

# Evil and Genocide

Sunday Circle, April 6, 2025

## What is Genocide?

Many scholars believe that genocide is the epitome of human evil. Genocide has existed since the beginning of humankind when some scholars think humans committed genocide by killing off the Neanderthals.

The Political Instability Task Force estimated that 43 genocides occurred between 1956 and 2016, resulting in 50 million deaths. The UN High Commission for Refugees estimates that a further 50 million had been displaced by such episodes of violence.

From the United States Holocaust Museum <https://www.ushmm.org/genocide-prevention/learn-about-genocide-and-other-mass-atrocities/what-is-genocide>

The word “genocide” did not exist prior to World War II. It is a specific term coined in 1942 by Polish-Jewish lawyer Raphael Lemkin (1900–1959) and first used in print in his 1944 book, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*.

After the Holocaust, the word “genocide” was established as a legal term for a specifically defined international crime.

The legal term “genocide” refers to certain acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group. Genocide is an international crime, according to the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948). The acts that constitute genocide fall into five categories:

- Killing members of the group
- Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group
- Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction, in whole or in part
- Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group
- Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group

Although the term “genocide” is often used, its commission is rare when compared to other serious crimes that are not defined by an intent to destroy a targeted group, such as crimes against humanity and war crimes.

## **Genocide in the Bible**

There are numerous accounts of genocide in scripture.

### **Genocide against the Jewish people**

#### **Exodus 1:11, 13-14 22**

<sup>11</sup>Therefore they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labor. <sup>13</sup>The Egyptians became ruthless in imposing tasks on the Israelites, <sup>14</sup>and made their lives bitter with hard service in mortar and brick and in every kind of field labor. They were ruthless in all the tasks that they imposed on them.

22 Pharaoh commanded all his people, 'Every boy that is born to the Hebrews you shall throw into the Nile, but you shall let every girl live.'

#### **Esther 3:8-11**

8 Then Haman said to King Artaxerxes, 'There is a certain nation scattered among the other nations in all your kingdom; their laws are different from those of every other nation, and they do not keep the laws of the king. It is not expedient for the king to tolerate them. <sup>9</sup>If it pleases the king, let it be decreed that they are to be destroyed, and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver into the king's treasury.' <sup>10</sup>So the king took off his signet ring and gave it to Haman to seal the decree that was to be written against the Jews. <sup>11</sup>The king told Haman, 'Keep the money, and do whatever you want with that nation.'

#### **Matthew 2:16-18**

16 When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men,\* he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men.\* <sup>17</sup>Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah:

<sup>18</sup> 'A voice was heard in Ramah,  
wailing and loud lamentation,  
Rachel weeping for her children;  
she refused to be consoled, because they are no more.'

### **The Genocide of Amalek**

The Amaleks were the first nation to attack the Jewish people after they left Egypt.

Exodus 17:13-16 <sup>13</sup>And Joshua defeated Amalek and his people with the sword.

14 Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Write this as a reminder in a book and recite it in the hearing of Joshua: I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven.' <sup>15</sup>And Moses built an altar and called it, The Lord is my banner. <sup>16</sup>He said, 'A hand upon the banner of the Lord! The Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.'

Deuteronomy 25:17-19 17 Remember what Amalek did to you on your journey out of Egypt, <sup>18</sup>how he attacked you on the way, when you were faint and weary, and struck down all who lagged behind you; he did not fear God. <sup>19</sup>Therefore when the Lord your God has given you rest from all your enemies on every hand, in the land that the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess, you shall blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven; do not forget.

1 Samuel 15:1-3

1 Samuel said to Saul, <sup>2</sup>Thus says the Lord of hosts, "I will punish the Amalekites for what they did in opposing the Israelites when they came up out of Egypt. <sup>3</sup>Now go and attack Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have; do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey."

Professor Mark Zvi Brettler caution about misuses of the stories of Amalek to justify modern genocides. He writes: These passages describe a complete ethnic cleansing ("kill alike men and women, infants and sucklings") in retaliation for Amalek's unprovoked attack on Israel when they "were famished and weary" (Deut 25:18). Such genocide, including even the youngest of children, is morally abhorrent; when we teach such texts, we must say so. This is a dangerous biblical text since it is being used, even now, to justify the wholesale murder of any person perceived to be an Amalekite.

## **Wrapping up our series on Evil**

### **Free Will and Evil**

God gave us free will. We have the opportunity to choose God and good or to choose evil.

Jesus said in the Gospel of Mark 7:20-23 (see also similar passage Matthew 15:18-20)

<sup>20</sup> 'It is what comes out of a person that defiles. <sup>21</sup>For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, <sup>22</sup>adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. <sup>23</sup>All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.'

St. Paul in his Letter to the Romans 12:9-21 wrote: 9 Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; 10 love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. 11 Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. \* 12 Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. 13 Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. 14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. 16 Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty but associate with the lowly; \* do not claim to be wiser than you are. 17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. 18 If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. 19 Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for

the wrath of God;\* for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.' 20No, 'if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will hear burning coals on their heads.' 21Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

### **How do we respond to evil when we encounter it**

Pray

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name,  
thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation but **deliver us from evil**.  
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen

### **Baptismal Examination**

*Question* Do you renounce Satan and all the spiritual forces of wickedness that rebel against God?

*Answer* I renounce them.

*Question* Do you renounce the evil powers of this world which corrupt and destroy the creatures of God?

*Answer* I renounce them.

*Question* Do you renounce all sinful desires that draw you from the love of God?

*Answer* I renounce them.

### **Baptismal Covenant**

*Celebrant* Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?

*People* I will, with God's help.