1 Introduction

Since the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, the relationship between Judaism and violence has been a matter of international significance. Prior to this event, few would have predicted that Jewish views on violence – or any other issue, for that matter – would become so important; there are, after all, only 14.5 million Jews in the world, and they make up no more than 0.2 percent of the global population. Yet the establishment of Israel has thrust the issue of Judaism and violence into the spotlight. This event has resulted in a violent conflict in the Middle East that has had far-reaching consequences in the international arena, and thus Jewish views on violence have become highly consequential for the world in general.

The Middle East conflict is, of course, first and foremost a conflict between Jews and Palestinians. Jews see the establishment of the state of Israel as a triumphant return to their homeland after two thousand years of exile in which they were a subjugated and persecuted minority in Europe and in the Islamic world. Palestinians see the same event as an unmitigated disaster that dispossessed them of their land by foreign invaders and has caused them deep suffering ever since.

The conflict, however, is so much more. It pits Israel not just against Palestinians but also against the Arab and Muslim worlds, and while at the time of this writing relations between Israel and its Arab neighbors seem better than they have at any time in the past, a comprehensive peace in the Middle East is still far off. Even more important, the Middle East conflict has become the focus of much larger tensions in the international arena between the Western world that has supported Israel – especially the United States – and the Arab and Muslims worlds that have supported the Palestinians. The West views Israel as an ally and a bastion of democracy in the Middle East that the Arab and Muslim worlds would do well to emulate, while Arabs and Muslims view the establishment of Israel as an attempt on the part of the West to dominate their worlds as it has done in the past. These tensions have never resulted in outright war. These parties have never fought a war solely over Israel. Nonetheless, tensions over Israel have certainly factored into the wars that the West has fought in recent decades in Iraq and Afghanistan; radical Islamist ideologues who have been active in these

wars view their conflict with the West through the prism of a worldview in which Israel and the West have conspired to destroy the Islamic world. The 9/11 attacks were also justified by radical Muslims in light of this worldview. The Middle East conflict is therefore not confined to the Middle East; it involves the entire relationship between the Western world and the Arab and Muslim worlds, and it thus constitutes one of the greatest threats to world peace.

Against this background, it should be clear why the attitudes of Jews to violence have become a matter of such importance in the international sphere. Strange as it may seem, the views of this tiny people on this one issue have ramifications not just for the stability of the Middle East but for the stability of the world as a whole.

This Element is devoted to providing insight into these views. Its purpose is to examine the dimensions of Judaism that can inspire violence among its adherents. My focus will not be entirely on the Middle East conflict. Jews have reflected on the issue of violence throughout their history, which has spanned at least three thousand years. The Hebrew Bible, which evolved during the first millennium BCE, contains a good deal of material on violence, and Jews reflected on this material during subsequent centuries when they had no political power. My analysis of violence in Judaism will therefore grapple with the Bible and its later Jewish interpreters. However, given the importance of the Middle East conflict in our time, much of my effort will be invested in explaining how Jewish views on violence have played a part in this conflict. This focus also makes sense in light of the fact that the creation of the state of Israel has inspired Jews to engage in discussions about violence that are far more extensive and far richer than any conducted since the loss of their political independence two thousand years ago.

There are, of course, elements in Judaism that serve to restrain violence or that go further in encouraging peace. In fact, there are just as many elements of this kind in Judaism as there are those that encourage violence. As I have shown in a previous book, one can find sources on both sides of this divide in every major school of thought in Judaism from the Bible to modern Zionism (Eisen, 2011). However, the focus here will be solely on the violent dimension of Judaism.

By focusing exclusively on this side of Judaism, I am in no way implying that Judaism is inherently violent nor that Judaism is more violent that other religions. If, as I have just stated, Judaism has both violent and peaceful elements within it, Judaism can be violent, or peaceful, depending on which dimension its adherents choose to accentuate. However, I believe that it is valuable – in fact, imperative – to explore the violent dimension of Judaism in its own right. First, such an exploration will provide critical insight for resolving the Middle East conflict. What I hope to show in this Element is that, when Judaism has become violent, it has usually been for understandable reasons, and this is very much the case with the Middle East conflict. Thus, anyone interested in resolving the Middle East conflict must be aware of this background. If one understands why Jews have entered the conflict, one will be much better equipped to convince them to exit it. Effective conflict resolution must always begin with in-depth conflict analysis. I also believe that exploring Judaism's violent dimension is valuable for Jews themselves quite apart from events in the Middle East. Jews cannot create an authentic Judaism for the modern age without acknowledging and understanding Judaism's violent side. That goes even for Jews who favor a peaceful reading of Judaism – and I happen to be one of those Jews. They too must grapple with Judaism's darker side, even if they choose to reject it.

Everything I am saying here applies not just to Judaism but to all major religions. All of them have a violent and a peaceful dimension; all of them can become violent or peaceful in practice depending on which dimension their adherents emphasize; and adherents of these religions must acknowledge and grapple with their violent elements, even if they prefer the elements in them that are peaceful (Appleby, 2000).

A number of other caveats are in order regarding this study. If it is not already obvious, my focus in this Element will be exclusively on how Judaism treats violence perpetrated by Jews against non-Jews. There are, of course, other types of violence that are pertinent to Judaism, such as violence against women, gays, and heretics. We also have plenty of instances in Jewish texts that depict God's violent behavior toward human beings, both Jews and non-Jews. Yet, while these issues are worthy of treatment, they pale in importance in today's world to Jewish violence

toward non-Jews because of the significance of the Middle East conflict in international affairs. My interest will therefore be solely on violence of this kind.

I must also emphasize that, while the Middle East conflict will be central to this Element, I will be making no moral judgments about it. My sole interest here is in understanding the potential for Judaism to foment violence and how that potential is triggered into action. Any moral judgments about Zionism – or Judaism as a whole, for that matter – would require a separate discussion. Therefore, I will make no attempt to determine whether Jews have been justified in creating the state of Israel, nor will I take any position on the justice of Israel's actions, once it came into existence. In Section 5 on Zionism, my concern will be to determine why Jews have made use of violence in the modern era in order to build their own state and what connection that violence has with Judaism.

Finally, I should note that this is my third book-length project on Judaism and violence, and it covers ground similar to that dealt with in *The Peace and Violence of Judaism: From the Bible to Modern Zionism* (Eisen, 2011). However, this Element differs from that book in a number of respects. First, it is shorter and more introductory in nature, given the intent of Cambridge's Elements series of which it is a part. Second, it tackles the question of Judaism and violence with new emphases. It is more historical in orientation than my previous book. It also makes use of insights from social psychology – in particular, Social Identity Theory – a field that was mentioned in my previous book but was not as central to my deliberations as it is in this Element.

1.1 Defining Violence

The term "violence" has been defined in several ways, and it is therefore important that I say something about how I understand the term. The definition provided by the World Health Organization (WHO) will suffice for my purposes. According to this definition, violence is "the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has the high likelihood of resulting in injury, death,

psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation" (Krug et al., 2002: 5). Note that there are three categories of violence here: self-inflicted, interpersonal, and collective. I will be interested in the third category. That is, I will be looking at Jewish views on violence toward other people.

The WHO definition of violence also describes those actions that constitute violence. Primary among them are those that result in physical harm or death. When people speak about violence, they usually have this type of action in mind. However, included in the definition are other forms of injury. Thus, mention is made of actions that result in, or are likely to result in, "psychological damage." That is, the mere threat of violence or verbal abuse of other kinds may be considered violence if it has a markedly deleterious psychological impact on the victim. Symbolic injury, such as the desecration of objects or places sacred to a particular religious group, may constitute violence for the same reason. Scholars also extend the definition of violence to what is often referred to as "structural violence," a category not clearly represented in the WHO definition. This type of violence involves one group oppressing another politically, socially, or economically so that the subjugated group suffers physically and psychologically over a lengthy period of time. Thus, even if blood is not spilled in such situations, the damage done over the long term can be just as harmful as more direct physical injury, and it is therefore often classified as violence (Galtung, 1990).

My study will focus primarily on the kind of violence that causes physical injury or death, particularly when it is perpetrated on a mass scale. War is the best example of this type of violence. However, I will also have occasion to refer to structural violence in my discussion of the Middle East conflict.

It is common to differentiate between violence that is unprovoked and aggressive and violence that is defensive, and it is also common to condemn the first type of violence and approve of the second. I will bring this distinction into my deliberations in the coming pages, but I will do so with great caution because it can be very difficult to differentiate between the two categories of violence. An individual or a group may act violently with the claim that they are only defending themselves, when, in truth, their

actions are aggressive. Even terrorist groups often claim that their violence is only for defensive purposes.

1.2 Methodology

My method in this Element will be primarily historical. I will trace the evolution of Jewish attitudes to violence throughout history. Sections will be devoted to the Hebrew Bible, rabbinic Judaism, medieval and early modern Judaism, and modern Zionism. A concluding section will then sum up my thoughts in the preceding sections and share some speculations about the future.

My analysis will assume that two main factors determine whether or not a people will engage in violence. The first is culture, which defines the attitudes and practices by which the constituents of a society relate to each other and to the world around them. Social scientists have done a great deal of work on the relationship between culture and violence, and they have discovered that cultures have widely different approaches to this issue (Ross, 1993). Those differences can usually be explained by past experiences. For instance, a people that has endured multiple traumas is likely to have a culture that is more prone to violence than one that has not (Volkan, 2007). The second major factor determining whether a people will engage in violence is historical context. Just because a culture has features that make it prone to violence does not mean that it will necessarily act in a violent manner in a given situation. It will become violent only when the right historical circumstances trigger its violent tendencies.

With regard to Judaism, my thesis will be that Jews developed a culture capable of violence against outsiders during the period of the Hebrew Bible and early rabbinic Judaism, a period that spanned more than two thousand years, from approximately 1500 BCE to 750 CE. During this lengthy stretch of time, Jews experienced a series of traumas that shaped the way they understood history and their role in it from a theological standpoint, and that theology of history contained within it the potential to inspire Jews to violence. It saw the Jews as God's chosen people who, despite whatever defeats they experienced, would eventually triumph in the messianic period. All that was needed to bring the violent potential in this theology into action

were the right historical circumstances. Those circumstances arose periodically during the biblical and early rabbinic periods, but after the Jews lost their political sovereignty in the first century, it would be many centuries before circumstances were ripe again for Jews to engage in violence. Those circumstances eventually came about with the advent of the Zionist movement and the drama surrounding the creation of the state of Israel. These events heralded the return of Jewish violence to the world stage.

If, as I am claiming here, Jewish violence in the modern period is the result of a culture shaped by past traumas, mention has to be made of the Holocaust. Many mistakenly assume that this trauma inspired Jews to build a modern Jewish state and engage in violence for that purpose. The death of 6 million Jews during the Second World War was certainly a major catastrophe for Jews, and it was undoubtedly an important factor in motivating Jews to create the state of Israel. However, too much attention has been paid to the Holocaust in explaining Jewish violence in the Middle East. The beginning of the Zionist movement predated the Holocaust by sixty years and was inspired by the centuries of Jewish suffering long before this event. In fact, Jews were the victims of violence in one form or another from biblical times onward. Moreover, violence by Jews against their Arab enemies predated the Holocaust as well. Jewish settlers in Palestine were involved in violent confrontations with Palestinians not long after they established the first Jewish settlements there. Thus, the desire of Jews to establish their own state and their capacity to engage in violence for that purpose cannot be attributed to the Holocaust alone.

My analysis in this Element will be enriched by insights that I plan to bring in from the social sciences. I have already noted the important work done by social scientists on the relationship between culture and violence, but my interest in the social sciences will be focused primarily on one particular school of social psychology that has carried out very valuable work on violence in recent years: Social Identity Theory (henceforth, SIT). This school explores the ubiquitous tendency of human beings to join groups and identify with their agenda, and, in doing so, it also provides important insights into the capacity for groups to engage in violence. I believe the insights of SIT into violence can be applied to modern Jews as well. My analysis here will also benefit from another series of insights in

the social sciences that belong to Vamik Volkan, a psychoanalyst who has written extensively on ethnic violence in the past thirty years.

It may seem odd that I would use the insights of social psychology to analyze events that date back to the biblical and rabbinic periods, seeing as those insights are predicated on data gleaned from ethnic and national conflicts that have taken place in just the last thirty to forty years. However, such insights have proven to be highly valuable in improving our understanding of the violent tendencies in a wide variety of cultures in our contemporary world, and I therefore believe that they are of value for understanding cultures that long predate this world as well. My sense is that they reveal truths about fundamental aspects of human nature and its capacity for violence, truths that are applicable in all places and times. We therefore have much to gain by applying the insights of social psychology not just to events involving Jews in today's world but also to events they experienced long ago.

2 The Hebrew Bible

Our first task is to lay out the theology of history that emerges in the Hebrew Bible and rabbinic Judaism and to explore its potential for encouraging violence. This section will be devoted to the Hebrew Bible, while the next will focus on rabbinic Judaism.[1]

The Hebrew Bible presents us with unique challenges. It consists of an enormous amount of material that was composed during the first millennium BCE by authors who are mostly unidentifiable. The material is also highly heterogeneous; it includes narrative, law, and poetry, to name just a few of its genres. As a result, the Bible does not provide consistent positions on most of the topics it treats. However, coherent themes and ideas can still be discerned in its pages, and fortunately that is the case with

[1] I will be using the terms "Hebrew Bible" and "Bible" interchangeably in this section. While in Western scholarship the term "Bible" includes the New Testament, here it will refer only to the Hebrew Bible, or *Tanakh*, the biblical text recognized as canonical by Jews.

its theology of history; it is presented in a consistent enough fashion in the biblical text for us to describe its general contours.

One way to analyze the Bible's theology of history is to trace its evolution through various layers of the biblical text, but that exercise is one I will not attempt here. Biblical scholars have expended enormous energy just identifying and dating these layers even before analyzing their content, and there is still much disagreement over the conclusions to be drawn from these efforts. I cannot wade into these waters. It will be much more fruitful for my purposes to treat the Bible as a unified piece of literature and to describe the theology of history that its final editors wanted its readers to understand.[2] This approach to the Bible will not only avoid needless complexity; it is closest to the one that Jews themselves have taken toward the Bible throughout the centuries, and it is therefore the best way to help us understand why the biblical text has also been a source of violence for Jews. However, I will not entirely ignore the work of modern biblical scholars who attempt to parse the biblical text into layers and order them chronologically. This scholarship will be valuable for providing insights into the sections of the Bible most important for our topic.

2.1 The Covenant

The key notion in the Bible's theology of history is covenant. It is this concept that undergirds the entire relationship between God and the Israelites as it is depicted in the biblical text. The covenant idea has its roots in ancient Near Eastern culture. A covenant was, in essence, a contract between two parties, usually between a king and his vassals, in which each party had obligations to the other (Hillers, 1969). It was more than just a formal agreement, however; it assumed a deep sense of loyalty and trust between the parties.

The covenant between God and the Israelites in the Bible is modeled on this type of contract, and it begins to take shape in chapter 12 of Genesis

[2] Among academic approaches to the Bible, this approach is most similar to that of Brevard Childs who championed canonical criticism. However, while Childs assumed that the biblical canon included the New Testament, I will be focusing only on the Hebrew Bible.

when God first communicates with Abraham (Gen. 12:1–3). In this chapter, God informs Abraham that he is to be the forefather of a great nation and that this nation will be a source of blessing for all other nations. God's relationship with Abraham and his descendants is then concretized in a formal covenant ceremony in Genesis 15. This chapter also begins to spell out the basic terms of the covenantal agreement that will be elaborated upon in subsequent chapters in Genesis. The picture that soon emerges is that the covenant will require Abraham and his descendants to obey God, and God, in turn, will be obligated to reward them with material wealth and prosperity (Gen. 18:19, 22:17).

Key to this agreement is the land of Canaan, which will later be designated as "the land of Israel" (Gen. 12:7). The material blessing that Abraham's descendants will experience will take place in this land that God has given them as part of the covenant. In other words, the chosen people will have a chosen land. However, neither Abraham nor his descendants will take possession of the land immediately. Abraham is informed in the covenant ceremony in Genesis 15 that his descendants will first become slaves in Egypt for several hundred years. God will then redeem them, and they will go on to take possession of the land by conquering the Canaanite nations who inhabit it (Gen. 15:7–21).

Critical details about the covenant are not defined in Genesis, but they emerge later on in the Torah. An important question is what prescriptions God wants the Israelites to fulfill in order to demonstrate their obedience to him. That question is answered in several sections of the Torah in which God imparts scores of commandments to the Israelites. The first of these commandments are given to Moses, the chief Israelite prophet, in a spectacular revelation on Mount Sinai described in the book of Exodus (Ex. 20). However, the vast majority of the commandments appear in subsequent sections of the Torah. Some of the commandments prescribe a series of rituals that the Israelites will observe to worship God, the most prominent of which are animal sacrifices. Other commandments prescribe a series of ethical imperatives on the presumption that obedience to God requires the Israelites to create a just society.

Portions of the Torah also spell out the punishments the Israelites will incur if they do not adhere to these commandments. God informs them that