

War in the Gulf: A Biblical Perspective, Part 1

Selected Scriptures

90-48

This morning, as I share with you a Biblical perspective on the War in the Gulf, I want to hasten to say that I'm not going to give you any rhetoric. We have perhaps enough and more of that than we care to have. I'm not here to give you any kind of poll or any kind of consensus, or the opinions of any experts. I'm not here to play upon your patriotic emotions.

I'm here basically to endeavor to have you understand war and this war from God's perspective. It is more of a lesson, more of a Bible study, in some ways, than a sermon. And it really comes as a result of a question that I have been asked throughout this week, how should a church respond to what is going on in the Gulf? How should a Christian respond?

A few days ago I received a phone call, and the man on the other end of the line said, "All across America, religious leaders are taking their stand with the antiwar protests. And we're calling you because we want to do an interview with you to play on our syndicated radio system, and we want you to tell us where you stand on this, because we believe you perhaps may take another view."

And he asked the question, "What is the church to do in response to this? What is a Christian's proper response? And are all religious leaders unilaterally committed to an antiwar position?" Well, if you're watching the news and listening at all, it does seem that all across America, religious leaders are marching and protesting and sitting in and crying out for peace, and demanding the end of American involvement in Iraq.

It's a time when people are looking at the church and saying, "Can you help? How am I to understand this? How am I to cope with this?" And, as I said, I don't want to give you rhetoric and I don't want to play on your emotion. I want to give you an understanding out of the Scripture so that you can perceive this scenario from the viewpoint of the Lord as much as is possible.

I believe, first of all, that evangelical, Bible-believing Christians are not antiwar necessarily. I think everybody is antiwar in the sense of the tragedy and the pain and the suffering and the death that is involved. But I think Christians who understand the Word of God look at war, and even this war, differently, because they look at it from a Biblical viewpoint.

While war is tragic and painful in a myriad of ways, and while we have every reason to hate war, we must understand what God says about it, because there are times when war is not avoidable. Many people are praying for the war to end, and that's fine. But if we're praying that way, our prayers must be based upon understanding.

Now, there was in my mind earlier in the week some prompting to consider some of these issues and

reflect upon the Word of God. By Wednesday, I spoke in the chapel at the Master's College, and I spoke to the students on a perspective from God's Word about the war. And following that message I began to think more deeply about it and realized that perhaps I should widen the things I said and bring more Biblical insight together and share it with you this Sunday and next Sunday, at least, for sure.

And as I was thinking through what I would want to talk about and how I'd want to divide it down in manageable bites so you could comprehend it, I came up with four questions that I think I need to answer for you and help you to see in the Scripture.

Question number one, why does war happen? Question number two, can war be just, or moral? Question number three, how are we to understand the present war in the Gulf? Question number four, is this a sign of the coming of Christ? Today and next Lord 's Day, I want to endeavor to answer those questions.

Let's begin with the first one, why does war happen? There is a certain amount of frustration in our culture about the fact that war even exists. There are certain people who just can't imagine that it's happening when we're so far along the evolutionary chain. We have come so far. We are so advanced. We are so educated.

Not only is everyone exposed to education via schools, but certainly everyone is exposed to education via media. We are so advanced, and there's so much talk of peace, and there's so much talk of love. And we have so much technology, sociology, psychology and theology, why are we still killing each other?

Isn't man basically far enough up the evolutionary ladder that it is true of him that he is a noble being, that his deepest desires are for love and peace? Isn't he good at heart? If left to himself, won't he find that which is the best? Isn't he the noblest beast? Sociologists and philosophers and psychologists and theologians tell us he is. And thus there is a lot of confusion about how can this be happening in a modern world.

But all of that is a lie. Man is not a noble beast. The heart of man is wicked, rebellious, proud, selfish, deceitful, violent, destructive, murderous. Not every man acts on the outside like he is on the inside, because there are built into culture some restraints, by God's mercy.

But man left to himself is a vile being, not at all the apex of an evolutionary chain, but the bottom, as it were, of a declining morality that started down in the Garden. And evil men, in fact, are getting worse and worse. It always interests me that even the peace lovers appear hostile and violent when they don't get what they want.

And so we ask the question, why is there war? How are we to explain war in such an advanced society? After all, we're not running around in loincloths with spears in our hands. And somebody might say, "Well, there are as many reasons for war as there are wars." That's a rather generic statement, and perhaps not at all correct.

Why are there wars? Let me suggest to you there are three components, three components. Number one, evil aggression. Evil aggression. Not all men are as wicked as they could be. Not all men are as

wicked on the outside as they are on the inside. Some are better at constraining their internal wickedness because of trained consciences, because of wanting peer approval, because of some kind of religious expectation, because of police and government control and a myriad of other things.

Not everybody's as bad as he could be. But there are some people who are as bad as they can be. And some of the people who are as wretched as human beings can possibly be are in positions to enact unbelievably horrendous acts. Evil aggression. Whether you kill one person or whether you are a mass murderer of 30, or whether you massacre millions, that kind of hostility is generated from a wicked, wretched, evil heart that has gone to the extremes of evil and knows no compunctions.

War happens because of evil aggression in the heart of man unrestrained. And every one of us, because we are fallen and sinful, and particularly those who are without the redemption and transformation of Jesus Christ, have the capacity to effect crimes of heinous character, were it not for restraints of one kind or another.

A good insight into this evil aggression cause of war is found in James chapter 4. Let's look together at this chapter and the first two verses, because I think the principle that James gives here is directly applicable. In James chapter 4, in verse 1, James writes profoundly, "What is the source of," and the Greek words, "wars and battles among you?" What is the source of them? Where do they come from?

And then he answers the question most interestingly. "Is not the source your pleasures, your lusts, your desires?" That word there is the word *hedonae*, from which the word *hedonism* comes, which is a word that means self-gratification. The word actually means the yearnings of self-gratification, to fulfill your own hedonistic desire for personal gratification. That's where war comes from.

"Is not the source your hedonistic, self-gratifying passions that wage war in your members?" Now, notice this, please. Before the war ever gets on the outside, it starts where? On the inside. You say, "What is this war?" This is a war between self-gratification and conscience. That's right. Self-gratification and conscience. Conscience is battling self-gratification.

The desire for what is forbidden and what is known to be wrong and what is visceral and what is lustful and what is passionately wanted for the sake of self-pleasure, self-promotion, self-prestige, self-plunder, self-power or whatever else, that wages war against the conscience. And everyone has a conscience which functions to one degree or another.

And according to Romans chapter 2, every man knows something of the law of God written in his heart, right? There is a moral sense in human beings that even a Saddam Hussein or an Adolf Hitler possesses. What happens is, war breaks out on the inside, between the yearnings for self-gratification and moral conscience.

And some people win the war in terms of conscience. Conscience is assisted by religion, and I'm not even talking about Christian people, by religion, by expectations, by habits that they've been trained with since they were children, by the fear of retaliation from governmental force. And so they're not as bad as they could be.

Other people, conscience becomes the victim of self-gratification. They become the criminals, the

mass murderers, the demagogues, the dictators, the rulers who massacre whole populations of people, all the way up the ladder. So the desire for what is forbidden and wrong wages war against what is right. You could say morality battles gratification.

James says that's where war starts. And when the hedonistic's desire for self-gratification dominates, the war goes from the inside to the outside. Because now, in order to gratify himself, there have to be some victims. To get what he wants, he's got to rape somebody or plunder somebody or kill somebody or steal something or destroy something.

And so in verse 2 he says, "You lust and you don't have. So what do you do? Your self-gratification has won. You want it, but you don't have it. So you kill to get it." That's it. You're envious. You want what somebody else has. You can't get it. So you fight and you make war. That's the war of self-gratification, going from the inside to the outside.

You ask yourself why a man like Hussein does what he does. The answer is because self-gratification lusts have overpowered conscience. I don't know anything about the man's background to know whether his conscience was exercised at any point in his life to a noble point, but it seems to me that it was not. And you put a man in a position of ultimate authority where he answers to absolutely no one, and you will find conscience having a very difficult time winning its victories.

What happens is, lust leads to passion. Passion leads to war. Whether they want pleasure, power, prestige, wealth, it drives men to kill. It drives them to destructive behavior. It drives them to deadly aggression. And if they don't get it, they're unfulfilled, and they'll make war.

Hussein's invasion of Kuwait was such a war. Revenge, hatred, lust for money, lust for oil, lust for power, and, believe me, he is not through. He doesn't want just Kuwait. He wants the world. He's an evil aggressor, classic, absolutely classic.

There's a second component that creates war, second element, and that is what we'll call just protection, just protection. There are wars and elements within war caused by the desire to defend, protect, liberate and free the victim of the evil aggressor.

Paul spoke about this. Look at Romans 13. No one can understand how to view war without understanding Romans 13. It is one of many New Testament Scriptures. We'll look more deeply at it next Lord's Day and at a number of other New Testament Scriptures. But for this morning I want to read it to you and make a few comments.

Romans 13:1 and following, "Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except from God, and those who exist are established by God." Make this general note in your mind. Government is a God-given mercy. Did you hear that? Government is a God-given mercy.

Government is given its primary task, to protect innocent people from evil aggressors. That is the primary role of government. Government has overstepped the bounds of its Biblical responsibility, its God-given responsibility in many, many ways, but this is it, initially and substantially.

"Therefore," verse 2 says, "he who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God, and they

who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves." God puts government in place to control sinful man. Otherwise, sinful man will run amok. It is government and the institutions of government, law, police, the courts, jails, the right of capital punishment, all of that, that restrains man and gives conscience some help in winning the war.

That's God-given, or sinful men would run amok in the world, to the destruction of everyone. And so if you resist the authority, you're resisting the God who gave the authority for the preservation of society.

And then in verse 3 he puts some leverage in the hand of authority, and some power, "For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil." In other words, the government exists to make people who do wrong afraid. And if government can't make them afraid, then they're going to continue to do wrong. Very simple.

If they do not live under the fear of just and swift punishment, then conscience cannot win against passion, the passion of the fallen heart. So he says in verse 3, "Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good. You'll have praise from the same." You don't have to live under fear if you just do what the law says, and God has given the law for the preservation of mankind.

And then in verse 4 he says, "Look, the authority is a minister of God to you for good." Whether on a local level, with the police, on a national/international level with the armies of nations, they are there to protect you from evil aggressors. "If you do what is evil, be afraid," look at this, "for it doesn't bear the sword for nothing." Why does it bear the sword, to do what? To use it.

Government is not symbolic. Government is not a pageant. Government has real power, and its power is in its sword. Now, what do you do with a sword? Rap people's knuckles? No. Spank them? No. You kill them. That's what you do with it. You take their life away.

What restrains ultimately the evil aggressor is the power of the sword, the deadly force that government can bring against ultimate acts of evil. That's God-ordained. In fact, he says, "not only does it not bear the sword for nothing, it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil." Never does government act in a more God-intended way than when it takes the life of an evil-doer to protect the innocent, to preserve life in a society.

I personally am convinced that based upon the Word of God America and the allies' response to Hussein is a noble war. It is a just war of protection, motivated by the noble cause to deliver an embattled people victimized by an evil aggressor. It is even an unselfish war. For they are not us. They are a people of a very different culture than we are.

You say, "Now, wait a minute? Aren't we really motivated by oil? Aren't we really motivated by prosperity? Aren't we really motivated by economics?" Certainly we are a grossly materialistic culture, and there might be some people along the path whose only compulsions in life are financial gain.

But if the United States of America was a nation motivated by those things, we would simply destroy all the Middle East nations and claim all the oil for ourselves, plunder all the oil and control the world. Then we could drive the market down as far down as we wanted.

We don't attack. We never have. We have never been the evil aggressor in a war. You see, down below the footings of this country, as far away from God as it has become, there are the notions of nobility in terms of what government is all about, showed up in our Bill of Rights and Constitution.

We're there to ensure the freedom of Kuwait, which the prosperity of Kuwait depends upon, and which prosperity per capita is probably greater than our own. We are there to keep Kuwait a free-market participant, to operate on their own in the world market and reap their own wealth. We don't even need their oil. We're still moved by the morality of defending nations against vicious destroyers.

That's what government's supposed to do. Whether you're talking about local police or national force, we exist to protect people from evil aggressors.

By the way, down in verses 6 and 7, he says, "Pay your taxes." Why does he say that? Because it takes a lot of money to support this government enterprise.

There's a third component, and I'm going to say more about Romans 13 next time, a lot more. There's a third component that we have to put into war. This is more mysterious, less discernable, just as real. That is that war is divine judgment. War is divine judgment.

The reality is, my friends, that the wages of sin is what? Death. That is a divine principle. All war, I believe, all war, to some degree or another, expresses God's wrath on man's sin, directly or indirectly. What do I mean by that?

Some wars in history have been commanded by God. In other words, there were times in the Old Testament when God said to Israel, "Go to war. Go over here, wipe that people out." God also said, "Not only do I want you to go, I'm going to lead you. I'm going to lead you." And so there are wars in which God was the commander in chief, and God directly commanded those wars to be fought.

And then there are the other wars, which are indirectly used by God to enact His judgment on nations. To give you another perspective, one which you must have about God, because everybody today is talking about the fact that these religious leaders are saying, "God is love and God is kindness and God is peaceful and this should never be a reflection of God," and so forth and so on, let me give you another perspective, if I might.

In Exodus 15:3, God Himself is called a man of war, a man of war. In Numbers 21:14, there's the mention of a fascinating piece of literature which is not available to us now, but it is called, listen to this, the Book of the Wars of the Lord. Numbers 21:14, the Book of the Wars of the Lord.

Apparently, the ancient people of God kept a book which consisted of victory songs written to be sung in celebration of the triumphs of the Lord in the conquest of Canaan. And whenever there would be another battle won, they would write another song and sing it to the glory of the God of war, who had won a victory.

Several times in the Old Testament, wars that God commanded are called Yahweh wars, God wars, Yahweh being the old Hebrew name for God. I Samuel 18:17, for example, I Samuel 25:28, God

wars. Scripture even speaks about God warring. Psalm 68:21, "God will shatter the head of His enemies."

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."

There were times when God told Israel to defend herself against attack, such as in Ezekiel 17, verses 18 and following, Numbers chapter 21, God says, "You defend yourself against attack." That's what government's for, to protect these people from an evil aggressor.

There were times when God said, "You fight against wickedness." Numbers 31:7, "You go against that nation and remove them, because they are a cancer, and while they may not be directly attacking you militarily, they are destroying you through the cancer of their ideology and idolatry."

And God told Joshua, when you go to the land of Canaan, Joshua chapter 1 and again in chapter 6, "Take that land by military force." You say, "Isn't Joshua and the people of God the evil aggressor?" No. Again, they are the just protectors. You say, "Why?" Because the life, behavior, conduct of the Canaanites was a cancer on human society. And God says they must be removed.

In David's Song of Praise in II Samuel 22:35, he says this, "The Lord trains my hands for battle so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze." That's repeated, by the way, in Psalm 18:34. Later, in Psalm 144, verse 1, David said, "Blessed be the Lord, my rock, who trains my hands for war and my fingers for battle." And in Numbers 32:20, the people of Israel were told, "Arm yourselves before the Lord for war."

A very significant chapter on war is Deuteronomy chapter 20, and, while I don't want to take time to read the whole chapter, I do want to mention the first few verses. Deuteronomy 20, it goes like this, verse 1, "When you go out to battle against your enemies and see horses and chariots and people more numerous than you, do not 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 priest shall come near and speak to the people, and he shall say to them, 'Hear, oh, Israel, you are approaching the battle against your enemies today. Do not be fainthearted. Do not be afraid or panic or tremble before them, for the Lord your God is the one who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies to save you.'"

And so what am I saying? That during God's particular time of setting Israel in the land as His people and preserving the righteous seed, He sent them to war. There are times when God is a man of war. By the way, the rest of the chapter, chapter 20 of Deuteronomy, gives the rules for war, what to do with captives, what to do to the people, what to do with the spoils, what to do with the trees and shrubbery, who should and who should not serve. God laid out some very clear directions for war.

So under God's leadership, either by direct command to defend yourself or to go and cut out, as it were, the cancer of that society, there were times when God sent His people, Israel, to war, to protect themselves or their allies, or to cut out some destructive culture. And so they fought battles

and they fought wars with God's help.

And if you look at the history of Israel, for example, take the time of the conquest of Canaan and the settling, there are many, many wars. During that period, they destroyed the wicked Canaanites, they had to fight continually battle after battle after battle against the Philistines.

And then not only were those people who really lived in the territory and really possessed the land, such as the Canaanites or the Philistines, but there were nomadic tribes, nomadic tribes moving around all the time, threatening the life of Israel. And, of course, you know, behind all of this is the great orchestrator of the death of Israel, namely Satan, who seeks to destroy Israel at all times. And so they had to battle these nomadic tribes, like the Amalekites and the Midianites and the Ammonites and the Arameans, for self-preservation.

And then when you get out of the settlement period, you move into the period of the monarchies, where they had the kings, the wars continue, with some of the same people, particularly the Philistines. And then you add wars with the Moabites. But, beyond that, the powerful, destructive forces of the Assyrians and the Babylonians that came and would've literally swallowed them up, in fact, were victorious, on occasion.

And when you study their history between the Old and the New Testament, history not recorded in Scripture, the time of the Romans and the Greeks, you read, like Flavius Josephus' writing of that time, who talks about endless wars with Greeks and Romans, the last and worst of which occurred in the siege of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. by the Romans.

Now, it needs to be said, then, that through all of the history of Israel, for the sake of the preservation of that people, to be a witness nation to the world and through whom the Messiah would come, and to whom ultimately God would give a kingdom in the future, for the sake of the preservation of that nation, which Satan wanted to obliterate from the face of the earth in order to thwart the plan of God, wars had to be fought, wars of defense and wars of surgical purification, just wars, to protect themselves.

It also needs to be said, and I hasten to say this, that when Israel forgot God, and when they became wicked, they lost the wars. And there were many of those wars. In fact, you could say perhaps in all of those wars, judgment was a two-edged sword, because many of the Jewish people died as well. And God was continually reminding them of their own wickedness. And sometimes they were slaughtered greatly as God turned the wicked nation on them to be the executioner of His judgment to them.

So we could say God has used wicked, destructive nations to judge the less wicked, such as Assyria, who is called an axe in God's hand in Isaiah 10:5, such as the Chaldeans. You remember when Habakkuk was saying, "Lord, work in your people. Work in their hearts. Turn them around. Revive them." And God says, "I'm going to do something." And he says, "What are you going to do?" "I'm going to bring the Chaldeans to wipe them out." And Habakkuk, he says, "How can you do that? How can you use a worse people, the Chaldeans, pagan, wretched, bitter and hasty nation, how can you use them to judge your own people, who aren't as bad?" Sometimes God does that. Sometimes God does that.

Furthermore, sometimes the Jews were used to execute their own people in civil war. One of the most shocking accounts in Scripture is in the 32nd chapter of Exodus, in verse 25. After the terrible sin of the people in making the golden calf, Moses comes down. He saw the people were, verse 25, "out of control." Out of control. What does that mean? That means that selfish gratification had conquered conscience. And they were gratifying themselves.

And Aaron had let them get out of control. What do you mean by that? Aaron was supposed to be government. Aaron was supposed to rule. Aaron was supposed to bear a sword, keep order. He didn't do it. "So Moses stood in the gate of the camp and said, 'Whoever is for the Lord, come to me.'

"And all the sons of Levi gathered together to him, and he said to them, 'Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, "Every man of you put his sword on his thigh and go back forth from gate to gate in the camp and kill every man his brother and every man his friend and every man his neighbor.'" So the sons of Levi did as Moses instructed, and about 3,000 men of the people fell that day." They killed their own people, their own relatives, their own family members. That was an act of God.

We can say, well, yes, God used Israel as a tool of judgment against evil, aggressive nations who polluted the human stream and culture and who defied His holiness. Yes, that's true. But sometimes God turned the tables and used those pagan nations as tools of judgment on Israel, and sometimes God turned Israel on itself in its own judgment.

I believe in all wars God is directly involved. It is mysterious to try to assess all the components of what He might be doing. But I'll tell you one thing. While on the one hand, we may think America is the just protector of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, et al, and we may think that America is the execution sword used by God against Iraq, and there's a sense in which that is true, that does not at all protect us from the judgment of God being turned on us for our sin as well.

And, if anything, this war should be a wakeup call to America. Because as we lose our own young we have to take stock of the reality of the fact that this nation has every right to feel the judgment of God, and, sad as it is to say, the young generation now over there in the armed forces fighting this battle is the most hedonistic, desolute generation this nation has ever known in its history. They are not a holy people.

And whatever comes against America should awaken us to the reality, the only reason we haven't suffered the wholesale judgment of God through some war is because God is presently merciful.

The ethics of war do not include blanket approval for all wars and all methods. Many wars and many methods are forbidden and receive harsh rebuke. For example, in Habakkuk, chapter 2, verses 6 to 19, there is a harsh rebuke of cruelty in war. It's a marvelous chapter.

Amos, for example, in chapter 1, verses 3 to 13, and then right at the beginning chapter 2, Amos strongly protested and forbid a war of evil aggression and forbid ruthless, pitiless war. And Psalm 68:30 says, "He has scattered the people who delight in war." God has no pleasure in that.

But as you look at the war now, the Gulf War, you see these components, don't you? Evil aggression is there, Hussein. Just protection is there, the allies and the United States, in a noble effort to do what government is supposed to do, with the leverage that government has been given by God

through the sword, through the instrument of death.

And I believe you see the component of divine judgment. You look at a God-rejecting, Christ-rejecting nation like Iraq that for centuries and centuries and centuries has not only rejected the gospel of Jesus Christ but done everything it could possibly do to stamp out the people of God, namely Israel. And it says in Genesis chapter 12 that whoever curses that people will be cursed, and you can easily see the judgment of God as a potential reality there.

Perhaps we need to be as wise as we should be and see also the judgment of God upon our own nation as some of our young and wonderful people give their lives, take stock of the fact that we stand on the edge of death in a very advanced culture and can't seem to do anything about it, and maybe wonder if in fact it isn't something due to the lifestyle we live.

By the way, we can thank God for the tremendous interest in the gospel. You're very much aware of the fact this is the first war ever fought by Americans in history where there have been no drugs, no alcohol, no prostitutes, no nothing to corrupt them, or to salve them, to give them escape. And so they're facing the stark reality of the barrenness of the place they are and also the inevitability of potential death.

We may be an instrument of God temporarily. We may be on the other end of it if we don't change. Israel served as God's tool for deadly judgment, but other nations also served as God's tool for deadly judgment on Israel. I can't help but think about 70 A.D. when the Romans came into Jerusalem and killed 1.1 million Jews. And you follow that all the way down to Adolf Hitler. Even after the destruction in 70 A.D. they destroyed 985 towns in Palestine, massacring people.

The Jews, even though they were chosen by God to be the nation through whom revelation would come, and the Messiah, are not preserved from the judgment of God even though they are His covenant people, and they are people even to this day under present judgment, awaiting the time when they'll look on Him whom they've pierced, embrace Him as the Messiah, come to faith and receive the kingdom God has prepared and promised to them.

All of this complex of factors pulls together in perfect precision, not for you and not for me, but for God. And, because I want to tell you this, God is sovereign over every bit of it. God is in absolute control of all of these things, and is working out and effecting His holy purpose perfectly.

In Isaiah 46, a good reminder of two verses that you ought to know by memory, if you don't. Verse 9, "I am God, and there is no other. I am God, and there is no one like me." Listen to verse 10, Isaiah 46, "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.'"

What is that saying? God says, "Remember me? There's nobody else up here but me, and I'm in charge of everything." In Acts 17:26, it says that He determines the boundaries of nations. A graphic illustration of God's sovereign control comes pointedly, poignantly, powerfully to our minds in Daniel, chapter 4. Look at it with me.

Daniel, chapter 4. Daniel is among his people, Israel, who are captive in Babylon under the reign of a man by the name of Nebuchadnezzar. Hussein says he wants to be Nebuchadnezzar. Why does he

say that? Nebuchadnezzar ruled the world. As king of Babylon, he was king of the ancient world. He was the head of gold in Daniel's image, the most powerful of all world empires in human history.

And he was king, it says in chapter 4, verse 1, "to all the peoples, nations and men of every language that live in all the earth." That is some kingdom. He was king over all of it. And he, of course, was a passionate hedonist, led by self-gratification, lust. And he was also dominated by almost inexplicable pride.

One day he had a dream. He called Daniel to interpret the dream. Daniel 4:24, "This is the interpretation, oh, king, this is the decree of the Most High, that is, of God, which is come upon my lord the king." Here's your dream, and here's what God means to say. "You will be driven away from mankind, and your dwelling place be with the beasts of the field, and you'll be given grass to eat like cattle and be drenched with the dew of heaven.

"And seven periods of time," seven years, "will pass over you, until you recognize that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes." Did you get that statement? God controls it all.

"And in that it was commanded to leave the stump with the roots of the tree, your kingdom will be assured to you after you recognize that it is heaven that rules." Boy, isn't that good? Nothing is out of hand. Nothing is out of line. Nothing has gotten away from God.

"Therefore, oh, king, may my advice be pleasing to you. Break away now from your sins by doing righteousness and from your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor, in case there may be a prolonging of your prosperity." There is a hint that Nebuchadnezzar was a wretched, evil, wicked aggressor.

You know what verse 28 says? Obviously, he didn't repent, so it all happened to him. "Twelve months later he was walking on the roof of the royal palace at Babylon. And he reflected," and listen to this soliloquy, "Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built, as a royal residence, by the might of my power, and for the glory of my majesty?" Not exactly a humble soul, is he?

"While the word was in the king's mouth, a voice came from heaven, saying," you want a conversation? You've got one. "King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is declared sovereignty has been removed from you, and you will be driven away from mankind, and your dwelling place will be with the beasts of the field. You will be given grass to eat like cattle, and seven periods of time will pass over you until you recognize that the most high is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes.'

"Immediately the word concerning Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled. He was driven away from mankind and began eating grass like cattle, and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair had grown like eagles' feathers and his nails like birds' claws." God's in control of everything.

Nebuchadnezzar ruled in the Mesopotamian Valley, where Saddam Hussein is. Same basic piece of earth. Same basic goal in mind. God told Nebuchadnezzar He was in charge. God may be telling Hussein the same thing.

He became a raving maniac, crawling around on the ground, eating grass like an animal, unkempt for seven years. Verse 34 says, "At the end of that period, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever." Boy, what a transformation.

"His dominion is an everlasting dominion. His kingdom endures from generation to generation. All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing. He does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth, and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, "What hast thou done?" God is absolutely in control.

"At that time, my reason returned to me, and my majesty and splendor were restored to me for the glory of my kingdom, and my counselors and my nobles began seeking me out, so I was reestablished in my sovereignty, and surpassing greatness was added to me." God didn't have to do that.

"Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt and honor the king of heaven, for all His works are true and His ways just, and He is able to humble those who walk in pride." Wouldn't it be wonderful if Hussein got saved? Then we could give him back Iraq. It's all in God's hands. It's all absolutely in God's hands.

Why is there war? There is war because man is sinful, lustful. He is desirous of selfish gratification. He becomes an evil aggressor. There is war because some governments are noble enough to understand what they are to do. The United States is one, and so are our allies, to stand against that kind of evil aggression and provide just protection for innocent people. And, in it all, the inexorable judgment of God is at work mysteriously, as God is doing His perfect purpose.

That leads us to the second question, which I will only introduce this morning, and that second question you already know the answer to, but it needs elucidation. Second question, can war be moral? Can war be just? We've already said, "Yes," but we need to say more than that, because somebody's going to say, "Well, that's all Old Testament. What about New Testament?" That's the typical argument. We'll get to the New Testament.

But let me say first of all just to think about it. Can war be moral? Now, let me have you use your mind with me for a moment. The pacifists and what used to call the peaceniks deny all war. They say there's no just war, no war, never have war. We saw all of that during Vietnam. We all agree that war is tragic, reflects the worst of man's wretchedness, but not all warring actions in themselves are evil.

War is tragic. It's not always evil. And it's often necessary as government does what God instituted government to do. Not all war can be avoided. To let violence, murder, slaughter of innocents go on unchecked is not noble. It is not right. It doesn't eliminate evil. It perpetuates, tolerates and honors the evil.

We understand, don't we, the atrocities reported by the Amnesty International report on Hussein? We understand that he has gouged out thousands of people's eyes, that he has cut off their tongues halfway up, that he's ripped the fingernails out of their hands and feet, that he's burned them with every conceivable thing, hot iron, fire of all sorts.

We understand that he has murdered and massacred to the point now where it's questionable in the vacuum when he goes that there would be anyone capable of stepping into leadership, at least anyone known to anybody, because they've all been assassinated.

We understand the massacre of the Kuwaiti people, the atrocities against the children and the women. We understand all of that. It is much too simplistic to stand by and say, "Stop fighting. Stop fighting." Government exists to bear the sword against the evil aggressor for the sake of the preservation of those who are his victims.

We have to recognize that in a fallen world it is simplistic if not stupid to say, "Let violence, murder, slaughter of the innocents go on unchecked." We must recognize that in this fallen world any refusal to exercise force to deter evil would mean to let evil rule. And then the whole world would be in chaos, with the collapse of society.

Look at it this way. If having military force and using it against deadly wickedness is immoral, then it's immoral in principle, right? If it's immoral to do that, it's immoral in principle. Well, if it's immoral in principle for us to try to protect people from deadly wickedness, then it would be equally immoral in principle to do that at any level.

So it would be equally immoral to have police or the National Guard or the Coast Guard or the sheriffs or the Highway Patrol or the FBI or private security. If it is immoral to restrain evil, then open all the jails and let everybody out. Eliminate the death penalty. That's absolutely unthinkable, absolutely unthinkable.

What would happen? What would happen if that were the principle we adopted? We'd all be terrorized to the point of death. You see, if in principle it is moral to use force at all, then it is moral to use force, period, in the right situation.

If a rapist is attacking a young girl, attempting to rape that girl with a gun to her head, and he kills her after the rape, goes along the rest of the day, finds another young girl. There's a bulletin out on him. The police are looking for him. They find him in the process of rape with a gun in his hand. And in the milieu that occurs in that moment they take his life. Is that immoral?

Is it immoral to protect that girl from the plundering, raping, murderous intent of this individual? Would we stay back and say, "Stop the war. Stop. Don't invade that...don't step in." It's ludicrous.

Is it immoral if you find a man murdering his 15th victim, the only way that you can deal with the man is in some kind of combat, and you have to take his life, is that immoral? It seems to me that a lot of the people who are crying that war is immoral would be the first ones who would grab the nearest weapon to fight off somebody who tried to come and murder them or somebody they love.

See, we have self-defensive instincts. God has designed that the best way possible in a fallen world, He wants us to be blessed and to live a happy life. An ideal or just war is conceivable in principle, just as it is conceivable to assume that somebody could take the life of someone trying to murder somebody else, plunder them, destroy them.

But an ideal or just war would be limited, and I want to share this with you, because I think it's very

important to note this, and these are things that I did not put together as a result of this current war. These are longtime standards that I've understood, that you can see fit perfectly what's happening now.

A just war would be limited to halting the evil aggressor and defending the oppressed and freeing them. That's the just war. It's limited to that. What do I mean by that? Let me give you five principles of a just war.

Number one, a just cause. A just war would be marked by a just cause. What do I mean by a just cause? I mean it's defensive. It's protective. It's the noble effort of government to wield the sword in the way that government is designed to wield the sword, and that is for the protection of the innocent victim against the evil aggressor. It would have to have a just cause.

Secondly, a just war would have to have a just intention, a just intention. What do I mean by that? Peace, safety and freedom, not revenge, plunder and conquest. Peace, safety and freedom, not revenge, plunder and conquest.

Thirdly, a just war is a last resort war. That is to say, it is only engaged in at the end of all possible negotiations, when every option has been utterly exhausted.

Fourthly, a just war has limited objectives. A just war has limited objectives. Not total destruction of everybody, not the devastation of everybody, limited objectives in the sense specific targets, specific goals, peace, deliverance, withdrawal.

And, fifthly, a just war engages limited means. A just war engages limited means. That is, its force is limited to its objectives. Think about that.

I think what you're experiencing in our country right now is an illustration of what government was designed to do very graphically. It's a noble effort. First of all, we have a just cause. We are the defenders of the freedom and the safety of an oppressed people.

Secondly, we have a just intention. Our intention is peace, safety and freedom, not revenge, plunder and conquest. Thirdly, we have gone to war only as a last resort, having exhausted all attempts at negotiating.

Fourthly, we have limited objectives. We're not trying to destroy the whole place. You realize, of course, don't you, you realize that if the United States set out as an objective to destroy Iraq we could destroy Iraq in a matter of minutes?

But we also have limited means, because our means are limited to our objectives. Our objective is not to destroy Iraq. We could do it with nuclear weaponry in a moment in time. But we are fighting a limited objective with limited means.

I have been fascinated to see how skilled we are at hitting exactly what we want to hit and little or anything else. That's a noble effort. That's a noble effort. Those are responsible approaches to the issue, reasonable ones.

But the question is still posed, as reasonable as those are, is the use of military force in resisting, restraining and punishing violence really entrusted to human government in the Bible? You say, "Yeah, we know Israel in the Old Testament, but what about the New Testament?" That's for next time.

And, next time we're also going to talk about how are we to understand this war, particularly in the light of Old Testament promises and the problem between the Arabs and the Jews scripturally.

And then we're going to answer the question, is this a sign of the return of Christ? That question has been circulating around our young people at the college. Some of them are very stressed, because they have not yet had the opportunity to engage in marital bliss, and they are somewhat hopeful that the Lord may delay His coming.

We will talk next time about such things. In the meantime, our pastoral staff is available for premarital counseling for any of you who want to hurry and enter into this blissful condition.

Let's bow together in prayer.

Father, it seems such a far-fetched thing, that we could pray as a people for the salvation of Saddam Hussein, and by the transforming grace of Jesus Christ embrace him as a brother if he were genuinely redeemed. Father, we don't want to hate the man.

We just hate the sin, and we despise the satanic influences behind him. But we would ask in your sovereignty if you would see fit to do to him what you did to Nebuchadnezzar. Send him out in the desert until he knows who the true God is.

And may this whole war in some way betray the faith of all those people who are believing in a false God. May it be clear that that false God is not the true God. We pray, Father, for the salvation of many of the Iraqi people, that somehow the gospel would penetrate their Muslim darkness. Lord, we pray somehow that you will cause them to come to the knowledge of the truth. We know you must have your people there someplace.

We pray for the continued ministry among our troops, and the salvation of many of them, many of whom will perhaps perish. Lord, we pray for the awakening of our own country. We know that after war, typically, through this century, there has been a renewal of interest in the gospel, because people came face to face with death.

We can only pray, Lord, that America might hear the wakeup call and recognize that it's walking on a path that's going to bring about its own judgment. This may be but a taste, as some of our precious young life is snuffed out.

Lord, we pray mostly that this might somehow extend the gospel, exalt the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, advance the kingdom, lift up your great name. And we would pray, Father, that the work could be done swiftly and quickly and done with, over with, so that it is not unnecessarily prolonged.

We just want you to be glorified in it all. Even as we see Israel implicated in this, we again are reminded to pray for the salvation of many in Israel. We know there are many evangelists there. I know of one who is on the street preaching. May there be many who hear his message of the Messiah, and, in the time of fear, come to the One who alone can deliver from all fear, even our Christ.

We thank you that you've given us in your Word insight to be able to understand the times and the seasons in which we live. We await further instruction as we look again to these things next Lord's Day, thankfully, in Christ's name. Amen.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2017 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright>).