



## Islam in America | A Special Edition from thESource for Youth Ministry

thESource exists to provide  
Jesus-centered resources for  
those at work with youth in  
the Lutheran congregation  
and beyond ...

### THE DIRECTORY

#### talk sheets

THE TRUE ROOT OF TERROR

LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR

RIGHTEOUS WRATH & ANGER  
MANAGEMENT

BUT IS THAT REALLY FAIR?

#### bible studies

HOLY WAR IN THE BIBLE

WHOSE LAND IS IT?

BROKEN TEETH, BLOODY BATHS,  
& BABY BASHING: IS THERE ANY  
PLACE IN THE CHURCH FOR  
IMPRECATORY PSALMS?

## The True Root of Terror | by Dr. Russ Moulds

### Core Text

Gen 6:5 (in the 5-8 context plus the entire Gen 1 - 11 context of sin-judgment-grace)

### Core Visual/Illustrations:

A personal story of genuine fear such as stage fright, an outdoors mishap, being present at a crime, accident or harm to a loved one, etc.

An appreciative description of a local member of the armed forces who has been in Iraq or Afghanistan.

A brief overview of what we know from recent neuroscience about post-traumatic stress syndrome (See WebMD, the APA site, etc.).

A recent local, national, or international news story involving terror and evil (such as a school shooting, kidnapping, etc.).

### Major Teaching /Talking Points

1. Perhaps the first incident of overt terror is found in Gen 3:24, a condition rightly created and managed by God due to sin. This event is immediately followed and contrasted by the Cain and Abel story where man wrongly uses power and force for evil. (Now might be a good place to discuss different definitions of terror.)
2. By Gen 6:5, God's very good creation (cf. Gen 1:31) is in a state of abject corruption. The problem is not this or that behavior or idea. The source of this and all corruption is that "every inclination of the thoughts of man's heart was only evil all the time." Not much wiggle room in this description!
3. Our evil, our wrong use of power and force, and the terror it generates is not limited to any group or person or, for that matter, religion, including Islam. For a sad example among God's Old Testament people, see Judges 19 - 21. No one and no group has a monopoly on terror, and through Gen 6:5, we're all implicated.
4. Yet in ways we do not understand (see Dt 29:29), God still manages all our temporal evil for his own good purposes, just as he did with Adam and Eve's sin and the flaming sword at the Garden of Eden. See such texts as Isa 45:5-7 (in the context of God's words to Cyrus), Isa 55:8-11, and Rom 8:28.
5. What, then, do we understand? The cross was used by the Romans as a deliberate instrument of terror to maintain their power and control as an empire. We now display that cross as the instrument by which God has conquered sin—the source of all terror—and created a new peace for all, terrorist and terrorized alike. (See the words of Saul the persecutor who became Paul the apostle in Gal 6:17.)



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### Questions / Discussion Starters for Youth

1. Consider some different ways to define terror and terrorism. Consider the experience of terror and use of terror at different scales: personal, local, and international.
2. Identify some different groups today and in the past who have used terror to achieve their aims.
3. Christian martyrs, past and present, have been the targets of state terrorism, radical terrorism, and local / individual terrorism. Since they are "martyrs," did they overcome terrorism or did terrorism overcome them? In what way(s) do these Christian martyrs help us.
4. We typically identify three sources for sin. Name them and discuss whether each of the three is a source for terror and terrorism.
5. Moslem suicide bombers are obviously sincere and committed. Why don't we hear anything about Christian suicide bombers?
6. Reflect a bit about Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. What was his attitude about the terror before him and those who would inflict it?



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## Boundary Stones | by Rev. Dr. Jerry Joersz

**Core Text** Romans 13:8-10

### Core Visual/Illustrations:

In OT times, people marked property lines with a single boundary stone or pile of stones (Deut. 19:14). God assigned each neighbor his space and prohibited moving the stones to steal land. Our neighbor's life, possessions and well-being are "sacred space" to be protected by love.

Make a "boundary stone" to remind you of God's commandment "love your neighbor." Using tempera paint, create a design picturing special love for a special need. Pile your stones and pray together for a list of "neighbors in need." Remember: a "neighbor," literally, is "one who is near or close by" (and not just spatially!).

### Major Teaching /Talking Points

#### Teaching Point # 1

Rom. 13:8-10. Christian love for our neighbor means: setting behavior boundaries that we will not cross. God's commandments are behavior boundaries. Love fulfills God's commands because it seeks to do nothing harmful to our neighbor (its negative purpose). Because of God's love in Christ we are obligated to do everything for our neighbor's well-being (positive purpose).

#### Teaching Point #2

Gal. 6:1-5. Christian love for our neighbor means: helping the neighbor caught in harmful or destructive behavior. God's love seeks rescue, just as Christ rescued us. Love requires facing and speaking the truth, not hiding behind denial. A spirit of gentleness and humility—not harsh judgment—goes a long way to restore someone overcome by sinful temptation.

#### Teaching Point #3

James 2:8-13. Christian love for our neighbor means: looking beyond the barriers. Favoritism based on such things as appearance, ethnic background, wealth, popularity, etc. prevent us from showing kindness and mercy to one in need. Just as God's mercy in Christ "triumphs over judgment," so love for our neighbor leads us to put aside a judgmental heart and offer a helping hand.



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### Questions / Discussion Starters for Youth

1. What are the signs that your “neighbor” is hurting and needs a Christian friend to help? Why is it important to sense these signs early?
2. Sometimes love for our neighbor requires tough choices. What is the toughest decision you have ever had to make (that is, to show “tough love”)?
3. Surveys tell us that teenagers believe “honesty and trust are essential in personal relationships.” Yet, significant percentages of them admit to such behaviors as: lying to parents and teachers, cheating on tests, and stealing from others (including copying other people’s work). (See <http://www.josephsoninstitute.org/reportcard/>) How do such things affect others negatively, as well as harm ourselves? How about their affect on relationships?
4. Showing respect for others (1 Pet. 3:15-16; also, Rom. 13:7) and their “life space” may be one of the highest expressions of love for our neighbor. List five specific ways (or the if you feel inspired!) you can show honor to your neighbor.
5. Read Lev. 19:14. This verse is quoted 8 times in the NT! Make a contest of seeing who can find the 8 NT passages quoting this verse the quickest. What does this bare fact tell us about its importance for the Christian faith?

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## Righteous Wrath & Anger Management | by Rev. Peter Nafzger

### Core Text

Romans 12.14, 17-21

### Core Visual/Illustrations:

"Anger Management: 101"

Have the group brainstorm two lists: 1) Reasons that people get angry (both good and bad reasons). 2) Ways people express their anger (both healthy and unhealthy ways).

You may want to include a few famous instances of people expressing their anger – for example, Kenny Rogers' assault of camera man on July 18, 2005; or the brawl during Detroit Pistons and Indiana Pacers game on Nov. 19, 2004 involving Ron Artest, several fans and other players.

### Major Teaching /Talking Points

1. Anger is not a sin. Scripture records times when God was angry (Numbers 32.10-13, Psalm 95.10) and when Jesus was angry (John 2.13-17). There is such a thing as righteous wrath at sin, also for Christians.
2. Although anger itself is not sinful, it can easily lead to sin (Ephesians 4.26). Christians must guard themselves from allowing righteous wrath to express itself in sinful ways.
3. Vengeance belongs to God (Romans 12.19). His vengeance rested upon Jesus in full (Isaiah 53.4-5; 2 Corinthians 5.21), and those outside of Christ will receive their punishment on judgment day (1 Thessalonians 1.6-10).
4. We are called to turn the other cheek (Matthew 5.39), forgive as we have been forgiven (Colossians 3.13), and strive to live at peace with everyone (Romans 12.18). We leave the execution of justice here on earth to the authorities that God has established (Romans 13.1-4).
5. God wants all people to be saved, including those who hurt us (1 Timothy 2.3-4). His love leads us to love our enemies, pray for those who persecute us, and allow the light of Christ to shine in us (1 Peter 2.9).



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### Questions / Discussion Starters for Youth

1. How do you handle anger? When was a time when your anger got out of control?
2. Martin Luther once wrote, “When I am angry I can pray well and preach well.” Discuss the relationship between anger and prayer.
3. After the Amish school shooting on Oct. 2, 2006 members of the Amish community and relatives of the victims publicly forgave the killer. How is that possible? Why is it hard for the secular media to understand how they could forgive him? What message does their forgiveness send the world?
4. When David was confronted by Nathan with his sin against Uriah (2 Samuel 12), he admitted that his sin was primarily against God (2 Samuel 12.13; cf. Psalm 51). All sins, even sins committed against us personally, are first and foremost sins against God. How does knowing that God willingly forgives those who sin against him affect our ability to forgive those who sin against us?
5. What are some appropriate expressions of anger in response to terrorism and violence? What are some inappropriate expressions?

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## But Is That Really Fair?| by Rev. Jeff Kunze

**Core Text** John 14:1-6

Supporting passages: John 3:16, Mark 16:16, John 5:24, John 20:31

### Core Visual/Illustrations:

Skit: "Need to Escape! Follow Me!"

Characters:

4 people (One of the four is the leader of the group). An Intercom Voice

Setting:

In an office/board room/or something of the like gathered around a table for a meeting. An alarm will sound soon after the meeting begins, indicating everyone should evacuate the building because of fire!

A Little Context:

These "experts" have gathered for a meeting of the minds—they've been called to "solve the world's problems."

The Scene:

The five introduce and converse among themselves...

P1: Hi. What's that? I parked in the south entrance and came up the side stairway.

P2: Me, too. No wait...I thought that door was locked so I came in the back entrance.

P3: It's a big building; I got lost. Not sure which way I ended up taking... there were some elevators that got me to this floor and here we are. Nice to meet all of you.

L: Welcome everyone! Sorry about the confusion; our Main Entrance is almost impossible to find after all the building projects going on here. People get lost all the time. At least we're all here now and I want to welcome you....

(Making the sound of an alarm!) Voice: ATTENTION ALL OCCUPANTS OF THE BUILDING! SMOKE HAS BEEN DETECTED IN THE BUILDING AND EVERYONE IS TO EVACUATE!

All look puzzled and worried.

L: Great! We didn't even get a chance to get started.

The leader stays at the table, pulls out a piece of paper and begins to study it. Meanwhile, the other three split up, each quickly going to a window looking for the best way to get out.

P1: We need to leave! I think I came up this way! I know how to get out, follow me! (Starts to head for an exit, then retreats back to the window...)

P2: Wait, that's not the way! I don't see any smoke coming up this side of the building and I'm sure there's outside stairs...Yes! A fire escape! I can see it! Let's go this way!



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P3: Are you sure? What if we open one of the doors outside of this room and cause some kind of explosion? I think we should just stay put! This is a big building, right? Maybe, if in fact there really is a fire, they'll put it out and we can just go on with our meeting. Walks back to the table and sits nervously.

P1: Didn't you hear the announcement and the alarm? We need to get out. Get up! Follow me everyone! I know the safest way!

P2: Have you been here before? How do you know your way is safest? Follow me! Look, I can see the fire escape from here; it's obvious this is the best way!

P3: (Getting up and going to P2) Okay, I'm going with you. Although I'm really afraid of heights!

P1: You two can go your own way; I've got a good feeling my way is the right way. I've always trusted my instincts and they've never let me down. I'm following my gut! Looking to the leader- What about you?

L: Actually, all three of you are wrong. If you go out your way (looking at P2 & P3) you will get stuck with tragic consequences. That fire escape is being torn down from the bottom up; you just can't see the bottom from here.

P2: (Looking back out the window) Really? Okay then we'll just jump when we get to the end...

P3: (looking at P2) How far down do you think it is? I'm scared...think you can catch me?

P1: That settles it! Let's go my way! I know how I got here and I'm going out the same way!

L: (looking at P1) And if you go your way it will take you down a hallway that goes right next to some boilers that could explode. If the fire is in that part of the building you'll never make it.

V: ATTENTION! THERE IS A FIRE IN THE BUILDING AND IT IS SPREADING FAST! EVERYONE IS TO EVACUATE IMMEDIATELY!

P3: I wonder how everyone else in the building is getting out. Maybe we should find out and follow them?

L: (Looking up from paper) Okay people, listen up! I've got the right way. Follow me!

P1: What makes you so certain? Maybe you'll lead us right into the fire? Why should we follow you?

L: Because I've got this! (Holds up paper).

P2: What's that?

L: These are the Architect's Blueprints. And written here in bold lettering it says, "Escape Route!" I don't know about you, but I'm following the Architect's plans!

P1 begins to look interested and starts to move toward L.

P2: But you said there's been a lot of construction going on around here. Maybe those blueprints are outdated and that way isn't the best way anymore!



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L: Listen, I can't make you all follow me; but I trust these plans! You can follow your gut or what “looks” like the right way, but I've got the plans of the One who built this place! (P1 is looking over L's shoulder) And if it says this is the Way (pointing to the paper), I'm going this way!

(Leader begins to exit and P1 starts to follow) P1: Um, can I go with you? (Both exit)

L: Follow me! (L & P1 exit the room. Make sure it's in a direction different from where the three were initially standing. You might want to squeeze between chairs to make it look like a “narrow way” to add to the symbolism).

P3 looks confused but stays with P2.

P2: (Shaking head in disgust) This is a no-brainer! (looking out the window) I can see where it says “Fire Escape” we're going this way! Let's go! We can just jump at the end of the stairs; I'm sure there's someone there who will catch us. (P3 looks worried but follows P2 and both exit in a different direction).

End.

## Major Teaching /Talking Points

Teaching Point #1

Jesus is the Way, the only Way to the Father, the only way to heaven! (John 14:6)

Teaching Point #2

This is the core belief of the Christian Church. (John 20:31)

Teaching Point #3

The Father's inclusive love and the narrow door. (Luke 13:22ff; John 3:16-21)

## Questions / Discussion Starters for Youth

How do you respond to someone who says, “It doesn't matter what you call God or who you believe in as long as you believe in something”? Or, “God is universal! He (or she) just wants us to be spiritual”?

Discussion point: Jesus is not merely an “insurance policy” that is, “I might as well as believe that Jesus is God and Savior in case He really is. It can't hurt. And hey! I'll keep an open mind to the other religions...you know, just in case they're the right ones!”

Believing in God is more than just believing a God exists (Even the Devil knows He exists!) That is not faith. Faith is a relationship and trust that comes through the Holy Spirit (see 1 Corinthians 12:3). Our belief, our faith in our Triune God means He has brought us into a close, personal relationship with Jesus Christ.



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### Other Discussion Points / Bonus Material...do what you want with this extra stuff:

Speaking of relationships, if I'm going to be that close to my Maker, I don't want to approach Him with a huge debt. But with that debt paid in full (thank You, Jesus!) I can approach God like a child to her father—with loving confidence.

When you give a witness / an account of the hope you have (Colossians 4:6) don't try to “sell Jesus.” He's not for sale! Confess your faith by sharing the peace He has brought into your life. And remember it is only the Holy Spirit who can turn a heart from darkness to the light of Jesus; it's not your job to convert anyone, that's His job! But He does ask that we bring His powerful, living Word into places that do not yet know the Savior. (Isaiah 52:7)

How do you answer those who say that Christianity is “not fair” or is too polarizing? Have you heard this comment before, “If you think such a powerful, almighty God would limit the way to ‘heaven’ through a single door, that doesn't say much for your powerful God; I think a God that big who is supposed to be loving and all would make many ways to salvation”? The Gospel reality is this: because God is so loving and powerful He made the Way to salvation absolutely clear. He didn't leave us guessing what might be the right way...”Is it that door; or that door over there...?” The only door to the Father in heaven is Jesus Christ. He demonstrated His love with outstretched arms on the cross for the sins of the world and they remain open wide for the world that whoever hears His “Blueprints” for salvation and believes in Him has passed from death to life! (John 5:24)

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## Jihad - Holy War - in the Bible | by Rev. Dr. Reed Lessing

Shock and outrage were two of the most prominent reactions to the events of Sept. 11, 2001. Yet those even casually acquainted with the Old Testament are aware that there is some correspondence between the Muslim jihad and the Old Testament idea "holy war." There are roughly sixty battle accounts from the exodus (1446 BC) to 586 BC (the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem) in which Israel is involved in some kind of war. About one-fourth of these contain clear references to "holy war." But if genocide and ethnic cleansing is morally wrong in the twenty-first century A.D. was it also wrong in the fifteenth or thirteenth centuries B.C.? Put another way, how are the atrocities of our day that are done in the name of religion different from the slaughter of Canaanite men, women and children prisoners of war that we read about in the Old Testament? (cf. e.g., Joshua 6). And even more pressing, how could this God command such slaughter, especially since in the New Testament Jesus commands believers to love and pray for enemies? (cf. Matt. 5:44).

These questions present a moral dilemma for Christian readers of the Old Testament and evoke another set of queries. How should we apply the Old Testament holy wars to our lives? Should a wedge be placed between the Old and New Testaments in order to preserve the integrity of both? Can there be a connection between these ancient accounts of God's people Israel and the image of God as Savior so prevalent in the Gospels?

Some make the claim that the Old Testament is a document of Israel's history and only secondarily an authoritative document for the church. They believe Israel's Great Commission as one of annihilation as opposed to the New Testament's mission of love, forgiveness and reconciliation. Proponents of this view believe that the holy war texts of the Old Testament are "pre-Christ, sub-Christ and anti-Christ."

The critique of this view is that – if not in theory then in practice – this position almost de-canonizes three-fourths of the Bible. It means that the only texts that apply to Christians are found in the New Testament. This understanding also overlooks the fact that if "the LORD is a Man of War" (Exod. 15:3), then so is Jesus who "judges and makes war," who is "dressed in a robe dipped in blood," and from whose mouth "comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations" (Rev. 19:11-15). The revelation of Jesus in the New Testament is no less violent than the revelation of the LORD in the Old Testament.

So is there another way to look at these Old Testament texts? Yes there is. At its root holy war is a battle against spiritual darkness and wickedness in realms that transcend the human and earthly (cf. Gen. 3:15; Job 1:6-12; 2:2-6; Eph. 6:10-18; Col. 2:13-15). The paradigmatic Song of the Sea ought to be understood in these terms, for it not only celebrates the LORD's triumph over Pharaoh and his armies (Exodus 15:1, 4-5) but also has clear overtones of an even more profound and significant victory, one over every competing deity real or imaginary. "Who among the gods is like you, O LORD? Who is like you – majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?" (Exodus 15:11). Pharaoh and Egypt become ciphers for Satan and his kingdom, hence "in, with and under" Israel's enemies are the "spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Eph. 6:12). Such enemies cannot be pacified – they must be destroyed.



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The issue, then, cannot be whether or not genocide is intrinsically good or evil – its sanction by a holy God settles that question. Rather, the issue has to do with the purpose of genocide, its initiator, and the particular circumstances of its application. Biblical genocide was part of a holy-war policy enacted for a unique situation, directed against a certain people, and in line with the character of God himself, a policy whose design is beyond human comprehension but one that is not, for that reason, unjust or immoral. Those very limitations preclude any possible justification of modern genocide for any reason.

The baptized are involved in “holy war” every day, only our enemy is not “flesh and blood” (Eph. 6:12) but Satan “who comes to kill, steal, and destroy” (John 10:10). We are called upon to “put on the full armor of God” (Eph. 6:11) and be prepared for battle (Eph. 6:13-17). When Jesus comes again many promises will be fulfilled. He will separate believers from unbelievers (Matt. 25:31-46). He will say to those who trusted in his salvation, “Come and enter into the joy of the Master” (Matt. 25:21, 23). But on this day the final holy war will take place (Rev. 19:11-21).

To summarize: “Holy war” is what God uniquely commanded in the Old Testament. The New Testament transforms the idea to indicate that the baptized are involved in a spiritual war. However on the Last Day Jesus will defeat his enemies and throw them into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:15).

For further study see *Show Them No Mercy: Four Views on God and Canaanite Genocide*. C.S. Cowles, Eugene H. Merrill, Daniel L. Gard and Tremper Longman III, edited by Stanley N. Gundry. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003.



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## Whose Land Is It? | by Rev. Dr. Reed Lessing

"Toddler Property Laws" are as follows. "If I like it, it's mine. If it's in my hand, it's mine. If I can take it from you, it's mine. If I had it a little while ago, it's mine. It must never appear to be yours in any way, because it is always and forevermore mine!"

Over the millennia numerous rulers, governments, and nations have looked at the land of Israel and said, "Mine!" The land once belonged to the Amorites (Gen. 15:16) and then it was possessed by the Israelites (Gen. 17:8). Assyrians (2 Kings 17:6), Babylonians (2 Kings 25:22), Persians (2 Chron. 36:23), Greeks (Dan. 11:1-5), and Romans (Luke 3:1) also subsequently claimed ownership. And since the end of the New Testament period Byzantine, Ottoman, and British empires have looked at this land and said "Mine!" So who's land is it?

From the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. until 1840's the question of who owned Palestine was answered politically; that is to say, whoever had the military might and diplomatic ability owned the land. In the 1840's, however, a Plymouth Brethren minister from England named John Nelson Darby began teaching that the question of Palestine's ownership needed to be answered theologically.

Picking up where Darby left off, Cyrus Scofield propagated the idea that God forever gave the land of Palestine to the Jews in his influential Scofield Reference Bible, first published in 1909. Prior to these teachings of Darby and Scofield, most Christians (including Lutherans) understood the ownership of Palestine to be a political and not a theological issue. All of that has changed. There are now millions of Christians who embrace the idea that the 1948 state of Israel is by divine decree and a sign of that we live in "the last days."

If Scofield popularized the teachings of Darby, then Jerry Jenkins and Tim LaHaye have taken Scofield's ideas and disseminated them a hundred fold. Jenkins and LaHaye, authors of the Left Behind series of novels, also believe the fuse that ignited "the last days" was ethnic Israel's return to the land of Palestine in 1948. They call this "the super sign of biblical prophecy" because supposedly now we are in the last generation before the rapture of the Church. Now, within a generation of 1948, the Church Age (the sixth dispensation) will end with the rapture. This will be followed by seven years of suffering and destruction, called the Tribulation. After this Christ will return visibly as judge and usher in the seventh dispensation, his 1,000 year reign on earth. During this time, however, unbelievers will increase. Christ will return (again) and bring all evil to an end. After this he will usher in the new heavens and new earth. The key, however, to the unfolding of these events is the belief that the land of Palestine forever belongs to the Jews.

But when Jesus speaks about the land (Luke 19:41-44) he makes no reference to it ever being restored to the Jews. Rather he taught his disciples to look forward – not a Jewish return to the land – but to the coming of Son of Man in his glory, on the Last Day (Matt. 24:30-31; Luke 21:25-28; Dan. 7:13-14).

Until the Day of Pentecost the disciples shared the same nationalistic understanding of the land as the other Jews of the First Century (cf. Luke 24:21; Acts 1:6). But after the coming of the Holy Spirit they began to use Old Testament language concerning the land in new ways. One example comes from the pen of Peter who speaks of our inheritance, which unlike the land of Palestine, "can never perish, spoil or fade" (1 Peter 1:4). The book of Hebrews is filled with examples of how the New Testament reinterprets the land. Christians have the land, which is described as the rest into which they have entered through Christ, in a way which even Joshua did not achieve for Israel (3:12-4:11). In Hebrews 11:13-16 the central gospel motif is the land.



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The pilgrimage of faith is set in three scenes: (1) a land from which they set out in faith, (2) the present context of wandering, and (3) the hoped-for homeland that is a "better", indeed a "heavenly" city.

It is estimated that 42 million Christians in the United States believe that Israel's resettlement of the land in 1948 is the key to a correct understanding of the end times. They contend that Old Testament prophecies regarding not only the land, but also such promises as the rebuilding of the temple and the reinstitution of its sacrifices must be literally fulfilled.

It is clear from Scripture, however, that these Old Testament promises are to be read in the light of the New Testament (Col. 2:16-17). The Old Testament revelations of God's acts in the history of Israel are shadows, images, forms and prophecies. The New Testament announces the reality, substance and final fulfillment of these promises in the person and work of Jesus Christ (John 5:39; Luke 24:44). The question, then, is not whether the land promises of the Old Testament are to be understood literally or spiritually. It is instead a question of whether they should be understood in terms of Old Testament shadows or in terms of the New Testament realities.

When the New Testament is allowed to interpret the Old Testament it follows that the 1948 state of Israel is not a prophetic realization of the Messianic kingdom of Jesus Christ. His kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36). Furthermore, a day should not be anticipated in which Christ's kingdom will manifest Jewish distinctives, whether by its location in the land of Palestine, its capital in Jerusalem, its constituency, or its ceremonial institutions and practices. The Old Testament needs to be viewed in light of Jesus Christ (cf. 2 Cor. 1:20).

When people point to the 1948 state of Israel as a concrete manifestation of God's presence they also overlook the fact that God has left visible and tangible signs indicating that he is with his people. 1 John 5:7-8 states: "For there are three that testify: the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement." God testifies to being present with his Church right now by means of the Spirit-inspired and Christ-centered Old and New Testament Scriptures, the water of baptism, as well as the true body and blood of Jesus in Holy Communion. The assurance of God's working in the world is therefore not based upon the return of the Jews to their ancestral land, but rather on the sure Word of promise of forgiveness of sins imparted in the means of grace, the Gospel and the Sacraments.

To summarize: There is no suggestion, therefore, that Jesus or the apostles believed the Jewish people still have a divine right to the land, or that the Jewish possession of the land would be an important – let alone central – aspect of God's plan for the world. The hope of the baptized is not placed upon current events in the Middle East. Rather we are called to fix our eyes upon Jesus (Heb. 12:3), even as we long and pray for his Second and Final Advent. On that day he will raise us from the dead and usher us into the new heavens and the new earth. Then Jesus will lovingly gaze upon all the baptized and say, "I have redeemed you, I have called you by name, you are always and forevermore mine!" (cf. Isa. 43:1).

For a more comprehensive study of the biblical teaching about the land please see the 1989 CTCR document entitled "The End Times: A Study on Eschatology and Millennialism" and the 2004 CTCR document entitled "A Lutheran Response to the Left Behind Series" along with its accompanying Bible Study.

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## Broken Teeth, Bloody Baths, & Baby Bashing: Is there any place in the Church for the Imprecatory Psalms?

by Rev. Dr. Reed Lessing

"Break the teeth in their mouth, O God!" (Ps. 58:6). "The righteous will be glad when ... they bathe their feet in the blood of the wicked" (Ps. 58:10). "Blessed is he ... who seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks" (Ps. 137:8b-9). How did such barbaric words make their way into the prayer book of God's people? Are these texts really part of the same tradition that admonishes the faithful to "turn the other cheek" (Luke 6:29), "walk the extra mile" (Matt. 5:41), and "bless, and do not curse" (Rom. 12:14)?

The sentiments of broken teeth, bloody baths, and baby bashing are not confined to a few psalms, in fact thirty-two of them fall under the ominous title, "imprecatory." They are often categorized into these three groups: imprecations against societal enemies (58, 94), imprecations against national enemies (68, 74, 79, 83, 129, 137), and imprecations against personal enemies (5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 17, 28, 31, 35, 40, 52, 54, 55, 56, 59, 69, 70, 71, 104, 109, 139, 140, 141, 143).

But before we accuse the Old Testament of such atrocities we have to face the fact that in the first book about the Christian Church, and this in its first chapter, Luke records an event when Peter quotes from both Pss. 69 and 109 – two of the most notorious of the imprecatory psalms. The apostle goes on to quote from these two psalms with the words that these texts, "had to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through the mouth of David concerning Judas ..." (cf. Acts 1:16, 20; Pss. 69:25; 109:8). Does this mean that the imprecatory psalms – all thirty-two of them – were inspired by the Holy Spirit? How did this state of affairs come about?

The answer is in Gen. 12:3. Here the LORD promises Abra[ha]m, "the one cursing you I will curse." God promises to curse Israel's enemies. The LORD, and not Israel, is the one doing the cursing. "Vengeance is mine, I will repay," says the LORD" (cf. Deut. 32:35 Rom. 12:19).

When psalmists call down curses it is because enemies have been disloyal to the LORD's covenant. As a consequence, the covenant breaker deserves the LORD's covenant curses. So when Israel's God enacts vengeance, "his sword is all blood, it is gorged with fat" (Isa. 34:6), this is because he is "contending for Zion" (Isa. 34:8). Without vengeance upon Israel's enemies there can be no salvation for Israel (cf. Isa. 35:4; Rev. 20:11-15).

The theology of imprecation appears in many places in the New Testament (cf. e.g., Acts 8:20, 13:10-11; 1 Cor. 16:22; Gal. 5:12; 2 Tim. 4:14; Rev. 6:9-11; 14:19-20; 18:4-8, 20; 19:1-3, 15). The classic example comes in Gal. 1:8-9 when the apostle invokes an anathema upon the enemies of the Gospel. The word anathema is lexically and theologically equivalent to the Hebrew word *herem* which appears in Israel's holy war texts and means utter annihilation. Standing in the same tradition, Jesus also uttered prayers of imprecation upon his enemies (e.g., Matt. 11:20-24; 23:13-39; Mark 11:14).

To be sure, love and forgiveness are the Church's major key. But what has happened to her minor key? Just look at any Christian hymnal that includes psalms and see how many of them are imprecatory.



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Christians continue to be victims of violent and unthinkable acts of hatred. There are countless Christians – even in the West – who are suffering horrific atrocities. Those who face sustained injustice, hardened enmity, and gross oppression must learn to pray imprecatory psalms. They are God’s gift so that sufferers are able to hold fast to their human dignity while at the same time endure hardship nonviolently. Luther puts it this way: “We should pray that our enemies be converted and become our friends and, if not, that their doing and designing be bound to fail and have no success and that their persons perish rather than the Gospel and the kingdom of Christ” (Luther’s Works, vol. 21, The Sermon on the Mount and the Magnificat, eds. Jaroslav Pelikan and A.T.W. Steinhilber [St. Louis: Concordia, 1956], 1000).

To summarize: A war is going on and it is a war of opposing powers with eternal consequences. In this war the baptized experience casualties, traitors, and triumphs. Our weapon is the “sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God” (Eph. 6:17) and this weapon is not one of sweet passivity, but of life and death. It is a weapon that includes both “the kindness and the severity of God” (Rom. 11:22). In times of acute and ongoing distress we must invoke the severity of God as expressed in the imprecatory psalms. It is our way of coming before the Lord and throwing the sword to him, for “the battle belongs to the LORD” (1 Sam. 17:47).

For further study see John N. Day, *Crying for Justice: What the Psalms teach us about Mercy and Vengeance in an age of Terrorism*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005.