



Al Amal No. 1 (Hope No. 1), Kinda Hibrawi

Security in the Middle of Violence

BY MARY MIKHAEL

Have you traveled through airports in the last few years? Have you ever felt overwhelmed by security procedures? The amount of time spent in lines and going through metal detectors can be distressing as you travel. Crossing borders between countries can be even worse. While many of us understand that such precautions are necessary, it is shocking to consider how important security measures have become.

Security has always been important for everyone, whether they are traveling or not. Surely, however, it has become an obsession, and one that we must consider critically and compassionately.

The Insecurity of Violence

Security from a political and social point of view means freedom from oppression and danger. It is safety in sheltered places with no threat of being attacked or violated. It is the assurance that you will never be denied a state of being where you are free to live with dignity and self-respect. Surely security is a human right for all.

Violence, on the other hand, is use of power or influence to dehumanize people. Violent entities use force to prevent individuals, groups or countries from living into their human dignity. All people have a right to live securely. All people have a right to move freely in their land and on

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their property. These are the physical realities that security demands, but which violence denies.

Violence has many shapes and forms—religious, when one claims superiority over others based on their faith; spiritual, when one claims to be sole possessor of the truth; physical, when the powerful crush the weak; psychological, when one demonizes and manipulates others; sexual, when one takes what one wants despite the humiliation of another; and military, when might is only and always right.

Violence is a sin that undermines the image of God in both the victim and the oppressor. We live in sin when we use violence in any form. We have, all of us, used violence to achieve security and, tragically, we all have missed the point.

Security Has Become the Game of Death

As I write this article in January of 2009, the world is disturbed by what has been going on in Gaza and Israel. Yet even as people demand an end to the killing of children and the destruction of homes, hospitals and schools, grave violations of international law continue. Forbidden weapons leave signs in the bones of injured children and crude rockets rain down panic and fear. All is done in the name of security—security for Israel, security for the Palestinians . . . Security has become the game of death.

When will we see this game for what it is? When will we recognize that this kind of security for one people means absolute *insecurity* for another? The use of excessive

violence only generates more violence and new enemies. Violence has never secured security.

People in the Middle East are desperate for security, but not the security brought by violence. I wonder if this concept of attaining security in the middle of violence is realistic. Can one truly have security when one lives in the middle of violence? This is a troubling question, but it is one with which we must struggle if we are ever going to share in God's reconciling work of justice and peace.

As Christians, we are blessed to have scripture to guide us, and the Holy Spirit, who is always with us. Though we may not find an exact answer or precise resolution to our questions, we still should ask: How do Christians understand security? Does the Bible address this concept? What security do we find in God's Word?

Looking to Scripture

We find, in the Bible, that security is a quality of life characterized by following God. Unlike the violence that seems to be inseparably linked to our modern pursuit of security, *the security of God* is dynamic and life-giving. Entered into and maintained by faith, which is trust in God, security means leading a life in accordance with the will of God. We actively pursue it—it is both a journey and a destination.

We read in *Psalms 37:3*, "Trust in the LORD, and do good; so you will live in the land, and enjoy security." As we do good, we pursue the security that God has for us. Jeremiah reveals that when God forgives the

sins of a city, God promises to "bring it recovery and healing; I [God] will heal them and reveal to them abundance of prosperity and security" (*Jer. 33:6*). As we pursue the justice and mercy of God we begin to glimpse the security of life in God. These scriptures remind us that it is indeed God's desire that all of creation be healthy and whole.

Looking to Joshua

Presbyterian women will be studying the book of *Joshua* in the coming year. In the book of *Joshua*, we find some of the most profound themes related to security in God. The title of this study is *Joshua: A Journey of Faith*. As we walk with Joshua and the Israelites, we join their journey and search for lives that are secured in God.

The whole book of *Joshua* is, in fact, a story of this journey of faith. How can it help us? Because it tells of the journey of a people who were rescued and redeemed from lives defined by lack of physical, social, spiritual and political security—slavery in Egypt. These are people who suffered all kinds of violence. And these are people for whom God intervened, saving them from oppression and violence. Violence is never the will of God, and because we all are created in the likeness of God (*Gen. 1:27*), violence destroys the image of God.

At the beginning of this biblical journey, God gives the needed directions that will ensure the safety of the Israelites and bring them into their rest—a life of peace, worship and security in the land promised to them. God tells Joshua—"Only be



Praying for Peace, Barbara Dubnick

strong and very courageous, being careful to act in accordance with all the law that my servant Moses commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, so that you may be successful wherever you go” (*Josh. 1:7*). The key to success on the journey is faithfulness to God.

Seeking Security Is a Journey of Faith

Before this redeemed community embarks on its journey of faith, however, sanctification is necessary. To journey in faith is to walk in the steps of God, to act in accordance with the will and law of God. Before crossing the Jordan River into the land of promise, into the hope of a new kind of security, Joshua tells the people, “Sanctify yourselves; for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you” (*Josh. 3:5*).

Ensuring that the Israelites remember to put God first as they enter the land, the ark of the covenant goes before them in their procession. God parts the Jordan and the people cross over on dry land (*Josh. 3:15–17*). Indeed the life of faith means experiencing God’s miracles. In keeping with the will of God, the response of the Israelites to all that

God is doing for them is worship. Upon crossing the Jordan, the males are circumcised and the community celebrates the Passover (*Josh. 5:2–12*). Such acts of worship center the Israelites in God’s security because they remind the people of the grace, mercy and justice of God. The Israelites found that as long as their journey was done in faith, their community was the stage for God’s miracles.

Choose This Day Whom You Will Serve

The journey of faith that we find in *Joshua* is not an easy one. As the people seek the security of God, we find disturbing stories of the Israelites destroying entire villages. This violence is portrayed as the will of God. Yet, stories like that of Rahab, the Gibeonites and the cities of refuge indicate that violence is not God’s will.

These stories reveal themes that teach us about the unique, life-giving security of God. God’s security is about including those who might be perceived as outsiders, welcoming them into our communities and learning together about following God’s will. God’s security is about the importance of justice and

fair trials. When people are treated fairly, they begin to feel secure.

Reaching out to all God’s creation is a characteristic of those who believe in God. While security as we see it practiced today in airports and on borders might seem to be a necessity, surely our truest security is found in following God. And as we follow God, we heed God’s calls to hospitality and justice.

Learning to trust one another, when we have so many legitimate reasons to question each other’s motives, is difficult. But as believers in God, we are given a choice every single day. It is for us to determine whether we want to bow down to the fear and violence around us, or whether we want to lift up the justice and grace that is given us through the one we call our Savior.

Indeed, only with God and in faith, can we enjoy rest, security and peace. The stories of the Israelites and the gospel of Jesus Christ remind us that we are constant recipients of redemption, grace and life. These are the gifts that make for true security. But this security in God is meant to be shared with *all* of God’s creation, and just as we choose whom we will serve, we also choose to work for justice and security for *all*.

The journey of faith is never without dangerous falls. Nevertheless, as Joshua made his choice, we all can and must choose the justice, peace and security of God. “[A]s for me and my household, we will serve the LORD” (*Josh. 24:15*). Joshua could never feel more secure than he was in those moments, in making that choice. What kind of security will you choose? 🍷

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