

THOUGHTS/QUESTIONS ON *Breaker Morant*

Some historians say that the Boer War was a fight between European powers for the control of southern Africa; a fight for control of recently discovered gold and diamonds.

1. How is it that Morant and his two compatriots got into trouble? What was the progression of events that led to the court marshal, and why didn't they see the trouble coming?
 - A. Guerilla warfare (considered military "cheating") called for a new response;
 - B. The order to take no prisoners was oral (perhaps to preserve "plausible deniability"; perhaps simply because of lack of planning)
 - C. Lord Kitchener was under orders from on high to comply with Dutch and German demands in order to get a peace settlement.
 - D. Australians were more or less expendable (colonials from what many British regarded to be a criminal colony; Britain had an attitude about colonials.)
2. How would you define "guerrilla warfare"?
(This term was first used during the Boer War in S. Africa from 1899-1902.)

Is there a difference between someone involved in terrorism and someone involved in guerilla warfare? If so, what distinctions would you make?

In the book of Joshua, a familiar story is the battle of Jericho, Joshua 6:1-27. How would you characterize that "battle"? Does it have elements of either terrorism or guerrilla warfare? When you read about battles and wars and ambushes in the Old Testament, be aware that God is always interested in individuals, even in the names of the "enemy", people are significant to the Lord. (Examples: Judges 4:2-3, 12-18, 8:4-6, 18-21) Why did God order the destruction of entire cities and populations?

Why do you think that God spared the city of Nineveh (See Jonah 3) when it was reputed to be a terribly wicked city, with a particularly cruel army?
3. Was Morant right to order the execution of the Boer prisoner wearing Hunt's uniform? Why or why not?
4. Was Morant right to order the execution of captured prisoners like Hunt did? Why or why not? Contrast with I Samuel 15:1-23 (Saul neglecting to kill all the Amalekites)
5. Do you think it is necessary for rules of justice and righteousness to be suspended in time of war?
6. Whether or not you liked Captain Robertson (first witness, previous commander of the Bushveldt Carbineers), do you agree or disagree that "there has to be a limit" about how far a person can go, whether in war or in any other situation?
II Samuel 2:8-32, 3:17-38 Joab murders Abner because he killed Joab's little brother
7. What importance did revenge have in Morant's actions? Have you ever felt like taking revenge for something that happened to you or to someone else? ("Taking the law into your own hands.") What prevented you from doing so?

8. A soldier is trained that he must not only obey orders, but that he must do so immediately. If a rocket launch or the loosing of an artillery round is called for, instant response is demanded; the last thing the military needs in pitched battle is a soldier who takes his time to carry out an order. Does this relieve him of personal moral responsibility? Under what circumstances is the “following orders” defense as used in the Nuremberg trials appropriate?

What was rule 303? What was its purpose for Morant and his men?

The film deals with the duties and responsibilities of the lower officers and soldiers to carry out immoral or questionable orders. How does the court martial deal with this problem?

9. In the military, especially in time of declared war, personal boundaries are suspended in two realms: first, the soldier is now subject to military authority (even civilian rights are marginalized under martial law), and second, the rights of the enemy evaporate during conflict. In military jargon, the job of a soldier is “to kill people and break things.” Do you believe it is acceptable for a Christian to serve in the military? What is your reaction to Christians who believe it is immoral for them to serve in the military?
10. Although the denial of responsibility by Lord Kitchener’s staff may seem immoral to us now, it is worth recalling that for certain “black operations” we protect our president with “plausible deniability.” What are your thoughts about this?
Note: after the trial, Lord Kitchener did admit that he issued orders to shoot enemy wearing British uniforms.
11. Identify some of the techniques used in the story and how they impacted you.
Examples: the band, camera angle for various parts of the trial, the use of flashback, the viewing of Hunt’s body, etc.
12. So what is the application to us in all of this? Use scripture to make your point.

If we were to use the “Hero model”:

1. Who is/are the Hero/s in this story? Is it Morant or Thomas? Who or what would be the Mentor? (Note: the Hero model doesn’t apply well to this movie because this is historical, not mythical)
2. What is the problem or central dramatic question in our story? A trial of soldiers charged with killing POW’s and a civilian?
3. What is the ordinary world from which our hero is called? For example, if Thomas is the hero, his previous experience is with land transactions and wills. He has no experience with Court Martial trials, actually no trial experience at all. He was chosen only because he was an Australian and would probably put up a weak defense.
4. Thomas seems to accept the call as a matter of duty to his countrymen. He seems at first to be “crossing the threshold” a bit clumsily until he interviews and challenges with force the first witness, Captain Hunt’s predecessor, Captain Robertson.