

JESUS & SELF-DEFENSE

Thankful to live in the middle of nowhere? Burning, looting, mayhem and murder has probably come to a neighborhood near someone you know. Perhaps you've wondered what the Bible says about self-defense. Statistics show a marked increase in gun purchases, background checks, and first-time gun buyers. Self-defense was a daily reality in Jesus' time as well.

1- FACT OF LIFE. Jesus Christ was anointed and appointed by God to fulfill the Old Testament promises about the Deliverer to come. He could even cast out demons with only a word. In Luke 11 Jesus explains how He divides and defeats the demonic kingdom of the devil, giving spiritual light and life to those who believe in Him and receive Him as Lord and Savior.

In Luke 11:21-22, Jesus uses an everyday example to illustrate overcoming Satan: "*when a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are safe; but when one stronger than he attacks him and overcomes him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides his spoil.*" Matthew 12:29, 24:43, Mark 3:27 record similar teaching from the stronger one.

"Fully armed" refers to how people protected their person and property, however they could afford. Armor included a panoply of weaponry and means of protection (Ephesians 6, Romans 13:12). The Old Testament lists a wide range of instruments including swords, knives, axes, spears, clubs, hammers, bow, arrows, shields, etc. Such protection is necessary in human existence because of sin, mankind's rebelling against God's character, acted out against others.

2- GOD'S LAWS. Luke 11 hearkens to Exodus 22:2-3, "*if a thief is found breaking in and is struck so that he dies, there shall be no blood-guilt for him, but if the sun is risen on him, there shall be bloodguilt for him.*" If one defends person and property in the dark, and the robber dies, it happened in self-defense. But in the daytime you could see who and what was going on.

In Exodus 20:13 God commands, "*you shall not murder.*" This refers to the taking of human life without the sanction of God (as in capital punishment which was required for capital crimes, or as in what scholars describe as "just war"). The Bible prescribes penalties for murder and manslaughter. Man is made in the image of God, and He says human life is sacred. (For more on capital punishment, see Genesis 9:6, Leviticus 24:17, Numbers 35:30-34).

3- RESPONSIBILITY. The Bible shows self-defense as pro-active, pro-life, for protection. It includes escape, evasion, and force. Throughout the Old Testament, God's people often took up swords to defend themselves, as in Nehemiah 4 and Esther 8-9. The warrior-king David was skilled in deadly force, but in 1Samuel 19 and 26, he chose to escape and evade danger. Jesus did likewise in Luke 4, John 8 and 10, and so did the apostle Paul in 2Corinthians 11.

"A number of passages in Scripture encourage escaping from danger, or even using force in self-defense, if necessary," notes theologian Wayne Grudem. "Scripture also encourages us to defend other people against wrongful attacks. Children should be taught to defend themselves with courage and determination, because failure to oppose physical harm with force often leads to more harm and wrong." Families are wise to discuss and develop plans for self-defense.

Self-preservation is a reality, a right and responsibility from God, and a reliance upon God. Many churches apply these Scriptures to armed security during services, and measures of protection for people and property. Churches sponsor courses in self-defense and obtaining permits for carrying concealed weapons. People routinely carried swords in Bible times.

4- IN JESUS' DAY. Due to disobedience to God, Israel had been conquered by many nations. As part of the Roman Empire, people were allowed to carry swords, and laws related to self-defense anticipated immediate justice. Slaves were expected to protect their masters. Like ours, it was a dangerous world, with not enough police. Self-defense was a practical reality.

A very common weapon was the Roman "gladius," a short 24-inch sword designed for close combat. It was carried by Roman soldiers for some 600 years, and used by gladiators. But depending on their situation, many common people carried them. One cost about two month's wages (which may make your personal armory seem like a bargain). The Bible's message for wrong-doers is "don't disobey God's holiness by attacking the person and property of others." Next time: "*let him who has no sword sell his cloak and buy one!*" □