

Week Two Handout

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

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The Prince of Peace and Armageddon

A New Testament view of war and peace

This class will examine the key New Testament texts and teachings on war and peace, seeking to understand how diverse Christian groups interpret them so differently.

Opening

Greetings. Thank you for being here today, even though I am not with you in person – although I assure you that I am with you in spirit (and image).

I want to thank all those that helped to make this possible – Doug Whallon, Mark and Nancy Cannister, and Santo Wiryaman.

For those of you that are new this week, I am sorry I am not there to meet you in person; however, I trust that you will come back next week so that I can greet you personally.

One reminder, each week the video from the week, as well as the handouts, will be available online for viewing and download at the Grace Chapel website. Just go to the Adult Discipleship section, click on January JOLT, and then click on the class.

Setting the Context

Last week we looked at the subject of War and Peace in the Old Testament. If you missed that session, all the materials are online. I have viewed them and they look great.

There is one issue that I did not cover last week because of lack of time. It is a very troubling one. It is the question of genocide and why in the OT God commanded the Israelites in some situations to kill everyone on the opposing side including women, children, and infants. Next week, I am going to briefly address this question. It is a hard one, but we can't ignore it.

Last week, I shared with you that the OT is replete with the discussion of and the realities of war. From the time of the Exodus from Egypt up until the building of the Second Temple after returning from Babylonian captivity, Israel was involved in perpetual wars.

Let's look at it in its historical context (see Supplemental Handout):

The Period of Israel's Wars

- The Exodus – c. 1290 BC
- King Saul – c. 1020 BC
- King David – c. 1000 BC
- King Solomon – c. 961 BC
- The Divided Kingdom – c. 925 BC
- Israel taken into captivity by the Assyrian Empire – 721 BC
- Judah defeated; Jerusalem destroyed; Babylonian captivity begins – 586 BC

The Rule of the Persian Empire

- Edict of Cyrus – 538 BC
- Building of the Second Temple – 520-515 BC

The Rule of the Greek and Ptolemaic Empires

- Alexander the Great defeats the Persians; Palestine under Greek rule – c. 356-323
- Ptolemy I – V (from Egypt) rule Palestine – 323-198 BC

Seleucid Control and the Rule of the Maccabees

- Seleucids (Syria) have control of Palestine while battling Rome – 198-63 BC
- The revolt of the Maccabees – 167 BC
- The Maccabian rule and religious freedom – 167-63 BC

Roman Rule of Palestine

- Pompey enters Jerusalem – 63 BC
- The Jewish-Roman war – 66-73 AD
- Destruction of Jerusalem – 70 AD
- Fall of Masada – 73 AD

The life and ministry of Jesus takes place while Palestine is completely under Roman rule. Later, as the early church is being established the Jewish-Roman War breaks out and Jerusalem is destroyed.

A New Testament View of War

This context is important to help us understand the view of war that is presented in the NT. In the NT war is accepted as a reality, though not affirmed, and used as a metaphor for the conflicts which arise in our lives and in our faith.

1. **Wars and the military are an accepted reality by Jesus and the disciples**
 - a. Matthew 24:6 – *You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come*
 - b. Luke 14:31-32 – *Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he*

will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.

- c. Matthew 8:5-13, Acts 10 – Soldiers who were among Jesus followers were never condemned for being a part of the military and involved in making war
 - d. Hebrews 11:32 – Soldiers are listed as among the “heroes of the faith”
- 2. The imagery of war is used to describe the work of Christ**
- a. 2 Corinthians 2:14 – *But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ . . .*
 - b. Colossians 2:15 – *And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.*
- 3. The war of the flesh and the spirit – Spiritual Warfare**
- a. Romans 7:23 – *But I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members.*
 - b. 1 Peter 2:11 – *Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul.*
 - c. 2 Corinthians 10:3-6 – *For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. And we will be ready to punish every act of disobedience, once your obedience is complete.*
- 4. The picture of the final conflict between good and evil, God and the devil**
- a. Revelation 16:14, 16 – *They are spirits of demons performing miraculous signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty. . . . Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.*
 - b. Revelation 17:14 – *They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings—and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers.*
 - c. Revelation 19:11-16 – *I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. “He will rule them with an iron scepter.” He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.*

A New Testament View of Peace

In the New Testament, there are several words for “peace” and it is used in a variety of ways. The Hebrew word *shalom* was used as an everyday word for greetings, wishing well, saying goodbye, and speaking of general well-being and harmony in everyday life.

In the New Testament, in contrast to the Old Testament, God is clearly declared to be a **God of peace**, not war:

- 1 Thessalonians 5:23 – *May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through.*
- Hebrews 13:20-21 – *May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*
- Romans 15:33 – *The God of Peace be with you all.*
- Philippians 4:9 – *And the God of peace will be with you.*

God is not only a God of peace, but he **gives peace** to those that believe in and follow him:

- Philippians 4:7 – *And the peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*

Peace has a special association with **birth of Jesus** as he is declared to be the long-promised “Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6-7):

- Luke 1:76-79 – Zechariah declares John the Baptist to be the “path to peace”
- Luke 2:14 – The angels sing, “Peace on earth to men on whom his favor rests”

Jesus makes peace **central to his teaching**:

- The Sermon on the Mount:
 - Matthew 5:9 – *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.*
 - Matthew 5:39-40 – Turn the other cheek
 - Matthew 5:43-44 – Love your enemies
- Mark 5:34, Luke 7:50, 8:48 – Jesus tells those he healed to “go in peace”
- Luke 10:5-6 – The disciples were to pronounce “peace on this house” when they went out two-by-two
- Luke 19:38, 42 – At the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, he came to bring “peace”
- The Last Supper:
 - John 14: 27 – *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.*
 - John 16:33 – *I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.*

Jesus Christ is the **source of peace** to those that trust in him:

- Ephesians 2:14-17 – *For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.*

The **essence of the Gospel** and **salvation** is peace:

- Acts 10:36 – *You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. See also Ephesians 2:17, 6:15.*
- Romans 5:1 – *Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*
- Galatians 5:22 – *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace . . .*
- Romans 8:6 – *The mind of the sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace.*

In comparing the New Testament and Old Testament’s teaching on “war and peace,” **several stark contrasts** are evident:

1. The OT era was largely a time of war for Israel, while the NT era was a time of peace – albeit an enforced peace by an occupying army.
2. The OT says much more about “war” because that was its context and reality. Peace is seen as something rare, something longed for, something that will come when the Messiah comes.
3. The NT accepts “war” but commends “peace.”
4. In the OT, God is a warrior; in the NT, God is a God of Peace.
5. In the NT, peace is not only the nature of God, but also the nature of Jesus, his teachings and the promise of salvation.

6. Those who support a theology of war, tend to lean on OT scriptures.
7. Those who support a theology of peace and pacifism, tend to lean on NT scriptures.
8. The challenge is to have a theology of war and peace that uses the whole Bible and reconciles seemingly contradictory scriptures. Our theology of war and peace cannot be justified by selective proof-texting.

Interpretations of War and Peace by Churches

Realism – Realism is a view of world affairs that says a nation has an obligation to act in its own best interests and that of its people. It prioritizes national interest and security over ideology, moral concerns, or social issues

“Christian Realism” is a branch of realism developed in the 1940s and 50s by Reinhold Niebuhr based on the belief that because the world is innately corrupt, God’s ideal cannot be attained. Thus, a nation should act in its own interests. This view was adopted by many American churches during the Cold War.

Pacifism / Non-violence – “Christian Pacifism” is a theological view that proposes that violence and war is not compatible with the teachings of Christ and the Christian faith. It suggests that Jesus himself was a pacifist who practiced pacifism – “turn the other cheek” and non-resistance to “death on the Cross. Therefore, Christians should imitate Christ, even if it means imprisonment or death.

Churches adopting this view:

- Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)
- Church of the Brethren
- Anabaptists
- Mennonites
- Amish
- Seventh Day Adventists
- Elements of the Church of Christ, Russian Orthodox, Catholics, Methodists, and Baptists
- Martin Luther King, Jr.

Just War – Just War Theory emerges out of Catholic philosophical thought beginning with Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. It teaches that although war and violence is morally abhorrent, sometimes it is necessary. It establishes criteria to determine which wars are morally justifiable and permissible.

Churches adopting this view:

- Roman Catholic Church
- Orthodox
- Most Mainline, Evangelical, and Pentecostal churches

Just Peace – The Just Peace Movement began in the 1970s and 80s as a “third way” between Just War and Christian Pacifism positions. Although it rejects violence, it admits that proactive steps must be taken to secure peace. Dr. Robert V. Moss, one of the early proponents of the Just Peace approach stated, “We now need to put as much effort into defining a just peace as we have done in the past in defining a just war.”

Churches adopting this view:

- United Church of Christ
- Congregational

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