

Mass Murder: A New Dimension of Evil

“When he was come to the other side into the country of the Gergesenes, there met him two possessed with devils, coming out of the tombs, exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way.”

—Matthew 8:28

THE SCRIPTURE ACCOUNT of Jesus driving the demons into a herd of swine is one of the most remarkable of all his mighty miracles that were performed during his earthly ministry. It points to the tremendous power over evil and evildoers that was given to our Lord Jesus by his Heavenly Father, and serves as an apt illustration of the even greater power over evil that will be administered under his future kingdom of righteousness and judgment.

We note, too, the great power that is exercised by Satan and the corrupt spirit beings during this present nighttime of sin and death. The Apostle Paul points to Satan as the source of all evil, “In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds

of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.”—II Cor. 4:4

There are multitudes of invisible spiritual demons that continue to promote their evil deeds in our world, and are to be judged accordingly in due time. The demons that were encountered by the Master immediately recognized and feared him, and indicated that they were well aware of their forthcoming final destiny. “They cried out, saying, What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time?” (Matt. 8:29) The word ‘torment’ as it is used here suggests ‘being put to the test,’ or judged before the time.

Three of the gospel writers have included accounts of this great miracle: Matthew 8:28-34; Mark 5:1-17 and Luke 8:26-36. Each of these records includes unique and interesting details that are not found in either of the other two accounts.

ANGELS KEPT NOT THEIR ESTATE

During the world’s early history, angelic beings were permitted for a time to materialize in the form of men. This led to an unholy alliance between themselves and the daughters of men, and “The angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.” (Jude 6) It is in this present condition of dense spiritual darkness that they have since been confined, and their wicked activities restrained. Having thus been barred from any further materializing, they now use their superior powers over men by gaining

possession of their minds and actions. They have since that time used the subjected human body as their medium.

MIRACLE-WORKING POWER

During Jesus' earthly ministry, the influence of demons was very prevalent, and some of his greatest miracles took place when he expelled them from their hapless victims. "He preached in their synagogues throughout all Galilee, and cast out devils." (Mark 1:39) Jesus gave this same power of the Holy Spirit to his apostles. "He called his twelve disciples together, and gave them power and authority over all devils, and to cure diseases. And he sent them to preach the kingdom of God, and to heal the sick." (Luke 9:1,2) He also gave this extraordinary power to the seventy whom he sent forth to preach the gospel. "The seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name."—Luke 10:17

MEN OF THE TOMBS

When Jesus confronted the demonized men in our featured text they were 'coming out of the tombs' and they are described as being 'exceeding fierce.' During the time of Jesus' ministry, when a person died, the place of burial was often in a rock-cut tomb or perhaps a cave. An above ground cemetery may have had vaults or chambers. These, in turn, served as characteristic places of solitude and abode for the poor wretched maniacs. We read, "Immediately there met him [Jesus] out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit, Who had his dwelling among the tombs."—Mark 5:2,3

Further important details are given that reveal the true nature of these demon-possessed men. Mark spoke concerning one of them, “Because that he had been often bound with fetters and chains, and the chains had been plucked asunder by him, and the fetters broken in pieces: neither could any man tame him. And always, night and day, he was in the mountains, and in the tombs, crying, and cutting himself with stones.” (vss. 4,5) Luke’s account includes further details. He wrote, “There met him [Jesus] out of the city a certain man, which had devils long time, and ware no clothes, neither abode in any house, but in the tombs.”—Luke 8:27

When recognizing Jesus, the demon said, “I beseech thee, torment me not. (For he had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. For oftentimes it had caught him: and he was kept bound with chains and in fetters; and he brake the bands, and was driven of the devil into the wilderness.)” (vss. 28,29) The unfortunate man had been completely overpowered by the demons that were using his body.

EXCEEDINGLY FIERCE

These unclean spirits were also described as being exceedingly fierce. The word fierce as it has been used by Matthew in this scripture (8:28) describes someone who is extremely difficult to deal with, and in this case emphasizes the very dangerous nature of the demonized man. The word has been variously translated as violent, fierce, savage, or other words. It is found in only one other scripture where the Apostle Paul used it to describe the last days of this present Gospel Age. “This know

also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.” (II Tim. 3:1) Here the translators used the word ‘perilous’ that describes the very difficult and dangerous world in which we now live.

CASTING OUT DEVILS

Tremendous power was shown by our Lord Jesus when he cast out the multitude of evil spirits who had been using the miserable man’s body as a medium. “There was a good way off from them an herd of many swine feeding. So the devils besought him, saying, If thou cast us out, suffer us to go away into the herd of swine.” (Matt. 8:30,31) These demons made no attempt to conceal their own identity, and freely acknowledged Jesus’ greater power over them. “He said unto them, Go. And when they were come out, they went into the herd of swine: and, behold, the whole herd of swine ran violently down a steep place into the sea, and perished in the waters.”—vs. 32

A LEGION

Our Lord was told that “Legion” was the name of one of the demons who had come out to meet him. “He [Jesus] asked him, What is thy name? And he answered, saying, My name is Legion: for we are many.” (Mark 5:9) The name ‘Legion’ is associated with the mighty Roman Empire that was in power at that time. It refers specifically to a large group of soldiers comprised of thousands of fighting men. There were various types of Roman legions that differed in number depending on the particular historical period of the empire, and the time and place.

In connection with the name Legion and its numerical significance, we read in Mark’s account

that there were about 2,000 swine in the herd that ran violently down the hill to their deaths in the waters below. Perhaps Jesus chose that particular herd as an indication of the number of demons that he would drive out of the wretched man's body, inasmuch as all of them were drowned. "Jesus gave them permission. And coming out, the unclean spirits entered the swine; and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea, about two thousand of them; and they were drowned in the sea."—Mark 5:13, *New American Standard Bible*

INIQUITY ABOUNDS

Most people will acknowledge that we are now living in a most dangerous and corrupt world. Evil and atrocious crimes are becoming more commonplace, and are being committed on an increasingly magnified and violent scale. There seems to be no logical explanation or conclusion concerning the perpetrators, their degree of lawlessness, or the extent of their mass killings.

Matthew recorded Jesus' words concerning the end of this age, "Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold." (Matt. 24:12) The word 'iniquity' points to that which is without law, and is therefore a criminal act. John used the same word that has been translated "transgression" in the following text. He said, "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law."—I John 3:4

VIRGINIA TECH MASSACRE

Panic struck the citizens of Blacksburg, Virginia in April, 2007, when the local university campus—Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University—

became the scene for a virtual shooting ground. An unstable-acting student gunman, 23-year old Cho Seung-Hui of Korean parentage, killed 32 fellow innocent students and teachers before turning his weapon upon himself. The carnage would have been much greater if he had not been stopped in time. At least 15 others were wounded, some of them seriously, in what has been called the worst-ever campus massacre in United States history.

Federal, state, and local law enforcement investigators searched the university campus for clues to what set off the deadly mass shooting rampage. The shootings occurred just four days before the eighth anniversary of the Columbine High School massacre in Littleton, Colorado. At that time, two students killed 13 people before turning their weapons on themselves. Officials are searching for possible links between the two mass killings to help explain the gunman's actions.

WEAPONS AVAILABILITY

The culture of gun ownership and the right to bear arms is a long-established tradition in the state of Virginia. In the days immediately following the shootings at Virginia Tech, surprisingly there were more local expressions of support for gun ownership than there were for demanding stricter controls.

An article was published by the *Los Angeles Times* (April 19, 2007) under the title "Guns a Staple of Rural Virginia" and was submitted by staff writers Maura Reynolds and Richard Fausset. It reads, "As mourners left flowers at a memorial marked by 32 stones on the campus' central Drill Field, Scott Heldreth, a member of the religious

organization Operation Save America, urged the crowd to realize that the issue isn't guns, it's sin. Speaking over a microphone, Heldreth said, 'It wouldn't matter if you got rid of all guns. Instead,' he said, 'events like the Columbine and Virginia Tech shootings are a result of the deteriorating morality of society. It's [gun ownership] a constitutional right our Founding Fathers created. It wasn't my decision. It was theirs.'

"But the question of controlling possession of firearms was a hot topic at Virginia Tech last year, when the state legislature was debating a law that would have overturned regulations prohibiting firearms on campus. The bill was written in response to a dispute over a Virginia Tech student who was disciplined for bringing a firearm onto campus even though it was properly purchased and licensed. The bill eventually failed, but Todd Gilbert, the Virginia delegate who championed it, said the point was not to encourage students to tote guns but to restrict universities from infringing on rights granted by the Legislature. A majority of Virginians still believe that the right to bear arms is an individual right that the government should have a limited ability to infringe on. And, for many, gun ownership is a natural part of life."

A DERANGED KILLER

In light of the tragic loss of life on the Virginia Tech campus, the question has been raised as to how someone who was so mentally deranged and violently oriented could have purchased weapons locally with no difficulty. Gun control advocates point to the fact that Cho Seung-Hui had been previously detained

under a temporary legal order and that he had been judged mentally incapacitated at that time. They insist that he should have been denied the right to purchase firearms. They further said that there had been clear evidence that a Virginia judicial officer had found that the killer presented an imminent danger to himself and others. As a result of his severe mental condition, he should have failed his background checks that were necessary to purchase firearms.

State and federal law enforcement authorities, on the other hand, confirmed that there was no record found in their criminal background check systems to indicate that the killer had been involuntarily committed for observation, or that he had been declared mentally incapacitated by a judge. A spokesperson for the Virginia State Police Department said that a review of Cho's gun purchases found that there was no evidence to block the purchase of weapons to him. The killer's two guns had both been purchased in the state of Virginia, and their serial numbers had been obliterated. After the shootings they were sent to be examined at a laboratory of the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms.

COLUMBINE MASSACRE

In April, 1999, eight years earlier almost to the day, news reports were suddenly turned toward the direction of the small town of Littleton, Colorado. It turned out that this was where two senior high-school students, Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris had gunned down twelve students and one teacher before killing themselves, a total of 15 people in all.

The boys' original plan was to kill hundreds of their fellow students, and they were armed with guns, knives, and numerous types of bombs to carry out the scheme. They walked the high school hallways on a shooting rampage.

A PLANNED MASS MURDER

According to numerous notes, plans, and videos that Klebold and Harris left behind to be discovered later, Klebold had been thinking of committing suicide for over two years. Both boys together had been planning a mass murder a full year before they actually carried it out.

Further investigation reveals that in January, 1998 the two boys were arrested for breaking into a van. As part of their plea agreement, Klebold and Harris agreed to enroll in a juvenile diversion program in April of that same year. They were first-time offenders, and the program allowed for the removal of the offence from their record if they successfully completed the program. For nearly a year, the two boys regularly attended the workshops, conferred with their counselors, participated in voluntary work projects, and convinced all concerned that they were sorry for their crime, and had changed their unlawful ways. However, it is now known that during the entire time that they were enrolled in the juvenile program they were secretly planning for a very large-scale massacre at their high school.

It seems that the two boys were intensely angry at most everyone and, except for a very few, they hated them all. They were serious about acting out their hatred and were able to secure bomb-making

plans and to learn about explosive materials. Together they amassed an arsenal of knives, guns, and nearly one hundred explosive devices.

In their quest to kill the maximum number of students possible, they began to devise a plan that involved bombing the cafeteria when it was the most crowded. They observed that the peak number would be reached after the 11:15 A.M. lunch break began. Their plan was to time a propane bomb to explode shortly thereafter, and then shoot any survivors that would try to escape. Although this well-planned carnage was avoided they were able to kill 12 students, 1 teacher, themselves, and to wound 24 others.

Again, the question remains, what motivated them to plan and work out intricate details in an effort to carry out a large-scale massacre in their own high school, and against their fellow students and faculty members? From all outward appearances the two boys looked and acted very much like any other normal teenagers, but obviously they were not average school boys.

THE TEXAS SNIPER

In August, 1966, media attention was focused on the events that were taking place at the University of Texas at Austin. This was the flagship doctoral research institution of the University of Texas system. A student, Charles Joseph Whitman, had secured himself with a huge arsenal of firearms and ammunition on the observation deck at the top of the twenty-seventh floor Clock Tower of the university's Administration Building. From this vantage point, and with the aid of a powerful scope attached to one of his weapons, Whitman was able

to pick off individuals who were making their way around the campus far below.

He had shot and killed both his wife and mother the night before, and had phoned both of their employers early that morning to say they would not be able to be at work that day. He then rented a dolly to carry all of his firearms and equipment, made his way by elevator to reach the top of the building and then barricaded himself behind the door.

In addition to a variety of knives and a large quantity of ammunition, Whitman had brought with him a Remington 700 rifle with a 4x Leupold scope, an M1 Carbine rifle, a .35 caliber rifle, a 12 gauge shotgun, and three pistols including a .357 Magnum, a Galesi-Brescia, and a Luger pistol.

It took police and law enforcement investigators time to determine precisely where the shooting was coming from, and then more time to lay a strategy as to how to best overpower the deranged gunman. In the meantime, Whitman had murdered 16 people before being killed in turn by the police. There were 24 others who were wounded of which one later died of injuries sustained. The question remains as to what motivated him to carry out a mass-murder rampage of so many innocent people.

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

No one knows to what degree the influences from Satan, or the evil spirits, may have had in prompting any of these mass murderers to carry out their deranged acts of violence in our modern 'civilized society.' What reason did Cho Seung-Hui have to carry out the largest massacre of students ever in a United States institution of learning? It is difficult

to understand what motivated either of the two boys, Dylan Klebold or Eric Harris, to elaborately plan a mass-murder campaign that would kill hundreds of their fellow students at Columbine High School. Why did the Texas sniper Charles Joseph Whitman choose to surround himself with a multitude of high-powered firearms at the top of the observation deck in Austin, Texas in a planned shooting rampage against innocent people far below?

SCRIPTURAL CONCLUSIONS

The Scriptures tell us that Satan, as the serpent, was more subtil than any beast of the field. (Gen. 3:1) The word “subtil” describes his cunning and evil pursuits, and has been translated “crafty” or “cunning” in some Bibles. Instead of assisting the newly created human family, the Prophet Isaiah said, concerning Satan, that he had weakened the nations. (Isa. 14:12) When Jesus was speaking to the Jews, he reminded them that Satan was a murderer from the beginning, and that there was “no truth in him” for “he is a liar” and the father of lies. (John 8:44) John the Revelator said concerning Satan, that he had deceived the whole world, and that he was the “accuser of our brethren” before God “day and night.”—Rev. 12:9,10

During Christ’s kingdom, all unrighteousness will be put down, and all who strive to obey God and his laws will receive life. “Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city. Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying.”—Rev. 22:14,15, *NASB* ■