

“What Does God Say About War”

Psalm 144:1-15

3-16-03

Read Psalm 144:1-15. Prayer. 9/11 changed America forever. Even though we are the most powerful nation on earth, that dark day taught us that we are no longer invincible and impenetrable but that we are susceptible and vulnerable to attack. Americans have learned to live with fear, anxiety, and uncertainty. We have learned to live with the specter of chemical weapons, biological weapons, and even nuclear weapons being used against us on our own soil. Osama Bin Laden and his terrorist network apparently have ties to a couple of nations that our President has identified as an axis of evil. One of these nations is Iraq. For the last several months, some 300,000 troops have received the call to prepare for war, and they have said tearful goodbyes to the families, and many have been deployed to the gulf region.

With our nation mobilizing for war in the face of the continued threat from weapons of mass destruction and global terrorism, many thoughtful Christians are asking some critical questions: What is God’s perspective on war? Are there biblical justifications for going to war? What is the cost of not going to war, when the threat is great and the cause is just? When one of our soldiers shoots one of the enemy on the battlefield, is that murder? How do we reconcile our involvement in war with what Jesus taught about turning the other cheek and loving our enemies? How do we respond as Christians and citizens of America when our nation is at war?

If you watch the news programs and read the newspapers and talk to people in your circle of relationships, you’re going to find that there are a lot of different opinions and answers to those questions, even among the Christian community. But the bottom line is this: What does God say about it? As always, the Bible is our starting point, because it is the authoritative, infallible, inerrant word of the living God. If you want to know what God’s perspective is on a matter, you will find it in the Bible.

I. WHERE DOES WAR COME FROM?

First of all, where does war come from? You might be surprised to know that war originated in heaven. Lucifer, one of God’s angels, in pride decided that he wanted to be exalted above God, worshipped as God, rule in the place of God (Isaiah 14, Ezek. 28). So Lucifer, who’s name means son of the morning, became Satan the father of the night, and he persuaded a third of the angelic host to join him in his rebellion against God (Rev. 12). Rev. 12:7 reviewing spiritual history speaks of a war in heaven. So there is a great cosmic conflict going on that will not be ultimately resolved until the final battle, when Jesus comes back to defeat the devil and his forces, and then rule and reign on the earth (Rev. 19-20).

But from the time Lucifer rebelled against God until the time he is thrown into the lake of fire that burns forever and ever, Jesus said there will be wars and rumors of wars. Why is that? When Satan enticed mankind to join his rebellion, war became a part of man’s sinful nature. James asks the question: Where does war come from? And then he answers in 4:1-2—War comes from our lust, the sinful desires that battle within.

Sometimes, nations want to expand their borders and lands—they want more. Sometimes, nations want to have power over other peoples and nations. Sometimes, they go to war out of hatred, prejudice, racism, etc. Sometimes, nations or peoples

go to war in order to promote the superiority of their religion. However, sometimes, nations go to war to defend themselves against attack or oppression. Sometimes nations go to war to protect other nations who are about to be attacked or even to liberate other nations who are under oppression by a foreign nation.

II. CAN ANY WAR BE DESCRIBED AS A “JUST WAR?”

Obviously, most wars originate in the sinful heart of man, and his lust for power, property, possessions, etc. But is there such a thing as a just war? The church has wrestled with that question for nearly 2000 years. In the 5th century, Augustine laid out some rules for a just war, and in the 12th century Thomas Aquinas elaborated on these rules—(By the way Augustine and Aquinas were arguably the two greatest theologians of the Catholic Church). The criteria normally cited for a "Just War" are these:

1. Just cause, as a defensive war;
2. Just intent, for liberation, not destruction or subjugation;
3. Last resort, when other means have been exhausted;
4. Legitimate authority, with the approval of Congress, in America’s case;
5. Limited and achievable goals;
6. Noncombatant immunity, with every effort made to protect civilians;
7. Proportionality, in which the benefit outweighs the cost.

Now how does this impending war with Iraq compare with Just War teaching of the church? Well I’m borrowing some from Dr. Richard Land of the ERLC in answer to these.

1. First, there must be just cause. After 9/11, we used military force in Afghanistan in response to the act of war that took the lives of nearly 3,000 of our citizens. That act of war was just cause for our retaliation. Now what about Iraq? In just war theory only defensive war is defensible. Well are we not about to launch a pre-emptive strike against Iraq? I mean, Iraq hasn’t attacked us, have they? Historically, just cause has been defined as responding to an attack. So can a preemptive strike be morally justified? The first response from many church leaders was negative. U.S. Catholic bishops opposed an attack unless Iraq could be linked to the September 11 terror strikes. One hundred Christian ethicists announced opposition; so did the general secretary of the Middle East Council of Churches. The new Archbishop of Canterbury and Pope John Paul II both expressed reservations. A couple of points need to be made here.

A. Iraq is allied with Al Qaeda: To those who say: “Iraq hasn’t attacked us,” I would say: Neither did Germany or Italy in WWII, but we went to war with them because they were *allied* with the nation of Japan, who did attack us by bombing Pearl Harbor. Likewise, Iraq is allied with Al Qaeda, the terrorist group that attacked us on 9/11. Colin Powell recently revealed to the UN that there is an increasingly large amount of hard evidence that there is daily and weekly cooperation between al Qaeda and Saddam Hussein. Saddam has harbored terror cells and moved Al Qaeda operatives into northern Iraq to try to destabilize and assassinate the Kurds who oppose his regime. It is only a matter of time in a quid pro quo deal that weapons of mass destruction will be given to Al Qaeda for brutal services rendered to Saddam Hussein—weapons that could be and will be used against the United States. Iraq is allied with our attackers and is therefore subject to military action on that basis alone.

B. Iraq is in Violation of an Agreement that was a Condition for the End of the Gulf War.

The question of preemptive strike turns on facts. For 12 years, Saddam Hussein has mocked the United Nations and the world. So this immanent military action is not really second war, but simply a continuation of the first in response to Iraq's failure to comply with the cease fire agreement—which was to cease and desist from producing weapons of mass destruction and allow the UN weapon's inspectors to help destroy what they have. Obviously, Saddam hasn't complied with the cease fire agreement.

In fact, Colin Powell recently presented ample evidence and proof to the UN Security Council of Saddam Hussein's duplicity and deception in his massive attempt to cover up and conceal his weapons of mass destruction. Remember Psalm 144:8,11? That's what we're dealing with here. As Powell reminded the assembly, the burden is on Iraq, not the weapons inspectors, to reveal and to give up weapons of mass destruction and not to play a deadly and dangerous game of shell game to see if the UN inspectors can find them. It's clear from the evidence that Saddam Hussein has no intention of willingly disarming and surrendering his weapons of mass destruction. So the bottom line is that the US has just cause to go to war because we are simply defending ourselves from a future attack.

2. Just intent, for liberation, not destruction or subjugation:

According to our President, our nation does not intend to destroy, conquer, or exploit Iraq. In fact, everything about our track record shows otherwise. What nation on the face of the earth wages war against an enemy nation and then turn around and spends millions and millions of it's own money to rebuild those conquered nations and help them countries economically, politically, and even protect them militarily. That is the spirit of America.

Bush in his speech to the U.N. General Assembly, said: "The United States has no quarrel with the Iraqi people. . . . Liberty for the Iraqi people is a great moral cause, and a great strategic goal. The people of Iraq deserve it; the security of all nations requires it. Free societies do not intimidate through cruelty and conquest, and open societies do not threaten the world with mass murder. The United States supports political and economic liberty in a unified Iraq." That is a just and noble intent—to liberate the Iraqi people from an evil dictator who brutalizes, tortures, starves, and kills his own people.

3. Last resort, when other means have been exhausted: Just war should be started only as a last resort. Again, for over a decade, Saddam Hussein has ignored UN Security Council resolutions or defied them while breaking virtually every agreement into which he has entered. We've tried diplomacy, we've tried embargoes, we've tried strategic air strikes, we've tried weapon's inspectors—and still he is prevaricating, obfuscating, and continuing his quest to obtain and develop the weapons of mass destruction, which he will use himself or supply to others who will terrorize the world community of nations. So given the Al Qaeda network's desire to bring America to its knees by whatever means possible, would it not be irresponsible and reckless of us to delay any longer in dealing with this grave and growing danger.

4. Legitimate authority, with the approval of Congress:

Fourth, just war requires authorization by legitimate authority. It was wise to go before the U.N. General Assembly and ask the Security Council to enforce its own resolutions against Iraq. However, as American citizens we believe that, however helpful a U.N. Security Council vote might be, the legitimate

authority on the use of U.S. military force is the government of the United States, and that the authorizing vehicle is a declaration of war or a joint resolution of the Congress. After all, we are a Sovereign Nation, and we have not been assimilated into the UN just yet.

When the threat of Soviet nuclear missiles in Cuba presented a grave threat to America's security, President Kennedy asked for the support of the U.N. and the Organization of American States, but he made it clear, with or without their support, those missiles would either be removed by the Soviets, or we would take them out ourselves. The American people expected no less from their president and their government in that day, why should we expect any different today.

5. Limited and achievable goals: Fifth, just war requires limited goals and the resort to armed force must have a reasonable expectation of success. In other words, "total war" is unacceptable (i.e., use of thermonuclear warheads) and the war's goals must be achievable. The stated policies for disarming the murderous Iraqi dictator and destroying his weapons of mass destruction, while liberating the Iraqi people from his cruel and barbarous grip, more than meet those criteria.

6. Noncombatant immunity, with every effort made to protect civilians. Sixth, just war theory requires noncombatant immunity—every effort must be made to protect civilians. Even though it's not fool-proof, smart bomb technology was used in the initial phase of the gulf war, and showed how we can wage war in the most humane way possible with regard to civilians. Our government, unlike Hussein, will not target civilians or use human shields and will do all that it can to minimize noncombatant casualties.

7. Proportionality, in which the benefit outweighs the cost:

Seventh, just war theory requires the question of proportionality be addressed. Will the human cost of the armed conflict to both sides be proportionate to the stated objectives and goals? Does the good gained by going to war justify the cost of lives lost? The cost of not dealing with this threat now will only succeed in greatly increasing the cost in human lives and suffering when an even more heavily armed and dangerous Saddam Hussein must be confronted in the not too distant future or he feeds Al Qaeda with weapons of mass destruction which are in turn used on American soil. Every day of delay significantly increases the risk of far greater human suffering in the future than acting now would involve.

We should also remember that the just-war doctrine is not grounded in revenge, punishment, or even justice. Thomas Aquinas discussed it in Summa Theologica—not in the section on justice but in the section on charity (that is, the love of God). As Christian scholar Darrell Cole writes, "The Christian who fails to use force to aid his neighbor when prudence dictates that force is the best way to render that aid is an uncharitable Christian. Hence Christians who willingly and knowingly refuse to engage in a just war...fail to show love towards their neighbor as well as towards God." Out of love of neighbor, then, Christians can and should support a preemptive strike, if ordered by the appropriate governmental authority to prevent an imminent attack. Again, these are the generally accepted teachings of the church concerning Just War, and certainly these are built on biblical principle, but I still believe we ought to answer the question: "What Does God Say About War?"

III. WHAT DOES GOD SAY ABOUT WAR?

Obviously, God is not thrilled about war. He doesn't enjoy the violence, the killing, the destruction, just as we don't. Even though it is not a theologically perfect statement, it's still true: war is hell. And the prophets looked forward to a day when there would be no war—When the nations of the world would beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks, a day when nation would not take up sword against nation, a day when people won't train for war anymore (Micah 4:1-3),. But we need remember that until the Lord Jesus comes back to rule and reign on this earth, that we are living in a fallen world, and we all have a fallen nature, we are all sinners by nature and by choice. And in that environment, sometimes war is a “necessary evil” if you will.

In fact, God used warfare to accomplish His sovereign purposes and plans. In the OT, He used the nation of Israel in particular to meet out His punishment of wicked people. And then He used other nations such as Assyria and Babylon to punish his own people Israel when they became disobedient and idolatrous. In the NT, warfare is used as a legitimate picture of the Christian life, and the culmination of God's plan for mankind on this earth involves war.

War in the OT: First of all, let's talk about war in the OT. God used war in the OT to accomplish his plans and His purposes by using it as an instrument of judgment. God told Abraham back in Gen. 15:16 that the nation that would come from him would be the instrument of judgment God would use to punish the wicked. In Deut. 20, in fulfillment of what He told Abraham, God lays out specific, detailed instructions for how to conduct a war against those nations and people God was punishing and giving their land to the Israelites.

He even started out by saying: Offer them peace (v 10). Have we not done that with Iraq? We have said: Surrender, surrender, surrender... But they have not and they will not. Well God says: Offer them peace, if they take it great, but if they don't show no quarter. Then in the Book of Joshua, the children of Israel attempted to carry out God's plan in God's strength. They waged war, and they were largely successful. However, they weren't completely obedient, and what God said eventually came true, that those pagan people's they allowed to live among them corrupted them and eventually became their oppressors. And during the time of the Judges, God raised up men and a woman in response to their cry for help, and these Judges waged war to defend and protect and gain back their freedom.

During the first years of the kingship, God blessed Saul and then David with victory in war, again, because it was a part of God's plan to protect and defend His people and at the same time meet out judgment on the pagan peoples around them. During the latter years of the nation of Israel, and then the division of the kingdom into Israel and Judah, the shoe was on the other foot so to speak. Israel was disobedient. Judah was disobedient. They went after the Baals and served other Gods. So God used other nations like Assyria and Babylon to wage war against his own people as punishment for their sin and disobedience (2 Chron. 36:15-20). So war is a part of God's sovereign plans and purposes.

Now are there consequences for not going to war when God commands it and the cause is just? Awesome consequences. Numbers 13 & 14. 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, their corpses burning in the sands of the desert and they never got into the promised land and not only that, but they kept their children from enjoying it for 40 years.

God uses war to accomplish His sovereign plans and purposes, and if we refuse to participate in a just war, there can be grave consequences.

War in the NT: Second, let's talk about War in the NT. Warfare is used as a legitimate picture of the Christian life. Paul talks about putting on the whole armor of God in Eph. 6. Paul talks about the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds, casting down imaginations and everything that exalts itself against the knowledge of God.

But the writers of the NT never advocate Christians waging war in response to personal persecution. However, they do advocate submitting to legitimate governmental authorities and being obedient citizens of the state (Romans 13:1-7 and 1 Peter 2:13-17)—as long as the state does not condone or command what God condemns (Acts 5—Peter said: We ought to obey God rather than men). The bottom line is this: Christian citizenship would involve participating in military service 1) if the governmental authority commands it and 2) if it is a Just War.

Then the question comes: If a Christian soldier or any soldier for that matter kills the enemy on the battlefield, does that not violate the 6th commandment that says: “Do not kill” (Exod. 20:13)? Again, that's a misunderstanding and misapplication of Scripture. The Hebrew word used there is one of several in the OT used to describe loss of life, but that particular Hebrew word erroneously translated by the KJV as “kill,” literally means “murder”—premeditated taking of a human life with malice and forethought. Killing someone in battle is not a violation of the 6th commandment, it is not murder—because he is under the authority and command of the God-ordained governmental authority.

So a Christian can legitimately participate in the military and maintain a close walk with God. David was a man after God's own heart, and yet he praises God in this psalm for training his hands for war. And God gave David success after success in war. And in our nation's history is filled with examples of God's providence, His protection, and His provision during war. I mean think about it. Even though we have strayed from the Lord, this is a Christian nation. Our founders took seriously the Great Commission in coming here. And even in our disobedient state, we send out more Christian missionaries than any other nation. No wonder the devil and his crowd are doing everything possible to destroy our nation, and along with it our faith in Christ, and our ability to communicate that faith to the world.

IV. WHAT WOULD JESUS DO?

Well what did Jesus say about war? Didn't Jesus say: turn the other cheek and love your enemies? Shouldn't that eliminate a Christian's support for and involvement in war? Again, to apply this to America and our impending war with Iraq is a gross misunderstanding and misapplication of the Scriptures. This word of Jesus was not addressed to the nation, but to the individual disciple. When you are attacked personally, that is how you are to respond. However, there are other provisions if your family is attacked.

Let's take it a step further. Jesus told a couple of parables about Kings who went to war (Luke 14:31-33; Luke 19:11-27). The implication was that war was justified. And there in the garden of Gethsemane, with Judas and the Temple guard approaching, he told his disciples in Luke 22:36: If you don't have a sword, sell your cloak and go buy one. The

implication is to use it for self-defense or to protect others—which goes back to just war theory.

America will make that stand.” And I say: Mr. President, I make that stand with you.

In fact, you don't find Jesus condemning the Romans for their wars. You don't find Jesus disciples holding up signs saying: “Give Peace a Chance!” You will never find Jesus saying: “Make love, not war!” Can you imagine Jesus and His disciples protesting against the Roman government? That would have lasted a few seconds. Pilate asked Jesus, “Why don't your disciples fight?” Jesus said: “My Kingdom is not of this world, if it were they would fight.” Get that: If it were, they would fight. And then he told Pilate: “You wouldn't have any power over me unless it was given to you by the Father.” And he told his disciples, that if it was God's will, He could call down legions of angels to defend him, but it wasn't God's plan at that moment. God's plan at that moment was for Him to go to the cross and suffer and die.

Now let's shift from “What would Jesus do?” to “What is Jesus going to do?” Look if you will at Rev. 19. Here we find the conclusion to the cosmic conflict that began in heaven with Satan's rebellion. Read v 11-21. That, my friend, is the “Mother of All Wars.” And one word from Jesus and it will be over. But Almighty God's sovereign plans and purposes are accomplished through war.

V. HOW SHOULD WE RESPOND TO WAR AS CHRISTIANS AND CITIZENS IN AMERICA

How should we respond as Christians and citizens? Folks, there is a time for debate. That's one of the great things about our nation. Each person is free to discuss and debate from the dictates of his or her heart. Each person is free to protest if they want to. That's part of the greatness of America. But I want to remind you that somebody had fight in a war for you to have that right. Somebody had to go to war, and maybe even give his life for you to have that freedom.

I think about those minute men who faced wave after wave of attack from the British. I think about how brother fought against brother in the great civil war to preserve our union and set people free from slavery. I think about those doughboys who piled into the trenches and faced sniper fire and mustard gas in WW I. I think of those men who were mercilessly attacked at Pearl Harbor and the thousands who died there. I think of those brave men who stormed the beaches of Normandy under a hailstorm of machine gun fire. I think of those brave souls who came up against the Communists in North Korea, and Vietnam and were never really given the support they needed to win, and yet they fought bravely anyway. I think of those men and women who went to the Gulf to liberate that little nation of Kuwait. I think of these men and women who are being called up right now to fight for our protection and freedom. I think of the hundreds of thousands of brave men have given their lives across the years for your freedom to express your opinion and enjoy your freedom, and God bless every one of them who died for the cause of liberty.

Folks, I am convinced that the time for debate is over, and the time to line up and support our President, who is a Christian man and a praying man. And the time to support those Troops, that time is here and now. We need to support and pray for their families and help them any way we can. President Bush told the U.N. assembly: “We cannot stand by and do nothing while dangers gather. We must stand up for our security, and for the permanent rights and hopes of mankind. By heritage and by choice, the United States of