that?
  - Preaching/teaching implications — How do I handle that?
- Common solutions to the problem of the "violence" texts today
  - Deny the inerrancy of the Scriptures — It didn't happen
  - Redefine the character of God — We know better now
  - Ignore the problem — Most Christians don't think about it (but Muslims/secularists do!)

### 2. The "Problem" of Violence for Our Culture

- Our culture is deeply conflicted about violence and justice
- We abhor violence and see it as a great moral evil/crime
  - Genocide — historic and recent
  - Ethnic cleansing — Balkans
  - Abolition of the death penalty
  - Criminalisation of corporal punishment
- We rejoice in violence and enjoy it (at least virtually)
  - Films, media, video games
- We want justice to be done even when this requires violence
  - Defeat of Nazi Germany
  - Death of "Jihadi John"
- We forget that our peace and security depend on violence or the threat of violence
  - Security and peace depend on past victory in war
- Christians have sentimentalised the character of God/Jesus
  - More like Father Christmas than the God of the Bible

### 3. Perspectives on Violence in the Bible

- In a fallen world where evil is real violence is inevitable  
War against cosmic spiritual enemies — chaos/Satan/Rahab/Leviathan  
War against temporal human enemies
- The execution of judgement requires violence  
The just punishment for sin is death  
Death is, and always requires, the ultimate exercise of violence
- Violence is sinful and wicked when it is not executing just judgement.

#### 4. **Violence and the Character of God**

- God's just character means that he is wrathful against sin and wickedness  
God is subject to righteous "violent passions"
- God executes judgement on his enemies in violent ways  
Exodus 14-15 — Red Sea
- God commands his people to execute his judgement against his/their enemies
- God raises up wicked oppressors to execute judgement against his people  
Assyrians against Israel  
Babylonians — Nebuchadnezzar against Judah/Jerusalem  
Romans against Jerusalem 70AD
- The LORD is the "Divine Warrior" who fights for/with his people
- God provides rulers to lead his people in battle — Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Judges, Kings — climaxing in the Messiah
- God is patient and long suffering so his violent judgement is always a last resort when grace has been rejected  
Exodus 34v6-7
- God delays granting justice to his people so that people may be saved  
2 Peter 3v8-9  
Luke 18v1-18

#### 5. **Violence and the New Testament**

- Jesus consistently refuses to exercise violence against human enemies
- Jesus teaches his disciples not to exercise violence to establish his kingdom  
Matthew 26v51-56
- Jesus enacts prophetic signs of the coming violence against Jerusalem/world  
Matthew 21 v 12-17 — overturning tables in temple & cursing fig tree

- Jesus' parables teach the coming violent judgement of individuals/the world.
  - Parable of the tenants in the vineyard
  - Parable of the talents
  - Parable of the wheat and the weeds & parable of the net
- Jesus bears the just violence of God's judgement on the cross to make mercy possible for guilty sinners
- Jesus makes clear that he will return in glory to execute judgement
- The New Testament views the "violence" passages of the OT fulfilled in the great judgement of the "Day of the Lord"
- Christians will return with the Lord Jesus to execute judgement with him
- Eternal judgement in hell is a reality that accomplishes eternal "ethnic cleansing" of the new creation from God's enemies
- In this present age we are to leave vengeance to the Lord, preach the gospel and pray for justice to be done
  - Matthew 7v9-13
  - Luke 18v1-18
  - Romans 7-21

## **6. Approaching the Violence Passages of the Bible Today**

- Understand them in the context of unfolding salvation-history
  - What was demanded in one era of salvation history may not apply now
  - Difference between Israel and the church
  - "This is the day of salvation"
- Understand them in their original context — feel the threat to God's people and their existence
- Utilise Biblical typology as the primary hermeneutical tool to apply and interpret
- Control their interpretation and application from the perspective of the NT paying special attention to any quotes/allusions
- Make clear that they reveal the just judgement of God — expound the wickedness of sin
  - Genesis 15v1 6 — the conquest of Canaan was a just judgement
- Emphasise how God makes provision for mercy for those who repent/submit to him
  - Joshua 2v1-21; 6v17, 22, 25 - Rahab
  - Joshua 9 – Gibeonites

- Proclaim the truth (and horror) of eternal judgement to come — which is worse by far.
- Rejoice in the cross where the twin demands of judgement and mercy were reconciled in the heart of God by the propitiatory death of Christ
- Help God's people to rejoice in the hope of future judgement
- Never forget the priority of mercy and the tragedy that judgement is required
- Remember that evangelism is about saving people from the just violence to come  
Deuteronomy 20v1 0-15
- Don't misrepresent the truth about the Bible and the Quran — but do highlight the difference between Jesus and Mohamed and the difference between the Muslim and Christian understanding of the "kingdom"
- Be honest about the grievous failures of the church/Christians in the past — they have not lived by the teaching of Jesus
- Preach strongly against all sinful violence that is not an exercise of just judgement  
Domestic abuse  
Crime — whether against property or people  
Terrorism "Unjustified" war  
Genocide  
Ethnic cleansing
- Be thankful for government that restrains violence by preserving civil peace and order  
Romans 13v1-6  
I Timothy 2v1-7

## **7. Back to Our Passages**

- How might we preach Ps 137 today?  
  
Is the Psalmist wicked to desire v7-9?  
  
How is our situation similar to/different from that of the Psalmist?  
  
How is this Psalm fulfilled in and by Jesus?  
  
How should a NT Christian pray in the kind of circumstances faced by the psalmist?