

Rereading Narratives of Safety and Security in Ancient Israel from a Pastoral Perspective

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Abstract

The present study investigates the concept of safety and security in the Hebrew Bible in order to demonstrate that our concern for self-defence in the modern post-biblical world was also a prerogative among biblical societies. Numerous inferences to self-defence in the Hebrew Bible show that ancient Israelite societies did not take preparedness against enemy attack lightly. In this essay, lessons on safety and security drawn from ancient Israelite societies will be appropriated in the Zimbabwean context. This appropriation is necessary because safety and security was critical in ancient Israel as it is in our post-colonial Zimbabwean society. Constructive themes from the Hebrew Bible will be appropriated as lessons to be learnt from the narratives about ancient Semitic peoples who are purported to have lived in a “real” physical, yet historical, space. Admittedly, the biblical text depicts that bad/negative things happened in ancient Israel. However, in this study self-defence is explored in a positive light in order to sensitise modern societies to the importance of preparedness against potential aggressors. In addition, the study attempts to encourage the readership to conceptualise ideals of moral values and high ethical integrity which the biblical text seeks to promote. Having said that, some pastoral perspectives on safety and security, as well as self-defence, are also explored.

Keywords: Yahweh; Israel; the Torah; murder; rape; assault; Hebrew Bible; Old Testament; self-defence; safety and security

Introduction

The Hebrew Bible (HB) reveals that self-defence, safety, and security were critical matters among communities in ancient Israel. Narratives about the traditions, cultures, and customs of ancient Israel are presented in a fashion that shows that self-defence, safety, and security were critical in everyday life. Obedience, faithfulness, practicing



the teachings of the Pentateuch (or rather the Torah), keeping the Sabbath, and tithing, among numerous other requirements, would guarantee peace, safety, and security, and blessings by Yahweh (Thompson 1963; Scurlock 2006). When Israel did the opposite, curses, starvation, exposure to enemy attack, invasion, and deportation followed (Rugwiji 2013, 54). The HB is replete with narratives on self-defence, safety, and security. The importance attached to safety and security during ancient biblical times can be noted in various OT books (Judg 3:31; 1 Sam 25:13; Neh 4:13–14,17-18; Esth 8:11; Psa 82:4; 144:1–2; Prov 24:11; Ezek 33:6; Joel 3:10; and Zech 2:8). The blessings that Yahweh vowed to give to the children of Israel for their faithfulness included a strong national defence and peace (Van Wyk 2002, 139). For example, when the Israelites were oppressed by the Philistines during the rule of the judges, they turned to worship local gods, and when war broke out there were no spears or swords amongst the 40 000 Israelites. The Bible links disarmament with the judgement of God (Van Wyk 2002, 140).

This study investigates the concept of self-defence in the HB in order to demonstrate that Yahweh was concerned about the safety and security of Israel. At the same time, a discussion of self-defence does not preclude believing communities today from considering the safety and security of their family members against potential aggressors. This essay does not seek to motivate vengeance because self-defence is not the same as vengeance and the biblical text portrays Yahweh declaring that “Vengeance is mine” (Lev 19:18; Deut 32:35). Primarily, narrative approach and desk research constitute the main techniques employed to develop this argument.

Statement of the Problem

First, I am not unaware of the complexities associated with firearms, especially with regards to reports of firearms being abused. Hence, there have been calls for a restriction on firearm ownership because some of those who already own guns abuse them, e.g., intentional murder, house-breaking, or robbery.

Second, I admit that numerous works have been published to date which focus primarily on abuse of firearms and fatalities perpetuated by someone in possession of a firearm. Newspaper articles frequently report on deaths involving firearms in our society. However, very few have succeeded in illuminating the ideology of self-defence in our society as an attempt to equip (both mentally and materially) individuals against enemy attack, assault, armed robbery, and/or rape.

Third, with cases of house-breaking, robbery, and deaths involving firearms increasing every day, it becomes necessary to sensitise the readership (and members of society at large, including those who congregate for prayers at night) that they are disadvantaged, vulnerable, and at risk if they are not equipped in self-defence.

Research Methodology

This study has been motivated largely by reading literature (desk research) on self-defence, particularly among believing communities, e.g., Christians, because, as Van Wyk's experiences illustrates, no place is totally free — not even a church (Van Wyk 2002, 7). Many works have already been published on self-defence in the HB and in our modern post-biblical world. Secondary sources utilised in this debate include, but are not limited to, the following: Fredriksen (2015), Martin (2014), Killebrew (2005), Frey (2004), Kopel (2004), Van Wyk (2002), Brownlie (1998), Bar-Yosef (1986), Ramcharan (1985), and Jordan (1984). Narratives which depict self-defence within the HB itself have served as primary sources to the present study. My personal experiences¹ have also influenced this debate in which some thoughts on precautionary measures towards safety and security have been filtered in.

Self-defence in the HB

Evidence from the biblical text suggests that self-defence was not taken for granted during ancient biblical times. Various examples will suffice. The author of the book of Genesis writes:

And for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal. And from each human being, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of another human being. Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made humankind. (Gen 9:5–6)

The book of Exodus is popular with many Bible readers who have familiarised themselves with the Decalogue (Ten Commandments). On Mount Sinai, Moses received the Ten Commandments (laws) from Yahweh and one of them forbade the shedding of human blood: “You shall not murder” (Exod 20:13). The book of Numbers states: “If anyone strikes someone a fatal blow with an iron object, that person is a murderer; the murderer is to be put to death” (Num 35:16). Nevertheless, if a man had killed someone unintentionally, that man “may flee to one of these cities and save his life” (Deut 19:5). Deuteronomy further warns:

But if out of hate someone lies in wait, assaults and kills a neighbour, and flees to of these cities, the killer must be sent for by the town elders, be brought back from the city, and be handed over to the avenger of blood to die. Show no pity. You must purge from

1 In March 2017, I went home to Chinhoyi (Zimbabwe) to visit my family. While my wife and I were sleeping, our belongings, including clothes, wallet (with money, bank cards, driver's licence, ID), handbags, and cell phones were stolen because we had left the windows open when we went to bed. When we reported the theft to the police we later realised that the robbers use long iron bars/sticks (smaller in thickness) with hooks on the other end to bring out smaller items in between the burglar bars.

Israel the guilt of shedding innocent blood, so that it may go well with you (Deut 19:11–13).

Numerous texts in the HB show that Yahweh did not consider it a sin when an Israelite killed an adversary who attempted to attack His chosen people, Israel. For example, in the book of Judges, a man called Shamgar, son of Anath, saved Israel by killing six hundred Philistines with an ox-goad (Judg 3:31). In addition, we read that David had six hundred armed men, of which he took four hundred, while the other two hundred were left behind to guard the supplies (1 Sam 25:13). David, who had already killed a lion and a bear when he was a shepherd (1 Sam 17:34, 36), had so mastered the art of killing at a tender age that he could even challenge the Philistine giant Goliath, to whom he said, “Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield, but I come to thee in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied” (1 Sam 17:45). According to Goliath, it was strange for young David to engage in a fight without a sword, a spear, and a shield. King Saul had also offered to equip young David with weapons fit for a battle (1 Sam 17:38). However, David preferred his sling; a missile released from a sling killed Goliath (1 Sam 17:45–49). Cheri Huber and June Shiver could not have said it better when they wrote, “Anything you practise, you get good at” (Huber and Shiver 2010, 57). We also read that “The Lord our God helps us fight our battles” (2 Chr 32:8), and that “He trains our arms for battle” (2 Sam 22:35). Similarly, we read in Nehemiah

the people by their clans with their swords, their spears and their bows ... so that these men would fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters and your wives and your homes... Those who carried burdens were loaded in such a way that each laboured on the work with one hand and held his weapon with the other. And each of the builders had his sword strapped at his side while he built. The man who sounded the trumpet was beside me. (Neh 4:13–18)

The psalmist was equally aware of potential aggressors when he wrote “Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked” (Psa 82:4). He further acknowledges that “Blessed be the Lord my strength which teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight” (Psa 144:1). In the same vein, a rereading of the book of Proverbs is also in order with regards to the concept of self-defence, which reiterates that “Rescue those who are unjustly sentenced to die; save them as they stagger to their death” (Prov 24:11). The prophet Joel also reminds the reader of the importance of readiness for battle where he writes “Beat your ploughshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears. Let the weakling say, ‘I am strong’” (Joel 3:10). With the idea of engaging in battle in Joel’s mind, the opposite will also be required when the battle is over in which “the swords will be beaten into ploughshares, and spears into pruning hooks” (Isa 2:4).

The HB stresses the commitment on the part of Israel towards defending and protecting their loved ones, family, or community. Yahweh’s preparedness and determination

towards safeguarding Israel's identity is typically shown when the HB refers to Israel as "the apple of Yahweh's own eye" (Deut 32:10; Zech 2:8). The other references to self-defence include the story of Esther and Mordechai who were not intimidated by Haman's plot (during the reign of Xerxes over Persia 486–465 B.C.E.) to exterminate the Jews (Esth 9:1–10). The writer of the book of Jeremiah regards Yahweh as the provider of strength and weapons when he says "You are my war club, my weapon for battle; with you I shatter nations, with you I destroy kingdoms" (Jer 51:20).

The purpose of building walls and enclosures, for example around Jerusalem, Tel Gezer, Tel Megiddo (Brandfon 1977, 79–84), and Jericho (Bar-Yosef 1986, 157–162) also needs to be brought into the spotlight in view of the concept of safety and security as depicted in the biblical text. The purpose for rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem by Ezra-Nehemiah was to protect the city and its inhabitants, the temple, and the temple treasures received from Babylonia (Ezra 1:5–11; Neh 7:1; Rugwiji 2013, 56). Nehemiah pleaded with king Artaxerxes for materials to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem (Rugwiji 2013, 45; Stern 2001, 434; Neh 2:7–8). Scholars, among them Israel Finkelstein (2008), have accepted the description of the reconstruction of the walls as historical, although they are divided on the reason for the fortifications (see, for example, Finkelstein 2008, 507). However, it is argued that the walls formed a strong and secure fortification for the city (Ashton 1992, 137). King Artaxerxes saw the walls as a true fortification and the authorisation of its rebuilding as a genuine "rearmament" (North 1969, 434). Nevertheless, Edelman (2005, 206) presupposes that for Artaxerxes the walls would provide protection for the civilian population, and government officials would man the fort and carry out the administration of the province. In both cases, the walls would provide a security system for everything in the enclosure. Meanwhile, gates as entrances into the enclosure played a critical role as security systems. A gate was found at Iron-Age Arad, a desert fortress in the Negev. With its square guard towers, the fortress was on top of a hill (Albright 1983, 48). Albright's findings seem to concur with the narrative in the book of Ezekiel which urges the watchman (probably located on the hilltop) to alert the people to potential aggressors. In Ezekiel 33:6, we read:

But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet to warn the people and the sword comes and takes someone's life, that person's life will be taken because of their sin, but I will hold the watchman accountable for their blood.

The walls of Jericho remind us of the biblical story describing the conquest of this ancient town by Joshua and the invading Israelite army (Bar-Yosef 1986, 157). The biblical narrative states, "Now the gates of Jericho were securely barred because of the Israelites. No one went out and no one came in" (Josh 6:1 NIV). However, while the town walls destroyed by Joshua's army have not been found (Killebrew 2005; Jacobs 2000), a series of Early Bronze and Middle Bronze Age walls and an impressive rampart have been uncovered and studied in detail. These findings throw some light on how

ancient biblical societies of Joshua's time used to construct walls which provided enclosures in which people lived.

There were also about fifteen gates on Jerusalem's walls during New Testament times (Albright 1983, 49). Gates were primarily built along plans that disallowed entrance by enemy soldiers (Albright 1983, 49). These gates were secured by strong locks of brass, iron, or wood. Archaeologists found keys which were close to two feet in length (Albright 1983, 48). Josephus is also reported mentioning the solid Corinthian brass doors of the "Beautiful Gate" of the Temple (Acts 3:2). It is further stated that there was a Hellenistic gate at Perga where John Mark left Paul (Albright 1983, 48).

Pacifism versus Activism

Many people today talk about pacifism and point out that the Bible emphasises being pacifistic. Many Christians have dedicated themselves to opposing all forms of violence (Vantassel 2009, 12). War and its accompanying use of lethal force run counter to the life and teaching of Christ and even the broader thrust of the New Testament (Vantassel 2009; Hays 1996). Emphasis on pacifism has drawn criticism from numerous biblical commentators who continuously refer to texts such as the book of Exodus as depicting teaching on revenge:

If men strive, and hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit departs from her, and yet no mischief follows: he shall be surely punished, according as the woman's husband will lay upon him; and he shall pay as the judges determine. And if any mischief follows, then thou shalt give life for life; eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot; burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe. (Exod 21:22–25)

Critics who dwell much on pacifism have drawn such a concept from the New Testament, particularly the teachings of Jesus. According to Jesus,

... whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. (Matt 5:39–41)

Other references which are cited as pacifistic in character, are statements made by Jesus as in the following examples:

- Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me; Rejoice and be glad because great is your reward in heaven for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before (Matt 5:11–12);
- Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? (Matt 6:25);

- Remember what I told you; a servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they obey yours also (John 15:20);
- These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world (John 16:33).

In some instances, Jesus appears to be in agreement with the teaching of the Torah, for example, “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil” (Matt 5:17). Many biblical commentators have critiqued the practicality of Jesus’ teachings, particularly where he encourages those in tribulation to “be of good cheer”. Jesus’ teaching in this regard has invited a plethora of criticisms, particularly by scholars who question Jesus for perceiving ordinary people of his time as superhuman (Beale 2005, 15). For example, it seems ambiguous and unrealistic for Paul and Silas to sing in prison (Acts 16:16–40). Beale (2005), among others, regards it as grossly paradoxical for Christians to accept “joyfully” the seizure of their property as stated in the book of Hebrews (Heb 10:34).

In my view, Jesus regarded the teaching of the Law/Torah (Exod 21:22–25) as being fulfilled by His teaching (Matt 5:39–41). As Richard B. Miller observes, to override a *prima facie*² duty, however, is not to abandon it (Miller 1986, 448). Jesus’ statements in the Gospels (Matt 5:17) imply that both actions in the Law and the Gospels (Exod 21:22–25; Matt 5:39–41) could be applied parenthetically. This notion arises from various references in Scripture which portray emphasis on being radical in order to enforce compliance. A few examples will suffice.

Jesus demonstrated a militarist approach against merchants and money-changers in the temple (Mathews 1988, 114). In his reaction, Jesus demonstrated his familiarisation with the HB (Isa 56:7) by quoting, “It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer,’ but you have made it a den of thieves” (Matt 21:13). In order to cleanse the “house” of these “thieves”, Jesus started beating people and turning up the tables. Jesus’ attitude in the temple was strange, especially if a similar reaction should be displayed in a postmodern church. We find the same approach presented in the books of Malachi and Zechariah where people who were disobedient by robbing God were cursed (Mal 3:9; Zech 5:3). In the book of Deuteronomy, it is depicted that disobedience to the Law attracted both curses and death (Deut 11:26–28).

The army was also important during biblical times, as it is in our postbiblical world. The Pentateuch depicts this notion. For example, Moses was instructed by Yahweh to

2 Latin for “first impression”; accepted as correct until proved otherwise.

Take a census of the whole Israelite community by clans and families, listing every man by name, one by one. You and Aaron are to count according to their divisions all the men in Israel who are twenty years old or more and able to serve in the army. (Num 1:2–3)

John the Baptist seemed to understand the function of soldiers in ancient Israel. The Baptist's response to the soldier's question, "And what should we do?" was, "Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely — be content with your pay" (Luke 3:14), which serves to illustrate that for John the soldiers had an important function for which they were paid even though there was no war because soldiers were *paid* to protect the nation. Jesus also taught that "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place" (John 18:36). Jesus acknowledged that the servants were capable of preventing His arrest (not in terms of numbers; they were equipped). The Greek term μάχαιρα (sword) (Mark 14:47) implies that disciples were armed and were capable of protesting the arrest of their master. In Gethsemane (Matt 26:36–46), only one disciple, Simon Peter, drew his weapon (Martin 2014, 5), and struck off the right ear of Malchus, the high priest's servant (John 18:10).

In ancient Rome, one could be arrested for possessing a dagger. If Jesus's followers were armed, that would be reason enough to crucify him (Martin 2014, 3–24). It appears Jesus was condemned to the death of the cross because either his mission or his message threatened Jerusalem's priests who then involved Pilate to neutralise their problem, or because Rome interpreted his movement as politically dangerous (Fredriksen 2015, 312).

Jesus urges his disciples: "But now if you have a purse, take it, and also a bag; and if you don't have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one" (Luke 22:36). According to Jesus, those who will be called in the Kingdom of Heaven are those who obey God's laws and teaches them (Matt 5:19). With reference to the Old Testament, the Torah comprises the laws which should be obeyed and practiced, and in my view, it does not leave out the question of preparedness against evildoers, murderers, robbers, rapists, and or assailants.

With the above view in mind, one would therefore regard the following affirmation by Jordan (1984, 111–112) to be in order:

If you or your child has been trained in self-defence, of course, you may be able to dispatch your assailant with a minimum of force. Always realise, though, that the man who attacks you, or your wife, has forfeited all his rights to 'fair' treatment. Women should be prepared to gouge out the eyes of any man who attacks them.

Kopel (2004, 27, cited in Feldman 2007) also says:

Much of Philo's treatise aimed to show that Jewish law from the Bible was consistent with the Roman law. The Roman law of the time allowed the killing of a thief only in self-defence and required that the victim first make a cry for help (to summon neighbours) before using deadly force.

Thus, Philo was aware of the status quo when he reiterated that the Mosaic provision conformed to the Roman law, because every burglar was a potential murderer (Kopel 2004, 27). The burglar could be armed, at the least, with iron house-breaking tools, which could be used as weapons (Kopel 2004, 27).

The Contemporary Perspective on Self-Defence

In 1948, the Universal Declaration of the Human Rights (UDHR) was proclaimed and adopted by the United Nations General Assembly (Ki-moon 2015). The document articulated the rights and freedoms to which every human being is equally and inalienably entitled (Ki-moon 2015), and that "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights" (Ki-moon 2015). However, the human rights in both self-defence and possession of firearms is non-existent according to UDHR. The United Nations (UN) does not recognise either. The UN and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have declared that there is neither a human right to self-defence nor to the possession of defensive arms (Kopel, Gallant and Eisen 2007, 4). The UN and NGOs further declare that insufficiently restrictive firearms laws are themselves a human rights violation, so all governments must sharply restrict citizen firearm possession (Kopel, Gallant and Eisen 2007, 4). It is the role of the state to exercise "due diligence" in preventing human rights violations (Frey 2004). As a norm of *jus cogens*³ (Brownlie 1998) no Government may deny the existence of the right to life and a higher duty and standard of protection of the right is imposed upon Governments (Ramcharan 1985, 15). Sivanandan and Bourne (2016, 61) also concur that in a democratic society, citizens should not be burdened with matters of defence; it is the function of the forces of law and order. Unfortunately, communities also play a role of perpetuating murder by not reporting the presence of suspected killers in the neighbourhood which allows these serial killers "to remain anonymous to the public and law enforcement agents" (Branson 2011, 72).

The foregone discussion on safety and security in the Pentateuch has shown Abraham as the model of the ideal Jewish fighter who fought to save the innocent, not for material gain (Kopel 2004, 20). He was a bold and successful commander, who caught and destroyed enemies. He was a good diplomat who built an alliance with other victims of aggression. The possession of a defensive weapon in our contemporary society cannot

3 Latin meaning "compelling law". The phrase refers to the principles which form the norms of international law that cannot be set aside.

be taken for granted. The argument for a defensive firearm can be buttressed by citing at least some incidents of attacks by terrorists/robbers as representative examples.

One Ramkissoo-Pillay (2016) has reported an attempted murder case which occurred in Westville in September 2016, when a man was shot in the foot while trying to protect his family from attack by armed criminals. During early 2017 in Shallcross, Chatsworth, a 42-year-old man was killed while attempting to protect his wife from robbers who had demanded the car keys in the driveway (Waterworth 2017). Tanaka Vunganai (2017) also chronicled that the Police in Mbare, Harare (Zimbabwe) have arrested five armed robbers and recovered knives, knobkerries, and axes that were used to attack residents in the suburb of Waterfalls at night. According to the *Herald* (19 Dec. 2016), a 52-year-old businessman in Harare was shot and killed after being robbed of an undisclosed amount of cash by suspected robbers who stalked him from his business premises. Numerous other cases of assault and attack include battered women in which both the believing community and the law have not sufficiently protected them. Children have been raped because both parents and members of society have neglected their traditional role of regarding any child as belonging to the community (Tolfree 2006). A popular African philosophy says, “It takes a village to raise a child” (Clinton, 1995; Nigro, 2016). In view of the above, one would want to envisage Larry Kilman’s assertion that “An attack on one is an attack on all” (2017, 25) as a relevant commitment towards protecting lives. For the American society, Kilman’s aphorism is not only expressed in words but also in deed.⁴

The Pastoral Perspective⁵ on Safety, Security, and Self-defence

The church’s perspective of and response to attack has always been made with reference to spirituality (unrighteousness) in which the “devil” is usually accused of causing people (in the spiritual realm), both believers and non-believers, to commit robbery, housebreaking, and murder, among other crimes.⁶ It is unusual for a pastor’s sermon to conclude without mentioning “Satan” as the spiritual force behind any evil deed (Alamo n.d.). In John 10:10, Satan is described as a “thief” who knows only to steal, kill, and destroy, and is unable to raise the dead (Harris 2007, 23–41). In order for people to “detect” and “defeat” the power of the devil and to circumvent the effect of evil so that their houses are not broken into, their property and other belongings not stolen, do not get sick and/or avoid murder, fasting, prayer, and loyalty to God are suggested as

4 After a mass shooting at the Orlando Gay Nightclub in USA, Barak Obama stated, “An attack on any American is an attack on all Americans” (Obama 2016).

5 The readership may be notified that the perspective of the church being reluctant to speak about SS and SD is arrived at from several personal experiences because the author is a preacher and so, on a daily basis, he familiarises himself with sermons in church services he attends. Some of the conversations included in this debate are drawn largely from personal experiences.

6 See, for example, Alamo (n.d.). Cf. Wiersbe (1979)

strategies.⁷ Practising the above is encouraged through preaching and Bible teaching as tools to counteract the “enemy’s” (devil’s) attack. One of the possible reasons why pastors/priests do not commit themselves to preaching against such practices is because some of the clerics are implicated in such criminal practices. For example, during the winter months of 2002, Americans were shocked and dismayed to learn of boys having been sexually abused by Catholic priests (Logan 2003, 321). It has also come to light that one of the suspects who stole our items while we were sleeping is one of the contract workers who came to refurbish our house in Chinhoyi, Zimbabwe (see footnote 1 above). The suspect purports to be a pastor of a local “indigenous church”⁸ who is alleged to be what Wayne A. Logan describes (2003, 383) as “an associate arm of crime”. Hence, the church has suffered attacks by criminals from within and without who deliberately subvert the sacred institution with the understanding that members of the church are neither prepared nor equipped against real and physical enemy attack. However, Van Wyk (2002) strongly believes that the sacred institution must prepare itself against enemy attack.

The massacre of congregants by terrorists at St James Church in Cape Town on 25 July 1993 remains an unforgettable experience particularly by survivors who attended the worship service that evening. Charl Van Wyk recounts his personal experience at St James Church (Van Wyk 2002). The report says there were slightly less than 1500 worshippers attending the church service that rainy and cold evening. Terrorists stormed in from the front left door and began shooting and unleashing hand grenades. Van Wyk, who had carried his firearm into the church that evening, used it to shoot back, which restrained the terrorists from causing more casualties. It is reported that 11 members of the congregation were killed, and 53 others wounded. As the OT depicts, Melchizedek blessed Abraham for his good works of using violence to rescue the innocent (Gen 14:18–20). In return, the regional commissioner of police also honoured Van Wyk for his boldness in protecting lives (see Van Wyk 2002, iii, centre of book). In his own words, Van Wyk declares that “there is no problem whatsoever for Christians (and society)⁹ to be involved in self-defence and in the protection of their families” (2002, 76).

7 See, for example, John Godson’s sermon “Spiritual warfare: Arise, fight, and never give up!” (Godson 2018).

8 Numerous indigenous churches are mushrooming in Zimbabwe. In the absence of employment and income, many people are turning to the church as an easy way of making money, particularly in the case of the claim of healing complicated sicknesses such as HIV/AIDS as well as the claim of making poor members of the congregation rich.

9 Insertion is my own.

Safety and security and health precautionary measures are not on the agenda of the teachings of most believing communities.¹⁰ In addition, study has shown that research on church and crime has been neglected in spite of the fact that youth involvement in “church activities is likely to be a vehicle for fostering the development of social networks that help to influence and thus constrain individual delinquent behaviour and subsequently reduce criminal activities” (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990; Krohn 1986, S81–S93). Hence, the mushrooming of Pentecostal groupings (see for example Mashau 2013, 1–8; Asamoah-Gyadu 2007, 128) who congregate alongside the main roads and other places which are not designated for human settlement or “formal organisation” is discouraged by health practitioners. Such “pilot” churches, which William Faupel chooses to describe as “creative chaos” (1996, 213–222), do not even put into consideration health concerns and protection of human life against attack and other misdeeds either by criminals taking advantage of the absence of light or the scarcity of sanitary facilities such as water and lavatories, which naturally puts the lives of parishioners, particularly children, at risk. Worse still, when a member of the church grouping falls ill, health concerns are not even raised as precipitating illness; the “devil” is the cause and fasting and prayer to God against Satan will prevail (Mashau 2013, 4). It is also noted that most believing communities congregate without soliciting the protection of law-enforcement agencies such as the police. The fact that people, having been meeting at a church for prayer (which also happens during the night) for some time and no criminal or atrocious activity has ever happened, does not guarantee that nothing will ever happen. In addition, the fact that most children of believing communities are exposed to enemy attack (including assault and rape) and some even succumb to death is because these vulnerable “souls” are not protected enough against crime-oriented individuals who purport to be genuine “cadres” yet are not. Hence, Jesus said of them: “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves” (Matt 7:15–20).¹¹ These “false prophets” or “wolves” would take advantage of the church’s unpreparedness and lack of protection to attack congregants as explained above.

“Prevention is better than cure” is a popular saying. Most health challenges that people experience are a result of deliberately ignoring to “play the game by the rules”. With massive awareness campaigns which have been launched to inform people about the deadly HIV which causes AIDS (Wold Bank 1997), for which until now no cure has

10 The author is familiar with several sermons and teachings in which preachers rarely touch on safety and security and practical health precautionary measures. Sermons are dominated by themes of evil and eternity.

11 To some extent, the text might be contextualised and appropriated in our modern postbiblical world given the mushrooming of Pentecostalism and Charismatic movements which preach “Prosperity Gospel.” In these churches, money is allegedly the focal point. These religious groupings would not escape the teaching of Jesus in Matt 7:15–20. For further reading on Pentecostalism, see, for example, Togarasei (2015, 56–66).

been found, it is advisable for people including members of believing communities to adhere to scientific discovery of either using condoms during sex and/or continue to take anti-retroviral drugs for those who are already affected. For those planning to engage in matrimonial relationship, it is advisable to seriously consider going for HIV/AIDS testing prior to having sex as a precautionary measure (Peersman and Levy 1998, S191–S196). There is no cure for HIV/AIDS; prevention is necessary (Maartens, Celum and Lewin 2014, 258–271). Acting contrary to these precautionary measures will result in fatality. This also applies to those suffering from illnesses such as sugar diabetes and high blood pressure (HBP), commonly known as “BP”. Nevertheless, reports have come to light of individuals, having been ill-advised by the pastor on the possibility of healing the above epidemics through prayer, abandoned adherence to proven scientific research, and subsequently suffered severe brain-damage or death.¹²

Another precautionary or protective measure to be considered by believing communities in view of safety and security is preparedness for one’s future life and/or that of one’s family in terms of housing and pension schemes. In my opinion, it is short-sighted for the church in the twenty-first century to disregard teaching on the future life of its members. The fact that some individuals would search for solace and assistance from organisations and shelters, most of which are established by the church, points to the failure of the sacred institution to coach its congregants on the importance of planning for such eventualities during their life-time. We are not unaware of the unfortunate situation in which some might not have had the opportunity to get involved in an income-generating investment due to various structural and socioeconomic challenges. However, the bottom line is that the church should adopt a programme of educating its members on preparedness towards future life in this real and physical world, although teaching on life after death and “home in heaven” (John 14:1–3; Grubbs 2009) forms part of the church’s curriculum.

Conclusions

This paper explored the significance and selflessness of self-defence against attack. The Torah and the biblical text as a whole present self-defence and protection of one’s family and/or society against enemies as matters which need higher priority. The paper maintained that safety and security is a collective effort; parents and society at large

12 The author is a minister of a Baptist congregation in Pretoria, South Africa. On a Sunday in September 2014, the senior pastor (who shall remain anonymous) collapsed in a church service. After a few minutes of prayer, he was rushed to a local hospital. At the hospital, it emerged that the beloved pastor had suffered severe brain damage because he had stopped taking his medication for blood pressure (BP). The following Saturday morning while I was attending ProPent outside Pretoria, they phoned me announcing his death.

were challenged to take a proactive role by either reporting attempted robbery or using any weapon at their disposal to restrain the assailant or robber.

In addition, the notion of collective effort invites a dialogue with the sense of belonging as enshrined in the concept of *hunhu* (Shona) and *ubuntu* (SiZulu). *Ubuntu* is better explained in the phrase *umuntu ngumuntu ngabanye* (Ncube 2010, 79) which can loosely be translated as “to be human is to affirm one’s humanity by recognising the humanity of others in its infinite variety of content and form” (Van der Merwe 1996, 1). The above expression of *ubuntu* supports the thrust of the present investigation: it is the urgency in the sense of belonging and attachment which inspires preparedness to sacrifice one’s life while trying to protect.

Nevertheless, robbers/assailants are not only cowards, they are also people whose individual lives are grossly punctuated by loss of self-esteem, unworthiness, and inhumanness which they actually mirror in the lives of their potential targets (see Emler 2001). Perhaps Eben Scheffler’s assertion could also be drawn into this very debate of regarding the life of others as worthless when he says: “We see the world as we are” (2015, 5). It was argued in this essay that potential targets should aim to demonstrate that they are not “easy targets” by either putting in place precautionary measures for security purposes or by shooting back when they are confronted with monstrous intruders who are usually armed. In my view, the dreadful occurrence while one attempts to protect one’s family and or communities against attack is a quintessence of “selfless sacrifice” (McCracken 2012, 995).

Recommendations

In light of the increase in crime and armed robbery in our society, this study would like to make the following recommendations:

Shout for help. Cases of armed robbery that came to light recently revealed that the killers usually demanded that their targets/victims keep quiet and threatened to kill them if they shouted. Usually, terrified people complied. Nevertheless, this paper insists that the option of *fighting back* may also include shouting for *help!*

Cell phones. With modern technology, cell phones are very useful during or immediately before robbery. As part of self-defence, I recommend one take a picture, or phone people/police to alert them that you are in danger. Always keep contact numbers of a police station/s in your area. It is also advisable that the cell phone is fully charged or has airtime before going to bed.

Good neighbours. Good neighbours are also an important part of one’s safety and security network. It is recommended that one shares security concerns with one’s neighbours.

Possession of a firearm. It is recommended that one possesses a licenced firearm, not as a rule, but as one of the options towards one's safety and security. A recipient of Gandhi's non-violent direct action, Rev/Dr Martin Luther King, Jr (USA) also believed in the human right to self-defence and he even applied for a handgun-carry permit after his house was bombed (Samsel 2016).

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