

A Biblical Perspective on War

Selected Scriptures

80-241

We are all very much aware of the fact that our nation is on the proverbial brink of war. The President has declared war and the media has begun to post the word in bold print. This is the first war of the twenty-first century.

It is, however, different than the five wars of the twentieth century: World War I, World War II, Korean War, Vietnam, and the Gulf War. It is different in that it is an unconventional war. It is what some are calling an asymmetrical war because it is not fought against a nation or a coalition of nations, but it is still a war. It is a deadly armed sustained conflict with an enemy. In truth, the war has already begun. It started when those hijacked jets hit the buildings and killed thousands of people. Those terrorists acts were essentially a declaration of war.

At this particular time, our nation is strategizing and arming for an appropriate response. The goal of that response is aimed at destroying the enemy's ability to harm us or others again. So the reality of war is swirling around us right here in the first year of the new millennium. And there are many opinions circulating in the national discourse that range from those people who advocate passivism, that is a non-retaliation, all the way to the other side to aggression, the severest kind of aggression is what some people want. There are opinions from restraint to all out destruction. I've heard everything from we shouldn't do anything to we should nuke Mecca. I have heard suggestions that we need to set about to find the specific perpetrators of these crimes against us and bring only them to justice, which would be something like trying to find the actual pilots that flew the Japanese planes and bombed Pearl Harbor and bringing them singularly to justice. I have also, as you have, heard people talk about literally annihilating anybody and everybody connected to the people who did this. And there are all points in between.

We want to come to that not just by virtue of what rhetoric feels more comfortable. We don't want to respond to this thing on sheer emotion, but rather because we are Christians and we have the Bible, we want to go to the Bible and get an understanding of war that comes from Scripture. We have to realize that the military has many believers, some of them from our own church. They are serving in a wide ranging area of responsibility everywhere from support and supply to special forces. And how are they as Christians to understand the responsibility they have under the command of those in the military, how does that fit in with the will of God and the teaching of the Bible?

I'm going to make two big points. I want to keep it as simple as possible and I'm going to load those two points with a lot of information.

Point number one, war in itself is not necessarily wrong, immoral or ungodly. War in itself is not necessarily wrong, immoral or ungodly. Now I know what the sixth commandment says and so do you, "You shall not murder," Exodus 20 verse 13. I also know that in Romans 12 verse 19 it says,

"Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says the Lord." We are commanded not to take personal vengeance but to leave vengeance to God and God ordained institutions. It is also true in Numbers 35:33 the Bible says, "So you shall not pollute the land in which you are for blood pollutes the land and no expiation can be made for the land for the blood that is shed on it except by the blood of him who shed it."

So while God says you should not murder and the Bible says you shall not take personal vengeance, it also says that when someone sheds blood that land is polluted until the person who shed that blood sheds his blood. In Genesis chapter 9 and verse 6 God Himself instituted capital punishment. He instituted capital punishment for the crime of murder. Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed. And later on in the Mosaic instruction we find there are at least 30 other immoral acts, crimes, for which God prescribed the death penalty.

So God Himself has established that we do not have the right to take a life in a act of murder or in an act of vengeance. But there is a place for just retribution and there are crimes, including murder, killing at any level, that require retaliation and retribution in the form of death. It is also true that not only has God established justice on an individual level through human government but He has also established war as a means of judgment on a national level. In fact, God Himself engages in war for His own purpose. God uses rulers and nations in His providence to bring death and destruction to people. And for sure, there are no people on the face of the earth who don't deserve to die because the wages of sin is death, the soul that sinneth it shall die, we all deserve to die. So when people die it isn't some aberration whether they die in an accident or from a disease or from a criminal act or war. That is part of sin. It's the wages, it's the payment. But there are times when God uses rulers and nations within His providence for His purpose to bring certain death and destruction to people because it's His will to do that.

I'm not here to tell you everything about God's will. I don't know that. I don't know why God does it in some circumstances and doesn't do it in other circumstances. God doesn't tell us that. But I trust that God always does what is right. In Joshua chapter 10 and verse 40 Joshua struck all the land, this is Joshua's conquest of Canaan and the children of Israel going into the land of Canaan which God had promised to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the land that God wanted to give His people and they needed to go into the land and they needed to go in and make war against the idolatrous people of the land and destroy those people and then take that land which God had given them. So Joshua did that, struck all the land, the hill country, the Negeb, the desert in the south, the lowland, the slopes, all their kings. He left no survivor but he utterly destroyed all who breathed, just as the Lord the God of Israel had commanded. Amazing. And Joshua struck them from Kadesh-Barnea, even as far as Gaza and all the country of Goshen even as far as Gibeon and Joshua captured all these kings and their lands at one time because the Lord the God of Israel fought for Israel.

Now here is a simple illustration of the fact that God sent Joshua, the commander, and his army, the people of Israel, to go and to make war and utterly destroy all who breathed in the land around Canaan. In Psalm 18, and it's important that you see these passages so I'm going to take the time to point them out to you, in Psalm 18 verse 30, this is a psalm of David and in verse 30 he says, "As for God, His way is blameless." Don't ever forget that. Whatever God does is blameless. "The Word of the Lord is tried, it's proven. He is a shield to all who take refuge in Him." You don't have to worry about what God does if you put your refuge in Him, right? Because no matter how you die, if your refuge is in Him even in a war you're going to into His glorious presence. Verse 31, "For who is God but the Lord, and who is a rock except our God, the God who girds me with strength and makes my

way blameless. He sets my feet like hind's feet, mountain goat's feet, He sets me upon my high places." Then verse 34, "He trains my hands for battle so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze." David saw himself as a soldier for God that went to battle to kill in fulfillment of divine purpose.

In the fifth chapter of Jeremiah and verse 14 we read, "Therefore thus says the Lord the God of hosts because you have spoken this word, behold, I am making My words in your mouth fire and this people wood and it will consume you. Behold--verse 15, and the Lord here is sending a message to Jerusalem--I am bringing a nation against you from afar." This is Babylon, the Chaldeans, the Babylonians. "I'm bringing a nation against you from afar, O house of Israel, declares the Lord. It is an enduring nation, it is an ancient nation." And truly Babylon was. "It is a nation whose language you do not know, nor can you understand what they say. Their quiver is like an open grave, all of them are mighty men and they will devour your harvest and your food. They will devour your sons and your daughters. They will devour your flocks and your herds. They will devour your vines and your fig trees. They will demolish with the sword your fortified cities in which you trust. Yet even in those days, declares the Lord, I will not make you a complete destruction." Obviously He saved some of them to take them into captivity and then later to bring them back. "And it shall come about when they say why has the Lord our God done all these things to us, then you shall say to them, As you have forsaken Me and served foreign gods in your land, so you shall serve strangers in a land that is not yours."

God sent the Babylonian army to come in with a massive slaughter to kill the people of Judah and Jerusalem, take a remnant captive and it was a punishment for their idolatry. In the fifty-first chapter of Jeremiah this too a very, very helpful passage of Scripture. Jeremiah chapter 51 verse 1, "Thus says the Lord...Behold I'm going to arouse," and here's an interesting turning of the tables. "I'm going to arouse against Babylon and against the inhabitants of Leb Kamai the spirit of a destroyer and I will dispatch foreigners to Babylon that they may win over her and may devastate her land for on every side they will be opposed to her in the day of her calamity."

What's He talking about? He's talking about the Persians under the leadership of Cyrus who later came to destroy the Babylonian Empire. God used the Babylonian army to judge Israel. God used the Medo-Persian army, particularly Cyrus the Persian, to judge Babylon.

And drop down to verse 11, this continues. "Sharpen the arrows, He says to the Persians, sharpen the arrows, fill your quiver, the Lord has aroused the spirit of the kings of the Medes because His purpose is against Babylon to destroy it, for it is the vengeance of the Lord, vengeance for His temple." The Babylonians went in and they conquered the Jews and that was an act of judgment and they desecrated the temple. And God used them to chasten Israel. But later on God came right back and punished them for their idolatry and desecration of His temple.

Down in verse 15, "It is He who made the earth by His power, who established the world by His wisdom and by His understanding He stretched out the heavens. When He utters His voice there's a tumult of waters in the heavens. He causes the clouds to ascend from the end of the earth. He makes lightning for the rain. He brings forth the wind from His storehouse. All mankind is stupid, devoid of knowledge. Every goldsmith is put to shame by his idols for his molten images are deceitful, there is no breath in them. They are worthless, a work of mockery. In the time of their punishment they will perish." Talking about the idols. "The portion of Jacob is not like these. Jacob doesn't have a God like these, for the maker of all is He," that is the God of Jacob is the true God, the creator. "Lord of hosts is His name."

And then notice verse 20, amazing. He says, "You are My war club, My battle axe, My weapon of war and with you I shatter nations and with you I destroy kingdoms. With you I shatter the horse and the rider, the chariot and the rider, man and woman, old man, youth, young man, virgin, the shepherd and his flock, the farmer and his team, governors and prefects." When God sends a force, a military force in, everybody feels the power and the deadliness of that force...not just the king, not just the military, not just those horse and riders and chariot and riders, those who represent the military but men and women, old and young, virgins and people working the farms, everybody all the way down through. And God is saying you, Cyrus really, the Persian who led the Medes and the Persians, you are My battle axe. You are My war club.

Backing up in the sixteenth chapter of Isaiah to further help you see this, Isaiah 16 verse 6, "We have heard of the pride of Moab and excessive pride even of his arrogance, pride and fury. His idle boasts are false. Therefore Moab shall wail, everyone of Moab shall wail. You shall moan for the raisin cakes of Kir-hareseth as those who are utterly stricken." You're going to long for the things you loved. And God here is talking about Assyrian armies who are going to come in a conquering fashion.

The thirty-seventh chapter of Isaiah, I won't read it, verses 26 and 27. God gives power to the Assyrian king Sennacherib to crush the fortified cities of Judah.

In Ezekiel 30 verse 22 to 26 God said that Nebuchadnezzar was His war weapon to break the power of Egypt. So God made war against Israel in the north. God made war against Judah in the south. God made war against Babylon. God made war against Egypt. The little prophecy of Habakkuk, I think, is very instructive as well. Habakkuk is toward the end of the Old Testament, chapter 1 verse 5. This is a judgment against Judah. God is going to bring the Chaldeans, it's the same prophecy we heard from Jeremiah that Babylonians or the Chaldeans are going to come and destroy Judah and Jerusalem.

Verse 5 of Habakkuk 1, "Look among the nations! Observe! Be astonished! Wonder! Because I'm doing something in your days. You would not believe if you were told. Behold I am raising up the Chaldeans, that fierce and impetuous people who march throughout the earth to seize dwelling places that are not theirs. They are dreaded and feared. Their justice and authority originate with themselves." That is they answer to nobody. "Their horses are swifter than leopards and keener than wolves in the evening. Their horsemen come galloping, their horsemen come from afar. They fly like an eagle swooping down to devour. All of them come for violence. Their horde of faces moves forward. They collect captives like sand. They mock at kings and rulers are a laughing matter to them. They laugh at every fortress and heap up rubble to capture it then they will sweep through like the wind and pass on. But they will be held guilty, they whose strength is their god."

God will use a worse nation than Judah, Babylon, the Chaldeans, to destroy Judah then hold them accountable for their desecration and later on have the Persians destroy them. God was involved in war. And God understands the devastation that war brings. Look for a moment at Psalm 37.

This is hard to hear, this little section, but needs to be read because it is the Word of God. Verse 9 of Psalm 37, "Evil doers will be cut off...evil doers will be cut off." Sooner or later, sooner or later the wicked will be destroyed. That's just the way it's going to be. There's no escape. And when it

happens, the fallout will strike everybody.

A couple of passages that show this, Isaiah 13:16, this a painful one. This is a discussion of when God brings the Medes, the Median Empire, the Persians, against Babylon. It's verse 1 of chapter 13, an oracle concerning Babylon and God is going to bring this army, and He did historically. But I want you to notice this most compelling part of it. "Anyone...verse 15...who is found will be thrust through," it's going to be deadly with a sword, "and anyone who is captured will fall by the sword. Their little ones also will be dashed to pieces before their eyes. Their houses will be plundered and their wives ravished." God knows innocent women and children die in a war and still He authorized the war.

Turn to Hosea and here you have Hosea talking about the Assyrians attacking the northern kingdom Israel. In Hosea chapter 13 this is almost a repetition of what I read in the same chapter and verse of Isaiah, 13:16. Israel is going to be destroyed, it says that in verse 9. And the agent of destruction in this case was the Assyrian Empire. Notice verse 16, "Samaria will be held guilty for she has rebelled against her God, they will fall by the sword," Samaria was the capital of the northern kingdom Israel, and look at this, "their little ones will be dashed to pieces and their pregnant women will be ripped open." God understands that what we would call the innocent perish in a war. The reality, however, is all people deserve to die and will die and some will die in wars which God determines are within His purpose and His will.

There's a little chapter and verse in Nahum, so easy to overlook, just three chapters long this book. In Nahum 3:10 it's the same thing. This is discussing Assyria's attack on Egypt and verse 10 says, "Her small children were dashed to pieces at the head of every street." Just horrible, unthinkable, but this is the reality of war.

By the way, I'm going to say this a couple of times tonight, file it in the front. God gives no account to us of His actions. He doesn't need to. And we can claim no right to call Him to account. He is the sovereign of the universe. He is blameless. He doesn't owe us any explanation. Calamity, war are within His providential purpose. Amos the prophet was a sheep breeder from a place called Tekoa. He received a revelation from God in Amos 3:6, listen to this, you don't have to look it up. Amos 3:6, write it down, "If there is calamity in a city will not the Lord have done it?" What's he saying? Is he saying God does evil? No. He is saying any calamity anyplace any time, crashing into towers, war fits within the purpose of God. Everything fits into His purpose, He hates sin, He's absolutely righteous, He is never responsible for any evil. Yet all that occurs He allows, even war which is within His purpose. We may not know what that purpose is. I'm sure it could have been very, very confusing to people living at the time of the Old Testament when just about every nation at one time or another was the battle axe of God against another one. And as I said, if God chose for all of us to die right now, we'd only get what we deserve. But He's patient and He's gracious but He sovereignly selects the calamities and the battles that He allows even though they are generated by wicked and evil men, they fit within His purpose.

So we know then that wars are not necessarily ungodly or immoral or wrong because God Himself engages in them. In fact, turn to Exodus 15...Exodus 15. You know, Exodus 15 is called "The Song of Moses." What do they have to sing about? Chapter 14, what happened in chapter 14? God drowned the entire Egyptian army, closed up the sea, drowned them all. Verse 28 of chapter 14, Pharaoh's entire army had gone into the sea, every one of them. God drowned them all. They were all dead on the shore, verse 30 says. And they sang a song because God had destroyed the entire Egyptian army. Were they all equally evil? No, but in God's purpose He deemed that it was time for

their punishment. And it was also time to protect His people. And so the song of Moses goes like this, "I will sing to the Lord for He is highly exalted. The horse and its rider He has hurled into the sea." Talking about the Egyptians. "The Lord is my strength and my song and He has become my salvation. This is my God and I will praise Him. My father's God and I will extol Him. The Lord is a warrior." Humph...the Lord is a warrior.

Back in chapter 14 verse 14, Moses told the people, "The Lord will fight for you." Did you know the Old Testament talks about God's wars? It does. Yahweh's battles, Yahweh's wars. First Samuel 18:17, 1 Samuel 18:17, 1 Samuel 25:28, the wars of God. God is a warrior. There are times when God uses war, there are times when God yields a sword.

In Exodus 32 the children of Israel worshiped the golden calf. It was idolatry. God was angry, verse 25, Moses saw the people were out of control. They were out of control worshiping the golden calf, having an orgy while he was up in the mountains getting the law of God. So Moses stood in the gate of the camp and he said, "All right, whoever is for the Lord come to me." And all the sons of Levi gathered to him. Nobody else, just the sons of Levi came. What did he tell them to do? "Thus says the Lord God of Israel, every man of you put his sword on his thigh, go forth back and forth from gate to gate in the camp everywhere, kill every man, his brother, every man, his friend, every man, his neighbor. So the sons of Levi did as Moses instructed and 3,000 men of the people fell that day." God said go and kill those idolaters now. That was a command from God to show the people in a profound way the danger of idolatry.

And then there's 1 Kings 18:40, Elijah with the prophets of Baal. And it says he seized them, brought them down to the brook Kishon and slew them there. Do you know how many there were? Four hundred and fifty.

Now there are times, you see, when God obviously not only instituted capital punishment as we saw in those earlier Scriptures, but there are times when God commanded that a group of people be killed, false prophets, idolaters. There are times when God actually was a warrior, when God was the commander-in-chief in a war and He had nations against nations bringing death and destruction against evil to punish idolatry, punishing it in Egypt, punishing it in Babylon, punishing it in Israel, punishing it in Judah. So God is a warrior, don't underestimate that.

Not always does God bring death. But sometimes He does in this way as a testimony to what we all deserve, right? But we don't live in a theocracy. We say we're a nation under God, but that's not true. You know that. We're under God in the sense that He is the sovereign over us, we're not under God in the sense that we willingly submit to Him. But we are not like Israel. We are not God's people. We don't have any covenant promise and protection. But God has assigned to human government the task of protection and punishment.

On a personal level government has the right to exercise capital punishment, government has the right to exercise just retribution, government has the responsibility to provide protection. And so, on a personal level we have the police and we have the courts and we have the jail system. And all of that is designed so that government can function to protect the good and punish the evil. Well God also gave that to government not only on the personal level but on the national level. Government has a responsibility to step in and protect its citizens from an aggressive force, preserve life and peace and justice here and in the world. While God is the ultimate judge, the final and eternal authority, He has delegated to man a certain sovereignty because the Bible says man is the king of the earth. And his

rulership goes through the agencies that God has instituted. His rule in the family is clear, the father is the ruler of the families, the head of the family. His rule in the church is through the pastors and elders who lead the church. His rule on the social level is through the duly constituted government.

War then has been divinely delegated to governments who are the God-appointed authority for preservation, punishment and protection. So when injustice is done against a nation, it is the responsibility of government to protect that nation. Let me tell about wars, real simple. War starts when the peace is interrupted and ends when it is restored. That's really what a war should be. It starts when the peace is interrupted and it ends when it is restored. Stopping Hitler would be the classic example of a just war, wouldn't it? He was going to commit genocide, obliterate the Jews from the face of the earth. He was going to literally kill everybody he had to on the face of the earth to achieve his horrendous evil intentions. America and many other nations rose up in a noble expression of the role of government to punish the evil doer and protect the innocent. And the war began when Hitler interrupted the peace and it ended when the peace was restored.

In the Old Testament we have a lot of Scriptures that talk about Yahweh's wars...the wars of God. Numbers 21:14, there we are told, here's a quote, "The book of the wars of the lord...the book of the wars of the Lord." And that book consisted of victory songs, written to be sung in the celebration of the triumph of the Lord over the idolatrous people of Canaan when they went in and they killed the idolaters as an act of divine judgment. They had songs to sing. There is a Psalm...when you think about the Psalms you think about songs and they were songs, it was a hymnbook of Israel. Psalm 68:21, here's...here's a verse you won't find in hymns, "God will shatter the heads of His enemies." God told Israel to arm itself and defend itself against attack. We find that in Ezekiel 17:18 and following. We find it in Numbers 21:1 to 3. And God instructed, as I told you, Joshua to take Canaan by military force. Read Joshua 1, read Joshua particularly Joshua 6. God instructs him to take that land by military force. Isaiah 42:13 says, "The Lord will go forth like a warrior. He will arouse His zeal like a man of war. He will utter a shout, yes He will raise a war cry, He will prevail against His enemies." If you've ever seen any old war movies when the armies would face each other in the phalanx and just run at each other...that's the imagery...shouting and screaming and raising a war cry and plunging into battle. And it says that's what the Lord will do.

David's song of praise, he said, "The Lord trains my hands for battle," as I read. "And he strengthens my arm to bend a bow of bronze." In Psalm 144:1 David said, "Blessed be the Lord my rock who trains my hands for war and my fingers for battle." Do you remember 1 Samuel 18:7 where when the people were hailing David they said, "Saul has killed his thousands and David has killed his ten thousands?"

Starting to get the picture? Deuteronomy chapter 20, we're going pretty good here, this is good. "When you go out to battle...Deuteronomy 20...against your enemies and you see horses and chariots and people more numerous than you, don't be afraid of them for the Lord your God who brought you up from the land of Egypt is with you. Now it shall come about that when you are approaching the battle, the priests shall come near and speak to the people. He shall say to them...Hear, O Israel, you are approaching the battle against your enemies today, do not be fainthearted, do not be afraid or panic or tremble before them." It's the original pep talk. Why? "For the Lord your God is the one who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies to save you." What a great statement. And the rest of the chapter, by the way, Deuteronomy 20, you can read it on your own, gives the rules for war. Who should be a soldier and who shouldn't. How to treat people. How to treat prisoners. How to deal with the spoils. How to treat the trees.

Well, let me summarize what we've been saying. Under God's command and God's direction and for His own purposes, to punish sinners, wicked nations, wicked people, God wielded a mighty sword of death. He wielded it against nations that threatened Israel. He wielded it against nations that threatened peace, against nations that threatened other nations. He wielded not only a sword of punishment but a sword of protection. God wielded His sword against aggressive, evil, destructive enemies who desire to destroy others. And under God's command and with God's help, battles were fought against sinful nations, against wicked nations, against aggressive nations. But they were also fought against His own people. Wars were then a form of divine protection, as well as divine judgment on idolatry, whether it was in a pagan nation or in Israel. Any national breach of the truth of God constitutes a justification for divine punishment. Don't you think for a minute that America is guaranteed to win any war. We're not the people of God. There's no covenant to preserve us. Those of us who are Christians obviously will survive everything into the glory of the Kingdom. I think we'll win this one, I hope we will. I don't know the purposes of God. I do know those who threaten us are wicked and evil and godless and idolatrous, but so are we. I also know this, however, that it's better to be a friend of Israel because whoever blesses Israel shall be blessed, whoever curses Israel shall be cursed, Genesis 12.

The Jews fought wars all the time. They fought wars in the time that's called the Conquest, when they came in and settled the land. They destroyed wicked Canaanites, Philistines, Amalekites, Medianites, Ammonites, Arameans(?). During the time of the monarchies, the kings, they fought more wars. They fought a lot of those wars against the same people they didn't destroy. If they destroyed them they wouldn't have had to fight wars against them anymore. And if those people had been destroyed as God told them to destroy them, they wouldn't have had their idolatrous influence all the time. Then they added they had to fight the Moabites. And then they had to make war against the powerful forces of the Assyrians who obliterated the northern kingdom, and the Babylonians who defeated the southern kingdom and hauled them off captive for 70 years in Babylon.

They fought wars at the time of the Conquest, at the time of the Monarchies. They fought wars in the 400 years between the Old and the New Testament. They had what is called a Maccabean Revolution. They fought the Greeks. Josephus says they fought the Romans. Now they're fighting just about everybody in the Middle East. Sad to say, you know, God intended Israel to be righteous and godly and to be His instrument to cleanse the Middle East of deadly idolatry so that they could bring on themselves the blessing of God. But Israel forgot God, didn't do the cleansing they were told to do and then began to adopt the idols of all the people around them. And judgment fell not only on the people around them, but on Israel as well. And God made war against everybody, including them.

You know, wicked, idolatrous, destructive nations are like cancer. They have to be fought. If you lose the war on cancer, you die. God has every right to purge His world any time He wants of any kind of sin, any sinning people. God desires the good to prevail. God desires that the good, even human good be rewarded. God desires stable civilization. God desires men to live at peace with one another. And war is really a righteous last resort for God. It comes after warnings and warnings and warnings and warnings that are not heeded. Here we are in the twenty-first century in a war...I don't know what God is doing in this, He hasn't told me. I was listening to some preacher on television today and saying, "Of all the times, this is the time to listen and let God tell you what He is doing." Well, He's not going to tell you, this is not some holy war because America is not a holy nation. This is a conflict between two idolatrous forces, but I'll say this, ours is a just engagement, the enemies' is

not because a just war is a war fought because peace is interrupted and it is fought only until peace is restored. It is not a war of aggression. It is not a war of dominance. It is a war of defense.

I think God prefers justice to injustice, don't you? Goodness to wickedness, kindness to brutality. And maybe...maybe we are going to be instruments of God to crush this wicked force that threatens justice and goodness in the world and threatens Israel. It's probably true that we will be that instrument. But after we have done that, there is no guarantee that we're not next. And you saw the pattern of that with God using Babylon to judge Israel, the Medes to judge Babylon, the Assyrians to judge Egypt and so forth.

Israel was God's judgment tool but they also were under His judgment. Is there anything more horrible than 70 A.D. when the Romans came in and besieged the city of Jerusalem? Surrounded it, basically that's what they would do and starve the people to death and before the slaughter under Titus Vespasian was over, we're told that the Romans killed 1.1 million Jews in 70 A.D. The next few years they sacked 985 pounds in the land of Israel, it was an utter devastation and the Jews that remained were scattered only to finally be regathered in 1948. Not even Israel, not even Israel escapes the judgment of God.

So, for the moment we may be the instrument of God to judge these evil aggressors who would destroy the people of God. But as I said, there's no guarantee in the future.

Now I want to take you in to the New Testament for a minute. And we're getting close to the end...not real close, but close. I'm going to give you a principle to think about. There are people who say war is wrong, war is wrong, we shouldn't do it, we shouldn't do it. When you come in to the New Testament you have some interesting passages of Scripture. Luke 3:8 and following, this is the preaching of John the Baptist and so he's preaching repentance, repentance, repentance and people are coming to repent. And he is saying to them, "Demonstrate that your repentance is real, show that your repentance is real." And so the crowd in verse 10 says, "How do we do that? How do we show that our repentance is real?"

He says, "Okay, let somebody who has two tunics share with him who has none and let the one who has food do likewise. And some tax gatherers also came to be baptized and he said to them...they said to him, 'Teacher, what do we do?' He said, 'Well, don't take any more tax than you're supposed to.' And then some soldiers came and they were questioning him saying, 'And what about us, what do we do?'" And some would like to have Jesus say...Get out of the military, it's wrong. He said, "Don't take money from anyone by force, don't accuse anyone falsely and be content with your wages." That is without question an implicit affirmation of being a soldier...just be honest, don't rob people because you have the power to do it, because you carry a weapon, don't accuse people falsely because you're on the inside of law enforcement, be content with your pay. I mean, there's an affirmation of the validity of being a soldier, just be a noble one who does what is right to do.

You have the same thing in the tenth chapter of Acts where Cornelius was a Roman soldier. He was a centurion which meant he was the leader of a hundred men. It's...it's an Italian battalion which was from Rome. Cornelius was a formidable soldier. He was a devout man, verse 2. He feared God with all his household. He gave many alms to the Jewish people, prayed to God continually. And in verse 22, "Cornelius was a centurion, a righteous and God fearing man, well spoken of by the entire nation of the Jews, divinely directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and hear a message from you," that's referring to Peter. Down in verse 48 he came to be baptized. Here is

another implicit, really a commendation of a man who was a righteous Roman soldier.

And then if you were to go through the teaching of Jesus you would find similar kind of implicit affirmations. Remember in Matthew 21 Jesus approved about a king who waged war against wicked people, remember that story? Do you remember Jesus said, "Nobody goes to war without counting the cost," do you remember when Peter took out his sword in the garden when they came to arrest Jesus, started to cut his way through the crowd, he cut the ear off the first guy in line who ducked and lost an ear? Peter was going for his throat, you can be sure. Jesus said, "Put your sword back in its sheath." He didn't say, "What are you doing with that thing?" He said, "Just put it back where it belongs." The implicit idea is you have a right to carry it for your self-protection, don't use it like this. In fact, in John 18:36 Jesus actually said, "That it would have been proper for his disciples to defend His Kingdom with swords if it was an earthly kingdom," John 18:36.

And I'll tell you something else. How many times in the New Testament is a soldier an image of a Christian? Right? We put on the armor of God, don't we? We're to be a good soldier of Jesus Christ. And do you know that the Lord would never use a dishonorable profession as an illustration for a Christian? He would never use a thief or a prostitute or a murderer as an illustration of a Christian. Thus He implies the nobility of being a soldier, it's a transferable analogy for a Christian. We are told to fight spiritual warfare like a good soldier.

By the way, Obadiah, the prophet in the Old Testament says that when the Lord comes He will instruct His people to engage in war. And when Jesus Himself comes, He comes on a white horse as a great warrior with a sword in His hand.

All of this imagery exalts the proper role of the soldier. Now let me give you two explicit passages. Turn to 1 Peter chapter 2...1 Peter chapter 2 verses 13 to 15. "Submit yourselves...1 Peter 2:13...submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors, those who are authorities under the king as sent by him for the punishment of evil doers and the praise of those who do right, for such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the foolishness of ignorance of foolish men."

In other words, here is the general principle. Soldiers, governors, whatever you want to call them, those who are under the king's authority are sent by him for the punishment of evil doers and the praise of those who do right. They come to make it good for the people who obey the law and bad for the people who don't. The primary duty of civil government is indicated here. The primary duty is not Welfare, it's not the reallocation of wealth, it's not the roads, it's not education. The primary duty of civil government is law enforcement. It is to punish evil doers so they can't harm other people and to deter would-be evil doers by letting them know what the penalty is.

Let me tell you something. The greatest need for a city is to strengthen the police force. That's the greatest need. Look around Los Angeles. People say, "What do we need? What do we need?" Stronger police force that protects people who do obey the law and punishes people who don't. And what is the thing the nation needs more than anything else? Strong military. We didn't think that when things were kind of going along and we were floating high when the cold war ended in the eastern Europe sector and we thought everything was going to be fine. And we downsized our military and now we've got a serious problem. The government's responsibility is to protect us from evil doers. And that may cause a war because the peace has been interrupted, those who are just and righteous go into action until the peace is restored.

Turn to Romans 13...Romans 13. This is a familiar portion, probably the most familiar portion of Scripture on the subject. The first seven verses definitive, verse 1, "Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities for there is no authority except from God and those which exist are established by God." Talking about governmental authorities, they're all...it isn't that every person is a Christian and every person is a, you know, willing servant of God. It just means that government as an entity is there by God's direction. "Therefore he who resists its authority has opposed the ordinance of God and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves."

When a nation or when a group of people like the terrorists attack America, they have struck a blow against an institution of God. Okay? We're not a godly nation, we're not under God as individual people, but government that seeks to provide justice and peace and protection is an agency of God. And when it's attacked, that institution of God is attacked. Rulers, verse 3, are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Then do what's good. Just do what's right because the authority, verse 4, is a minister of God to you for good. So when somebody attacks this government, this entity, it is attacking the servant of God for the well-being, protection and peace of this nation. And if you do what is evil, be afraid because this institution of government doesn't bear the sword for nothing. A sword is an instrument of death, it's not to wrap people on the knuckles, it's to run them through...what a sword is for. This is a sword here, it is the minister of God.

And here's the main point. The government is the avenger which brings wrath on the one who practices evil. God delegates vengeance to the government. The government then has the power to kill. And let me tell you something, if the government's power to kill is a mercy, it's a mercy otherwise evil people dominate. You see, man's worse enemy is man. You read in the time of the Tribulation in the future when Antichrist rules the world, all the laws will change and it says people will rise up and kill each other in the same family.

Now all of that is to demonstrate the point that I started with. War is not necessarily immoral, wrong or ungodly. In fact, it may well be an expression of righteousness. Francis Schaeffer wrote in one of his books called Who is for Peace? "To refuse to do what I can for those under the power of oppression is nothing less than a failure of Christian love, it is to refuse to love my neighbor as myself."

This nation has always understood that. And we've gone all over the globe to protect other people who were under the slaughter of an evil oppressor. This is good. So really there are only two kinds of wars. There is the war of evil aggression, James 4, you lust, you have not, so you commit this war of evil aggression, the Stalins and the Hitlers and the Osama bin Ladens and whoever else. It's the war of evil aggression, rooted in alienation from God, rooted in wretched lust and desire to have something and something is in the way of getting what you want. It's the war of the terrorists.

Then the other war would be the war of just protection. The evil aggressor comes and the reaction is the peace has been taken, we have to restore the peace. That's the function of government. We have to protect the people. It's not just vengeance. If we don't do something immediately, they'll bomb us even more and many more people will die. God is a warrior because He's a God of peace. And listen to this, war is a severe mercy. War is a severe mercy. But it is a mercy.

A moral war, a just war is defensive. It is protective. It is a last resort when all attempts at

reconciliation and mediation are exhausted. And, boy, have we done that. A moral war is national, it's not personal vengeance. A moral war is limited, it doesn't seek annihilation, it just seeks to restore the peace. It just seeks to assure that they can't do it again. And the ethics of the Old Testament by no means give a blanket approval for all wars or all methods of war. You can read the second chapter of Habakkuk where the ethics of war are laid out and God condemns people who commit wars of aggression. That little book of Habakkuk has so many wonderful insights with regard to this particular issue. It warns against nations that plunder and loot and kill and commit bloodshed and violence. Woe to those who build a city with bloodshed and found a town with violence. I mean, God in no way blanket approves war. The only war that God approves is that war either which He Himself commands, in the case of Israel where He's not doing any more through direct revelation, or that just war of protection.

Amos the prophet, again Amos chapter 1, almost the whole chapter, forbids a war of evil aggression. It forbids a pitiless, ruthless war. In fact, Psalm 68:30 says, "God scattered the people who delight in war."

Now I believe that the war we're not engaged in with this Middle East terrorist group is a war that embraces these two features. They are the evil aggressor and we are the just protector. And that's the way it is. It is possible then, I like to think that we as an evil nation ourselves still have enough human goodness and commitment to justice to be used as God's instrument of judgment on those who not only have rejected God but who want to destroy Israel and take peace from the whole earth. I like to think we are the judgment weapon for God to deal with those people. I also know down the road that we may be next.

You see, all of this is a complex of factors that God understands but...in the L.A. Times the other day some guy wrote an article and the headline was, "Where is God?" And the answer was, "He is in the rubble." God is not in the rubble. God is not victimized. He's not trying to find His way out. He's on the throne. He's the sovereign of the universe. Isaiah 46:9 and 10, "Remember the former things long past, for I am God and there is no other, I am God and there is no one like Me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things which have not been done saying, 'My purpose will be established and I will accomplish all My good pleasure.'" That's encouraging, isn't it?

Nebuchadnezzar knew that. He knew God was God. He knew God was mighty. Everything is in God's control. And again, He doesn't have to explain it...just doesn't have to explain it. He may allow war for no other reason than to show us the effects of sin, and to waken us to our sinful condition. He may allow war to give us a temporal taste of eternal punishment. People kept climbing all over the rubble when they were interviewing it, they said, "This is like being in hell." I kept thinking, "Wow, I hope they know what they're saying." What a great lesson that is. We see our sin in this. We see our vulnerability in this. We see the agonizing reality of death right in our face. We see the taste of hell. That is a severe mercy, isn't it? That's a severe mercy because we need to see that so that we can repent before the tower falls on us.

You say, "Well what about my kids in the next generation? Will it be better?" Jesus said in Matthew 24, "In the end of the age there shall be wars and rumors of wars." It's not going to change. Not going to change until that great final conflict of the Antichrist when the Lord Jesus comes back as the final warrior and forever wins the victory.

Now I could end here. But there's a second point and it's brief but it's a point you need to understand.

This is maybe even critical. Okay, the second point...the first point, war is not necessarily wrong, evil, ungodly, immoral...second point, God has a purpose in war, just like everything, but we may not know what it is.

Well, is this a judgment on America? Is this a judgment on us for abortion, materialism, secularism? What is it? Were those people who died in the building the worse people in our society and that's why they were there? And somebody whose alarm didn't work and they never got there in time was a better person? I mean, what is this? What is God doing in this? What's His purpose?

Well, I'm going to give you an answer. Before I do that I want to say, however, don't think for a moment that those people in that building are the worse. Don't think that the person who died in the war are the worse. The fact of the matter is the visible providence of God has no respect of persons. It doesn't discriminate between believers and unbelievers. Plane crashes, boat sinkings, train accidents, car collisions, heart disease, cancer doesn't discriminate between a sinner and a saint, or between a sinner and a sinner. There are complex divine elements operating here.

The best answer I can find in Scripture is in Isaiah 45. This is the last passage but this is really critical. Isaiah 45, and I want you to turn to this chapter, I want you to look right at verse 15. The first line of verse 15, I just want you to focus on it, Isaiah 45:15, this is what it says, "Truly you are a God who...what?...hides Himself." Wow! You are a God who hides Himself. Now listen very carefully, this is not a complaint, this is praise. This is an expression of adoration. This is a statement of worship and it should end with an exclamation point as the verse does.

Now let me give you the background. Israel was experiencing at the time of this prophecy...Israel was experiencing a barrage of humiliations, trouble everywhere, defeat everywhere, constantly attacked by idolatrous enemies, assaulted and defeated by their enemies. The enemies of Israel had plundered her treasures, taken her people captive, destroyed places. And God through the prophet Isaiah says...It's going to get worse. Only a matter of time before Jerusalem would be conquered, destroyed. And the remainder of the people who weren't killed, taken to Babylon as captives. It came to pass, Assyria destroyed the northern kingdom Israel; Babylon destroyed the southern kingdom Judah.

Now this is hard to swallow because they are the people of God's promise. They are the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They are the covenant people. Yet God is doing nothing to protect them. Why? Why? Why doesn't God do something?

Well, they were in sin. They turned their back on God, they were in idolatry. And so all of this was coming on them. And we ask the same question today, why did God let that happen? Why did He allow it? Why didn't He protect us? Aren't we a nation under God? Don't we have "In God We Trust" on our coins, even if it's "Me First" in our hearts? Doesn't God bless America because America is special?

Well the new theology...the new theology says that God would like to prevent these things but He doesn't really know they're going to happen until He turns on CNN. This is called the process theology. God is just in the process of awakening to things like you are. He doesn't know the future because He can't know something that hasn't happened, so the future catches Him by surprise as well.

Well other say, "No, He knew about it but He just couldn't do anything about it." Others would say, "Well He knew about it and He could do something about it, but He doesn't care." These are the questions in the minds of people in our country. They were the questions in the minds of Isaiah's readers.

So let's go back to verse 5 and watch how this unfolds. The Lord here is talking and He says, verse 5, "I am the Lord, there is no other, besides Me there is no God. I will gird you though you have not known Me that men may know from the rising to the setting of the sun that there is no one besides Me. I am the Lord and there is no other. The one forming light and creating darkness, causing well-being and creating calamity, I am the Lord who does all these. Drip down, O heavens from above, and let the clouds pour down righteousness. Let the earth open up and salvation bear fruit and righteousness spring up with it. I, the Lord, have created it. Woe to the one who quarrels with his Maker, an earthenware vessel from the vessels of earth! Will the clay say to the potter, 'What are you doing?' Or the thing you are making say, 'He has no hands'? Woe to him who says to a father, 'What are you begetting?' Or to a woman, 'To what are you giving birth?'" Ridiculous questions.

"Thus says the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker: 'Ask Me about the things to come concerning My sons and you shall commit to Me the work of My hands. It is I who made the earth, and created man upon it. I stretched out the heavens with My hands and I ordained all their host. I have aroused him in righteousness and I will make all his ways smooth. He will build My city and will let My exiles go free.'" He's referring prophetically to Cyrus who pronounced the freedom of Israel from Babylon.

Verse 14, "Thus says the Lord, 'The products of Egypt, the merchandise of Cush, the Sabeans, men of stature will come over to you and will be yours. They will walk behind you, they will come over in chains and will bow down to you. They will make supplication to you. Surely, God is with you and there is none else, no other God.'"

Now all of this affirms that God is God. God is Creator. God is sovereign. God is in control. Does exactly what He wants to do. You have absolutely no right to ask. And it comes to this culmination, verse 15, "Truly," the prophet responds, "You are a God who hides Himself." What he means by that is...You're in it all, we just can't see it. We can't know Your purpose, but You're hidden in all of it, all the calamity and all the blessing, all the fruitfulness, all the creation, light and darkness, the earth, the clouds, You're in it all, all the events, everything...You're in it, You're hidden in there. We can't see what His purposes are.

But I love how verse 15 ends, "O God of Israel, Savior!" Where's Isaiah going here? He says this, "I can't see and I can't know all the details of what You're doing, but this I know, in the end You are a Savior!" So that ultimately in every mysterious operation of God in the world, the end is that He might save sinners. He has the purpose of salvation.

Down in verse 20, the Lord talks. "Gather yourselves and come," He says. "Draw near together, you fugitives of the nations, they have no knowledge, who carry about their wooden idol and they pray to a god who cannot...what?...cannot save." And then He says this, "Declare and set forth your case; indeed let them consult together. Who has announced this from of old? Who has long since declared it? Is it not I, the Lord? And there is no other God besides Me, a righteous God and a Savior. There

is none except Me."

And here comes the invitation, and this is the invitation I give to America, this is the invitation I give to you, verse 22, "Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth."

Is that profound? He says...I look at all of this and You're hidden in it and I can't understand all of the complex of Your divine purposes, but I know this, the great end of everything is that men might be saved That's why I say war is a severe mercy...it awakens you to the fragile character of life...it awakens you to the reality of death...it awakens you to the insecure future...it awakens you to the terror just an arm's length away...it awakens you to the reality of sin...it awakens you to horrors...the death of children...the death of innocent women. It awakens you to all of these things in order that you might see death close and you might get a taste of the consequence of sin. You see some weeping, you see some wailing, you see some gnashing of teeth, you see some darkness, you see some terror and all of that is a preview of what eternal judgment brings. And this, I say, is a severe mercy.

So, the question is...are you prepared to die? Spurgeon said in a sermon that he preached September 8, 1861, I read it this week, he said this, "Let us remember that death will come to us as it did to them, with terrors. Not with the crash of broken timbers, perhaps not with the darkness of the tunnel, not with the smoke and with the steam, not with the shrieks of women and the groans of dying men." He was referring to a train accident. "But it will come," he said, "with terrors. For meet death where we may, if we be not in Christ and if the shepherd's rod and staff do not comfort us, to die must be an awful and tremendous thing. Yes in thy body, O sinner, with downy pillows beneath thy head and a wife's tender arm to bear thee up and a tender hand to wipe thy clammy sweat, thou will find it still an awful work to face the monster and feel his sting and enter into his dread dominion. It is an awful work at any time and at every time under the best and most propitious circumstances for a person to die unprepared."

It is a universal principle that in normal times people make a superficial display of themselves. They put on a good front, they adopt behavior that is self-centered and self-indulgent. They are able actors playing a superficial role, giving the impression that everything is well and under control. And then the disaster hits, fear, panic, sadness shatters them. The artfully crafted mask disintegrates, the troubled heart breaks out with reality. This is a great time for the gospel. People live comfortably, indifferent to the supernatural powers at work in the world, the reality of sin and death and hell. They are consumed with what is physical and what is fashionable. There is no desperation until a crisis comes. And know this, God is hidden in all of this, inexorably working His sovereign purpose. We don't know all of that. We do know this, He is the Savior. And He's calling people to salvation. Let's pray.

Father, we thank You for the call. Your salvation is not hidden. You have made it clear. You desire all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. And so You have given us one mediator, the man Christ Jesus who gave Himself as a ransom for all. For this I am appointed a preacher and an apostle. All of us need to take the message that though Your purpose for the moment is hidden, Your ultimate purpose is not. All these warnings are so that men can flee to the only security which is Your own glorious person wherein they will find eternal deliverance and salvation. We thank You for the severe mercy that has come upon us and may many flee to Christ and find in Him full comfort, trust, peace, joy, security and hope. We pray in His great name. Amen.

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