

## Week One Handout

### *“Holy War, Holy Peace: A biblical, historical and political perspective”*

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### **Jihad in the Land of Israel**

An Old Testament view of war and peace

*The aim of this class is to present an overview of the Jewish teachings about war and peace set in the historical context of perpetual Holy War.*

*The class will also raise the question about whether Christians should situate their contemporary arguments about war and peace solely in the Old Testament or within the broader context of the whole Bible.*

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### **Opening**

A couple of questions:

- How many of you have or are serving in the military or police services?
- How many of you have served in war zone?

I have not. I have not been in the military nor have I served in any capacity in a war zone. But I have family and friends who have – and who have died there.

War and peace is always a controversial subject.

- It raises lots of emotions.
- It involves the fundamental nature and values of a society.
- It involves life and death.
- It involves people and families that make the ultimate sacrifice for their country.

War and peace is found in the Bible and is an integral part of the biblical story.

- War and peace can be argued from both sides in the Bible.
- Different religious groups, denominations, ad sects have strong positions on both sides of the divide.

### **Course Overview**

1. Four quick snapshots

- Too much for four weeks, but we will cover as much as possible
- We will take a quick tour through the subject and hit the high points.
- The syllabus explains each of the weeks in the series – OT, NT, History, Just War Theory

## 2. Meaning and varieties of the term 'war'

Oxford English Dictionary:

*Hostile contention by means of armed forces, carried on between nations, states, or rulers, or between parties in the same nation or state; the employment of armed forces against a foreign power, or against an opposing party in the state.*

Merriam –Webster:

*A state of usually open and declared armed hostile conflict between political units (as states or nations).*

Merriam –Webster:

*A state of hostility, conflict, opposition, or antagonism between mental, physical, social, or other forces (i.e., war on drugs [1971], war on terror [2001], war on poverty [1964], war on cancer [1971])*

## 3. Three kinds of war (Martin Wight) are evident from history.

These are not *causes* of war; rather they are *justifications* for war.

**Wars of gain** = *wars of opportunity, wars of conquest, wars of territorial expansion, wars of imperialism and colonialism*

**Wars of fear** = *wars of necessity, defensive wars, pre-emptive wars (looming threat and impending disaster)*

**Wars of doctrine** = *wars to assert a principle, wars to advance a cause, a crusading war, a missionary war*

*“Doctrinal wars are wars of righteousness and conviction based on doctrines that are not only right for us; they are right for everybody, everywhere. They are wars to bring one’s religion or one’s ideology to foreigners and ultimately all people around the world. They are wars to defend the faith.”*  
Robert Jackson

**Three additional kinds of war since WWII based on UN Charter, UN action, and International Law:**

- Wars to uphold international peace and security
- Wars of national liberation
- Wars to protect human rights

## An Old Testament View of War

### 1. 'War' in the Hebrew language and culture

Several different words translated 'war'

- To strive , to contend, to stir up strife, to engage in conflict
- To conquer, to fight, to overcome
- To arm, army, battle, warrior, war cry or shout

## 2. A god of war

In early Israel, God is sometimes described as a warrior-God.

**Exodus 15:3** – *“The LORD is a warrior, The LORD is his name.”*

**Numbers 21:14** – *“Therefore it is said in the Book of the Wars of the LORD . . .”*

**Joshua 10:11** – *“As they fled before Israel on the road down from Beth Horon to Azekah, the LORD hurled large hailstones down on them from the sky, and more of them died from the hailstones than were killed by the swords of the Israelites.”*

**Judges 5:1-31** – The Song of Deborah

**Psalms 46:7** – *“The LORD of hosts is with us . . .”* LORD of Sabaoth. Can also be translated “LORD of armies.”

## 3. A nation of war

“Israel” is the name that God gave Jacob after he wrestled with God all night at the crossing of the Jabbock. (Genesis 32:22-32)

**Genesis 32:28** – *“Then the man said, ‘Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome.’”*

**Israel** = “God strives”. Could also be translated, “God wars against . . .”, and therefore, the nation of Israel is defined in militaristic, warring terms.

## 4. War in various time periods in the Old Testament

War was a constant and common feature in the history of Israel from its beginnings up to the destruction of the second Temple. Long periods of peace seldom occurred and when they did, the Bible emphasizes them – “so the land had rest for forty years” (Judges 3:11); “but now the Lord my God has given me rest on every side” (1 Kings 5:4)

Israel experienced all forms of war – wars of gain (conquest & consolidation), of fear (defense), and doctrinal.

### a. The Canaanite period

Israel was borne in battle – the battle with the army of Pharaoh at the crossing of the Red Sea. (See Exodus 14-15)

**Exodus 14:13-14** – *Moses answered the people, “Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. **The LORD will fight for you**; you need only to be still.”*

**Deuteronomy 20** – Instructions for *how* to go to war and fight battles.

b. **The period of conquest and settlement**

The story of the conquest and settlement of the Promised Land is the story of successive battles fought by Joshua and the Judges of Israel.

**Joshua 5:13 – 6:27** - The Battle of Jericho

**Judges 4-5** – Deborah

**Judges 7** – Gideon

c. **The period of the monarchies**

**1 Samuel 8** – Israel asks for a king so they will have someone to lead them in battle. *“We want a king over us. Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and go out before us and fight our battles.”*

**1 Samuel 13** – When Saul was rejected by God as king, it was because he was impatient in the preparations for going into battle. He did not wait for Samuel to come and offer the sacrifice before they went into battle (cf. Deuteronomy 20:1-4).

**2 Samuel 11** – David was a warrior-poet-king. He was first noticed when he defeated the great Philistine warrior, Goliath. He built his reputation by assembling a rag-tag army in battles with Saul. He finished conquering the Promised Land and united Israel as one nation. And he sinned with Bathsheba by not leading Israel into battle as he should have – *“In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war . . .”* (2 Samuel 11:1)

Succeeding generations of kings of Israel saw success and failure in battle in relationship to their obedience of God and attentiveness to his word.

d. **The period of the second Temple onwards**

The period of the second Temple (516 BC to 70 AD) was the era of the Persian and Greek wars of which we know a great deal from extra-biblical sources:

Thucydides – *The Peloponnesian War*

Herodotus – *The Histories*

It was the Persian king, Cyrus the Great, that allowed the Jewish exiles to return from captivity to Jerusalem to start rebuilding the temple in 538 BC (2 Chronicles 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-4). The work was completed under King Darius (Ezra 5-6).

The land of Israel stood strategically between the Empires of Greece and Persia. It was militarily and strategically advantageous for foreign rulers to curry favor with the people of Israel. Eventually, the land was conquered by Alexander the Great and came under Greek rule and influence.

For Israel, although conquered and ruled by foreign powers, this period was more significantly a time of peace.

## An Old Testament View of Peace

1. In the early history of Israel, peace is largely spoken of in individualistic terms. The Hebrew word “*shalom*” is used to speak of personal well-being and wholeness, peace, quiet, and tranquility.
2. False prophets often prophesied “peace” to earn favor with the people. God denounces those declaring peace as not sent by him unless peace comes first. (Jeremiah 14:13, 28:9).
3. The true prophets declared that there was coming from God a new era of peace:
  - a. A Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:2-7)
  - b. A kingdom of peace (Zechariah 9:9-12; Micah 4:1-3)
4. In the midst of all the wars and fighting, one man foresaw the true nature of God – Gideon.

### **Judges 6:22-24**

*“When Gideon realized that it was the angel of the LORD, he exclaimed, “Ah, Sovereign LORD! I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face!” But the LORD said to him, “Peace! Do not be afraid. You are not going to die.” So Gideon built an altar to the LORD there and called it **The LORD is Peace.**”*

## Conclusions

- The Old Testament largely presents “war and peace” from a perspective that justifies war.
- Those that want to justify war often turn to Old Testament scriptures to do so – “The LORD will fight for us . . .”
- Although “peace” is presented in more individualistic terms and national peace is spoken of as a future reality, we must not forget that **The LORD is peace.**
- We must base our theology and hermeneutic on the whole Bible and not just one part. So, the Old Testament perspective must be balanced with that found in the New Testament.

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