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# BIBLICAL / THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF NONVIOLENCE: THE HEBREW SCRIPTURES

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## 1. The Story

### 2. Jeremiah's Symbolic Action – nonviolent imagination

- a. *"The prophets combined as sophisticated understanding of the world order, the role of the nation where they found themselves, an understanding of God and of power, and a deep affection for their people and their land..."* - Gene Stoltzfus
- b. Jeremiah 13:1-11 – Linen Girdle
- c. Jeremiah 13:12-14 – Wine Jars
- d. Jeremiah 18:1-10 – Making a Pot
- e. Jeremiah 19:1-13 – Broken Pot

### 3. Scripture in Israel Palestine Context

- a. Shma': *Shma' Israel Adonai elohenu The Lord is our God Shma' Israel Adonai e'had* (Deuteronomy 6:4)
- b. Canon: The prophets are very minor. The center is the Torah (1<sup>st</sup> 5 books).
- c. Texts and concepts used against peace
  - i. Revenge: Leviticus 19:15 – You shall not stand against (profit by, stand upon) the blood of a neighbor. Colloquial translation: Do not stand idly by the blood of a neighbor. Better translation: Do not testify against your neighbor in a capital offence.
  - ii. Oral Torah: Text – "If evil is coming, get up early to slay the evil." Traditional interpretation – evil thoughts, read the Bible. Colloquial – "If a man is coming to kill you, you get up and kill him first."
  - iii. "God gave us the land" – Torah as deed. God as real-estate agent; but WHY did God give the land? To be a blessing to all nations...
  - iv. "Chosen People" – All people are chosen for different things: We (Jews) bring the Torah; You Christians and Moslems have to figure out what you're chosen for
- d. Some useful concepts/texts
  - i. Land Confiscation: Don't move a boundary marker. (Hosea 5:10)
  - ii. Do not covet your neighbor's house. (Exodus 20:17)
  - iii. Aliens and Strangers: when an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God. (Leviticus 19:33-34)
  - iv. Jewish understanding of "violence" – only what happens to people, only if blood is spilled
  - v. But the heart of Judaism is Justice, the deep down making things right. "Justice, Justice only shall you pursue." (Deuteronomy 16:20); Traditional interpretation: Both just ends and just means;
  - vi. Shalom: peace – redeem all creation also greeting on the street. Salem in Arabic

### 4. Beginning of the Koran: In the name of God the merciful/compassionate/generous (*Bis millah hir rah'man nirrahim*)

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"The Bible is not an end but a beginning; a precedent, not a story. Its being embedded in particular historic situations has not deterred it from being everlasting. Nothing in it is surreptitious or trite. It is not an epic about the life of heroes but the story of every (person) in all climates and all ages. Its topic is the world, the whole of history... It continues to scatter seeds of justice and compassion, to echo God's cry to the world and to pierce (human) armor of callousness." – Abraham Joshua Heschel, *"God in Search of Man"*

"In spite of the patriarchal nature of biblical texts, I myself have no intention of giving up the biblical basis of my theology. In spite of its ancient and patriarchal worldviews, in spite of inconsistencies and mixed messages, the story of God's love affair with the world leads me to a vision of New Creation that impels my life." – Letty Russell, editor, *"Feminist Interpretations of the Bible."*