

Violence In The Bible

By Dave DeWitt

Definitions of Violence

English “violence”

~ “Behavior involving physical force intended to hurt, damage, or kill someone or something” (New Oxford American Dictionary).

~ “The use of physical force so as to injure, abuse, damage, or destroy” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary).

Hebrew **חָמָס** (**hamas**)

~ “wrong, do violence to, treat violently ... The opposite of violence is gentleness, kindness, weakness, mildness.[TWOT]

~ “n.m. violence, wrong — violence, specif. of physical violence; but also wrong, including injurious language, harsh treatment, etc. (of wrong done to Sarah by Hagar)” [BDB]

So, let’s say,

Definition: Violence is damaging physical force.

Here are eight common questions about violence in the Bible, with my answers.

Question #1. “Why is there so much violence in the Bible?”

Answer: There are a lot of descriptions of violence in the Bible, personally and militarily, because the Bible reports real history just as it happened. If you want some nice story that leaves out violence, then read a children’s fiction book or go see a “G” movie. But if you want truth, then you need to read actual history. And if you have read history, you’ll read about violence. Reality includes the actions of real people and some people are violent. The 800 years between Joshua (c. 1400B.C.) and the kings (ending c. 600BC) were a very violent time in the Near East. If the Bible ignored violence, it would rightly be criticized for covering up what really happened.

We live in a violent world. Simon Rickards reported the,

“10 Deadliest World Events In Human History”

[<https://listverse.com/2013/01/03/10-deadliest-world-events-in-human-history/>]

- #10. Atlantic Slave Trade, Death Toll Estimate: 15 Million 1500s – 1800s
- #9. Transition to Ming Dynasty 1260 – 1368 and thereafter, Death Toll Estimate: 30 Million
- #8. An Lushan Rebellion, Death Toll Estimate: 36 Million 755 – 763
- #7. Taiping Rebellion, Death Toll Estimate: 40 Million 1850 and following
- #6. Great Chinese Famine, Death Toll Estimate: 43 Million 1958 to 1961
- #5. Soviet Crimes, Death Toll Estimate: 49 Million 1917 – 1953
- #4. Mongol Conquests, Death Toll Estimate: 60 Million Genghis Khan
- #3. World War 1, Death Toll Estimate: 65 Million – 1914-1918
- #2. World War 2, Death Toll Estimate: 72 Million – 1939-1945
- #1. European Colonization of the Americas, Death Toll Estimate: 100 Million 1400s – 1700s

#1 is probably listed as it is to make colonization look evil. But #1 in this list is actually not #1. If Rickard’s number are correct, colonization of north, central, and south America killed 100 million people over a 300-year period. That would be 333,333 a year. That would be 1000 people a day, which is actually ridiculous.

And why is there no mention of killing Christians of which the lowest estimation is 60 million a year.

"Credible research has reached the shocking conclusion that every year an estimate of more than 100,000 Christians are killed because of some relation to their faith," Vatican spokesman Archbishop Silvano Maria Tomasi announced in a radio address to the United Nations Human Rights Council. [<https://zenit.org/articles/archbishop-silvano-tomasi-s-address-to-the-un-human-rights-council-interactive-dialogue>]

According to the World Health Organization there are 40-50 million abortions world-wide annually. If European colonization had practiced the abortions we do, they would have murdered 12 billion babies. The most violent time in history is right now, just counting abortions. Not to mention the Muslim terrorists, who have been violently killing people for 1400 years, drug related violence, street-gang and inner-city violence. [For example, in Chicago during 2017 there were 2937 people shot and wounded (about 8 people a day), 624 shot and killed with 675 total homicides, (about two a day). And, Chicago has the strictest gun control laws in America.]

People are violent, they have always been violent, and they will always be violent (Mark 7:21-23). And violence is not decreasing. The 20th century was the most violent century in all of history. There is violence in the Bible, because the Bible tells it like it is.

Question #2. "Why did God use violence?"

Answer: God used violence because of sin. Every act of violence by God was a judgment on the sin of men or angels (Jude 5-7). I suspect the reason many don't like the idea of violence from God, is they don't like the idea of God judging sin. God has in the past, and will in the future, use physical force to destroy sin and those who commit it.

Since God is holy, just, true, and does not change, He must judge sin with justice, an *eye for an eye* (Exodus 21:24; Leviticus 24:20; Deuteronomy 19:21). But God didn't do what the Canaanites and the Philistines did. God used physical force to destroy evil people. The inhabitants of Canaan used violence to torture people. For example, when Saul was mortally wounded in battle he asked his armor bearer to kill him, and finally fell on his own sword, because he was fearful of being tortured by the Philistines (1 Samuel 31:4), as Sampson was when he put his eyes out (Judges 16).

God is the giver of life. All life belongs to Him and He does not owe anyone an explanation for taking what He has given. Life belongs to God and He can do what He wants with it (Genesis 2:7).

~For example, why do we die?

Answer: Because that's what God told Adam and Eve would happen if they sinned. Over 151,600 people die every day because Adam and Eve sinned.

~Why did God bring about the violent destruction of all but eight people, at the time of Noah's flood?

Answer: Because: *the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually* (Genesis 6:5).

~Why did God wipe out Sodom and Gomorrah?

Answer: Because *their sin is exceedingly grave* (Genesis 18:20; Jude 7). Actually, God told Abraham He would spare the whole city if there were 10 righteous men (Genesis 18:32).

~ Why is God more violent in judging sin in the Old Testament, than He is in the New Testament?

Answer: He isn't. Don't think the violent judgment of God is confined to the Old Testament. Jesus said of Jewish unbelievers, *The sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth* (Matthew 8:12).

Remember during this church/grace age God has postponed judgement for the afterlife and the next age. Describing Jesus at His second coming, the Apostle John wrote,

From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty ... Come, assemble for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings and the flesh of commanders and the flesh of mighty men ... (Revelation 19:15-18).

Not one time did Jesus ever criticize, modify or ammend God's use of violence in the Old Testament.

Question #3. "Why did God order people to commit acts of violence?"

Answer: God commanded people to use violence when they acted as instruments of God. The first time God commanded violence was recorded in Genesis 9:6 when He commanded capital punishment for murderers. *Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He made man.* This means someone has to determine "who done it" so it requires the formation of some kind of government. When God formed the nation Israel, they were required to carry out justice because they were a theocracy with God as their king. For example, God said,

Any man from the sons of Israel or from the aliens sojourning in Israel who gives any of his offspring to Molech, shall surely be put to death; the people of the land shall stone him with stones (Leviticus 20:2).

This was capital punishment to be carried out by the leadership of Israel as a nation. Today, during this church/grace age, God has given that responsibility to the world's governments.

Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God (Romans 13:1 see also 1 Peter 2:13-14).

The church is individual believers, not a government, and violence is not the responsibility of individuals. Jesus said,

You have heard that it was said, "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth." But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also (Matthew 5:38-39).

When Jesus referred to what *you have heard*, He was talking about a command given to Israel as a government. But His command to turn the other cheek was for the individual. The church Jesus started was not about building a kingdom on this earth. Since it was not building a nation, it required no violence.

Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm" (John 18:36).

Paul gave the same perspective. Speaking of civil government, he wrote,

... for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil (Romans 13:4).

But when speaking of individual believers Paul wrote,

Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men (Romans 12:17-18).

What about evil governments? Evil governments are just evil decision of evil people in positions of power given to them by God. Since God established them as *a minister of God to you for good*, God will hold the governing officials accountable for doing that.

Question #4. Did God order genocide?

Atheist Richard Dawkins claims that the God of the Old Testament is a "vindictive, bloodthirsty, ethnic cleanser" [Richard Dawkins, The God Delusion, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006), 248].

Definition: Genocide is “the deliberate killing of a large group of people, especially those of a particular ethnic group or nation” (New Oxford American Dictionary – The word was created by a Polish Jew, Dr. Raphael Lemki, and presented to United Nations after Hitler’s attempt to wipe out the Jews).

Answer: Yes, God did order the “killing of a large group of people.” But no, God was not judging ethnicity. God was judging sin and keeping His people from sin. With the cities in the land God had given to Israel He said,

But you shall utterly destroy them, the Hittite and the Amorite, the Canaanite and the Perizzite, the Hivite and the Jebusite, as the LORD your God has commanded you, so that they may not teach you to do according to all their detestable things which they have done for their gods, so that you would sin against the LORD your God. (Deuteronomy 20:16-18, emphasis mine).

Remember the historical context in which God gave the land to Israel. When all the evil people of the world rejected Him, God chose Abraham and through his seed made a people for Himself. Then we are told He gave them *a land for which the Lord your God cares* (Deuteronomy 11:12). God told Israel to possess the land He gave them, not to expand to other places. The Jews have never been empire builders. They have never attempted to expand beyond the borders God gave them.

It should also be noted that the Canaanites Joshua killed were not innocent people. God noted their sin when He told Abraham his descendants would be *strangers in a land that is not theirs... then in the fourth generation they will return here for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete.*

When Joshua entered the land *the iniquity of the Amorite was complete.* Leviticus 18 warns the Israelites not to follow the sins of the Canaanites which included having sex with mothers, sisters, and animals, homosexuality, and sacrificing children to the god Molech. The violence God commanded was not about genetics, it was about sin.

Violent judgment also extended to Israel. The tribe of Benjamin was almost exterminated because they refused to take a stand against the *worthless [homosexual] fellows in Gibeah* (Judges 19:22-25; 20:13). God directed Judah to lead the army against Benjamin. The bloody battle that followed left thousands of Israelites dead *And the LORD struck Benjamin before Israel, so that the sons of Israel destroyed 25,100 men of Benjamin that day, all who draw the sword.* (Judges 20:35).

Event/people	Were they sinning?	Did God provide justice?
The Fall: Adam and Eve	Yes	Yes
The Flood	Yes	Yes
Sodom and Gomorrah	Yes	Yes
The Egyptians	Yes	Yes
The Canaanites	Yes	Yes
The <u>Benjamites</u>	Yes	Yes

Question #5. “Did the God of the Old Testament tell His people to be violent?”

Answer: Individually, no. As a nation, yes. God’s commands in the Old Testament for violence were national, not personal. They were for Israel as a government, not for Israelites as individuals. The nation was to *put to death* individuals who committed serious sin, including violence.

If a man takes the life of any human being,

he shall surely be put to death (Leviticus 24:17)

The Proverbs are an example of God's personal commands, and those commands are about nonviolence. *If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink; for you will heap burning coals on his head, and the LORD will reward you (Proverbs 3:31; 25:21-22; Romans 12:17).*

When a man's ways are pleasing to the LORD, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him. (Proverbs 16:7).

The Old Testament commands for individuals were as nonviolent as New Testament commands for individuals.

Question #6. "Why does God command people to kill women and children?"

Samuel told Saul,

Now go and strike Amalek and utterly destroy all that he has, and do not spare him; but put to death both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey. (1 Samuel 15:3).

Answer: because women and children are as sinful as men and boys. Solomon's foreign wives led him into idolatry. If you leave the women, they will marry your men and draw them into idolatry and immorality. If you leave the children, they will grow up to do the same. For example, suppose you told your spouse "I will wipe out all the adultery in my life – most of the time." Suppose a convicted thief told his parole board, "I will definitely eliminate stealing in my life – most of the time."

But there is another issue here. During the wilderness wanderings Israel had been savagely attacked by Amalekites, and God promised vengeance (Exodus 17:8-16). The killing of the Amalekites was part of the justice of God.

Question #7 "Does the Bible's command *do not kill*, include individual violence for protection?"

Answer: The commandment in Exodus 20:13 has been mistranslated *do not kill*. The Hebrew word רָצַח (ratsach) basically means, *to murder* or *slay*. Here is how it is translated in the NASB: "kills(1), manslayer(19), murder(7), murdered(2), murderer(13), murderers(1), murders(1), put to death(1), slain(1), slew(1)." The command is to not commit murder "the unlawful premeditated killing of one human being by another" (New Oxford American Dictionary).

The Mosaic Law made a distinction between killing someone breaking into your house at night, when the assumption is the family needs to be protected, and someone who just breaks in during the day to steal.

If the thief is caught while breaking in and is struck so that he dies, there will be no bloodguiltiness on his account. But if the sun has risen on him, there will be bloodguiltiness on his account. He shall surely make restitution; if he owns nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft (Exodus 22:2-3).

God does not categorically condemn individual violence. David violently killed Goliath (1 Samuel 17) and tens of thousands of Philistines (1 Samuel 21:11). Samuel violently killed King Agag (1 Samuel 15:33). Abraham used violence to rescue his nephew Lot with a household army (Genesis 14). David used violence to rescue his family, and the families of his men, when they were kidnapped from Ziklag (1 Samuel 30:17). Jesus predicted violence in the judgment of unbelievers (Matthew 8:12). Jesus' commands about turning the other cheek are about forbidding vengeance, not violence for protecting

your family. If you are a parent you have a responsibility to do what is reasonable to defend your family. *But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever* (1 Timothy 5:8). The context here is supporting your parents, but it's a legitimate application to say we are responsible to defend all of our family.

Question #8 "Isn't there more violence in the Bible than in the Quran"?

Answer? There are some low information people that claim the Bible promotes violence more than the Quran. For example Samuel Osborn [@samuelOsborne93, Tuesday 9 February 2016 15:30 GMT] did a study where he concluded,

“Further analysis found that the Old Testament was ... more than twice as violent as the Quran.”

Here is some information.

A. Biblical violence covers many centuries with many authors in many books, the Quran covers 23 years with one author in one book. There are 6,236 verses in the Quran. There are 31,102 verses in the Bible.

“Muslims believe that the Quran was verbally revealed by God to Muhammad through the angel Gabriel (Jibril), gradually over a period of approximately 23 years, beginning on 22 December 609 CE, when Muhammad was 40, and concluding in 632, the year of his death” (Wikipedia).

The Bible was written over a period of 1600 year (between 1500 BC and 100AD) covering the history of over 4000 years. The Quran was written by one person (apparently receiving dictation from an illiterate Mohammed). The Bible is a library of 66 books, written by 40 different authors. So, the Bible has five times more verses, covers 70 times more history, has 39 more authors with 65 more books.

	Violence and Cruelty	Total verses	Percent
Bible	842	31102	2.71
Quran	333	6236	5.34

Yeah, I'd say the Bible has more violence mentioned in it than the Quran. But, according to skepticsannotatedbible.com, the Bible has 842 passages about violence and the Quran has 333. That means 2.71% of the Bible is about violence and 5.34% of the Quran is about violence. Conclusion: on a per verse basis, the Quran has twice as much violence as the Bible.

B. The violence prescribed by God when Israel entered the land, was for a particular time and a particular people. The conquest of Canaan had limits, historically and geographically. Israel had no agenda beyond the land of Canaan. Unlike the believers in the Quran, Israelites were not to torture unbelievers or force them to become part of their religion. For believers in the Bible, violence was not connected to religion. At no time did the God of the Bible command His people to kill unbelievers if they didn't convert to biblical faith.

In the Quran violence is totally connected to: the Muslim religion, world domination through war, torture and death for those who do not convert to Islam. Here is some of the instruction in the Quran.

Sura 5:33 “The only reward of those who make war upon Allah and His messenger and strive after corruption in the land will be that they will be killed or crucified, or have their hands and feet on alternate sides cut off ...”

Sura 9:5 “But when the forbidden months are past, then fight and slay the pagans wherever ye find them, and seize them, beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them in every stratagem [of war]; but if they repent, and establish regular prayers and practice regular charity, then open the way for them: for Allah is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful

Sura 9:29 “Fight those who believe not in Allah nor the Last Day, nor hold that forbidden which hath been forbidden by God and His Apostle, nor acknowledge the religion of Truth, [even if they are] of the

People of the Book [Christians and Jews], until they pay the *jizya* [tribute] with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued”.

C. The Crusades, the Inquisition, and the Salem witch trials were Christian errors which occurred because of people ignoring the Bible, not from reading the Bible. The crusades and the Inquisition were a product of the church keeping the Bible from the people. The crusades (1000s – 1200s) were a response to 400 years of violent Muslim aggression around the Mediterranean and into Byzantium and southern Europe from the 600s to the 1000s. The Inquisition (1100s-1400s with the Spanish inquisition lasting into the 1800s) was a product of the Roman Catholic Church acting like a military tribunal to cleanse the Church (or the Catholic countries) of Protestants, Jews, and unbelievers. Both these violent atrocities were carried out by people who ignored the Bible, with and against a population who was ignorant of the Bible, people who were not allowed to read it for themselves. The Crusades and the Inquisition were a product of the Catholic Church acting like just another aggressive human institution. The Salem witch trials get a lot of attention but are not really in the same category. They happened during one year (spring to fall of 1692 with some into 1693) where 20 people were executed for being witches. But after this time the church regretted it, admitted the trials were a mistake, and compensated the families of those convicted. During one random sample week (the week I taught this material in Poland – March 10-16, 2018) Islam, “The Religion of Peace,” carried out 38 attacks, where 183 people were killed 206 injured, including 3 suicide blasts, in 12 countries (thereligionofpeace.com).

D. Both Christians and Muslims have already had a reformation. Every so often we hear some ignorant commentator says something like, “The Christians have had their reformation, now the Muslims also need to have a reformation.” What they mean is, there are new progressive liberal Christians that ignore the Bible and act like the rest of the liberals. Specifically, they believe both the Bible and the Quran teach violence, but the trend in Christianity is to ignore the Bible and the Muslims need to do the same thing, with the Quran. The reality is, Christians had their reformation when they left the institutional church and began following the Bible into salvation and a Christlikeness, including a non-violent lifestyle. But Islam has also had the same sort of reformation. Islamic terrorist groups are Muslims who have gone back to their book (the Quran) and their leader (Mohammed) for their direction. Islamic terrorism **is** a Muslim reformation.

E. The message of the Bible and that of the Quran can be seen in the conduct of its readers. Christians who follow the Bible are not promoting violence, military conquest, or torture of unbelievers. Let me ask you two questions.

1. How many Christian terrorist groups have you heard of? ----- I’m guessing none.
2. How many Muslim terrorist groups have you heard of? ----- I’m guessing you can name several – like maybe you’ve heard of Al-Qaeda, Hamas, Hezbollah, ISIS or ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria or Levant), or the Palestinian Islamic Jihad in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Here is a list of 29 Islamic terrorist organizations currently operating.

- Abu Sayyaf, Philippines
- Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, Gaza Strip and West Bank
- Al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya, Egypt
- Al-Qaeda, worldwide
- Al-Shabaab, Somalia
- Ansar al-Islam, Iraq
- Ansar al-sharia, Libya
- Armed Islamic Group (GIA), Algeria
- Boko Haram, Nigeria
- Caucasus Emirate (IK), Russia

- East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), China
- Egyptian Islamic Jihad, Egypt
- Great Eastern Islamic Raiders' Front (IBDA-C), Turkey
- Hamas, Gaza Strip and West Bank
- Harkat-ul-Mujahideen al-Alami, Pakistan
- Hezbollah, Lebanon
- Islamic Movement of Central Asia, Central Asia
- Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Uzbekistan
- Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, worldwide
- Jaish-e-Mohammed, Pakistan and Kashmir

- Jamaat Ansar al-Sunna, Iraq
- Jemaah Islamiyah, Indonesia
- Lashkar-e-Taiba, Pakistan and Kashmir
- Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, Pakistan
- Maute (ISIS Affiliated Group in Southeast Asia), Philippine
- Moro Islamic Liberation Front, Philippines
- Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group, Morocco and Europe
- Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Gaza Strip and West Bank
- Tawhid and Jihad, Iraq

Conclusion

The idea that violence is bad comes from the liberal progressive agenda. These people see mankind as evolving into a utopia of peace. That peace will be achieved when we realize (or legislate) all human action as good if it doesn't hurt someone else, or the environment. Therefore, they believe violence is bad and since there is violence in the Bible, the Bible is bad. Since the Bible was written for the glory of God, not the glory of man, it does not fit the progressive agenda.

The reality is, it's humans that are bad, not violence. Violence is neutral. It is bad when used for sin and good when used to judge sin (by God or government). There is violence in the Bible because violence existed and God used it for judgment of sin. He also commanded Israel as a nation to represent His righteousness by meeting heinous sins with violence. But in neither the Old or New Testaments does God command or sanction individual violence of one person against another.

~When a man's ways are pleasing to the LORD, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him (Proverbs 16:7).

~Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you (Luke 6:27).

~If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men (Romans 12:18).