

The Christian Woman and

War & Justice

Key Verses: *"To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven" (Ecclesiastes 3:1). "A time to love, and a time of war, and a time of peace" (Ecclesiastes 3:8).*

"A Time for War..."

Tears came to my eyes as I heard my African sister in Christ describe part of her family's experience during the civil conflict of spring 2011 in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, West Africa. Their neighborhood was one of the hardest hit for several weeks. Many were the hours they lay flat on the floor during bombardments, praying and wondering if their home would be the next to collapse. At times her young daughter begged her, "Mama, let me back in your stomach where it is safe."



Men were shot indiscriminately on the street, so she was the family member who walked to market early in the morning for daily food, as did many other women. On the walks she quoted Scripture to give herself strength, and shared with other terrified women the peace she felt by trusting Christ as Savior. Piles of corpses, covered with enormous flies, littered the city streets and filled the air with the stench of rotting flesh. The Lord in His mercy spared her family, and later when her husband's job led them to move to a new town, He used them effectively to minister to many people traumatized by events of the war.

My own experience as a missionary wife living in that war-torn country inspires many sad and angry thoughts about war, too. Watching the exploitation of the people to satisfy the lust of hungry-power leaders, enduring the perpetual corruption and abuse by the supposed peace-keeping forces, and experiencing the 3-hour evacuation from our house as rebel forces approached our town—all of these were mild events compared to the suffering of many Ivoirians. In 2011, as I was in the States awaiting surgery, Verlin spoke quietly to me on the phone while he sat on the floor in the hall of our African home. He had turned out the lights because rebel and government forces were using our walled yard as cover from which to shoot at one another.

War is ugly, brutal, and offends our innate longing for peace and security in life. Many people, especially women, have problems wrapping their minds around the idea that the Lord of the Universe (particularly Jesus as He lived His sinless life on earth) could ever be in favor of war.

How could our “meek and lowly of heart” Savior (Matthew 11:29), who commanded us to “turn the other cheek” (Matthew 5:39) and corrected Peter for cutting off the ear of the servant of the high priest in the Garden of Gethsemane (John 18:10-11), desire the destruction of cities or nations or people groups? Can the One who did not defend His rights on earth take pleasure in genocide or the slaughter of innocents? Likewise, what mother’s heart does not quake at the thought of her son spilling his blood on some gruesome battlefield?

Nevertheless, a rapid overview of the Scripture from Genesis to Revelation records numerous examples of battles and wars, including quite a few that were directly commanded by the Lord. Before the fall of man in Genesis there was no war, except the occasion in heaven when Lucifer and his demons were cast out (Isaiah 14:15; Ezekiel 28:16-17). In Revelation, we learn again of a war in heaven pitting angelic hosts against the devil and his hosts (Revelation 12), and of the last battle on earth which Jesus Himself will lead (Revelation 19:11-16).

After that, we followers of Christ will dwell eternally with our Righteous King. There will be no more war then, or sorrow, or tears, when the scroll of human history is rolled up and the Prince of Peace reigns. Until then, we live in a world torn by war, as the ungodly seek to gain control of power and resources for their own devices, and as the godly at times must stand up to defend their freedoms and ability to worship God.

Biblically there is indeed “a time for war, and a time for peace” (Ecclesiastes 3:8). What does that mean? How do we believers live with that tension? When do we leave vengeance to the Lord, and when do we pray for our husbands and sons to utterly vanquish the enemy in battle? Is pacifism a responsible option?

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Our study on War and Justice is designed to grapple with these hard questions by prayerfully and biblically considering three things: 1. What does it mean that the Lord God is just and righteous? 2. Is there such a thing as a just war? 3. How do we respond justly to the circumstances of our lives and our world?

OUR JUST LORD

One thing that can help us accept the reality and necessity of war in our fallen world is to remind ourselves of the nature of God. All the attributes of the Lord (including His love, mercy, justice, and wrath) operate perfectly in Him at all times. God would not be God if He did not judge sin. As much as He loves His creation and desires only what is good for us, He cannot overlook wickedness and He will judge righteously.

The only reason we as believers experience the loving grace of God instead of His wrath, is because Jesus took the wrath and penalty for all our sins upon Himself when He died at Calvary. Every human who does not receive this incredibly merciful offer in Christ will experience the full wrath of God.

Looking at a few biblical examples can help us better understand the Lord's holiness, as we see the occasions when the Lord Himself brought destruction, or when He commanded His chosen people to destroy cities or peoples in war.

1. **Read Genesis 6:1-8** for the description of the situation on earth when the Lord decided to send the worldwide flood. What was the condition of mankind's heart and thoughts at that time? (verse 5) How did God respond?

Psalm 85:10

*"Mercy and truth
are met together;
righteousness and
peace have kissed
each other."*

Verse 8 says that Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. Why do you think that was the case? Look at Genesis 6:22 to help you respond.

On other occasions the Lord also used supernatural means to bring judgment for wickedness. He rained sulfur and fire from heaven on Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:24-25) and struck down the firstborn in the land of Egypt because of Pharaoh's hard heart (Exodus 12:29-30). In addition, the angel of the Lord struck down 185,000 Assyrians in one night (II Kings 19:35).

These acts of judgment, and others like them in the Bible, are sometimes what nonbelievers use as excuse to not follow the Lord. "I could never serve a God who does brutal things like that to innocent people." Are these acts of random brutality? Were these people innocent? Write down some thoughts you could use to help a non-Christian understand the love and justice of God.

2. At other times, the Lord gave clear instructions for the Israelites to destroy cities or peoples they encountered by war. One example was when He said to wipe out the Amalekites. **Read Deuteronomy 25:17-19.** What did Amalek do when the children of Israel were passing his way as they fled from Egypt? (verse 18)

What was Amalek's attitude toward God?

What act of mercy did King Saul demonstrate to the Kenites, the neighbors of the Amalekites, before he destroyed the Amalekites? I Samuel 15:5-7

Why were the Kenites given the opportunity to leave?

3. Notice another mixture of war and mercy in the story of the taking of Jericho. God clearly instructed Joshua to destroy the city. Only one woman and her family were spared. Review the details in [Joshua 2:1-20](#). What two particular stories had the people of Jericho heard about the Israelites? (verse 10)

What conclusion did Rahab reach about the God of the Israelites, based on the stories she had heard? What was she willing to risk as a result? (verses 11-14)

4. [Jeremiah 18:7-11](#) describes the criteria the Lord uses to determine whether or not He will destroy a nation or people. What must a nation do to stop the judgment of the Lord? (verse 8)

As God's chosen people, was Judah "safe" from ever experiencing the wrath of God? (verse 9-11)

Judah did not heed the gracious warnings the Lord gave repeatedly about turning from their sins. He sent the Babylonians to defeat them and carry them into captivity. In [Jeremiah 21:1-10](#) read the Lord's reaction to Judah's king who was hoping God would protect Jerusalem from the invasion of Nebuchadnezzar. Write out Jeremiah 21:5 as a solemn reminder of the holy God we serve.

If the Lord's chosen people did not escape His wrath against unrepentant sin, neither will our nation, if we do not turn from our wicked ways. However, if a nation does repent and turn to God, they can experience the Lord's grace. The example of Nineveh in the book of Jonah is a great example of repentance that held back God's hand of judgment.

5. The examples above all came from the Old Testament. Jesus did not give war-like commands in the New Testament, although some of His disciples were disappointed that He did not fight to set up an earthly kingdom. However, remember why He came. It was to die for our sins and destroy the works of the devil. To put up a fight for the cause of His protection would have defeated the purpose of His coming to earth.

The book of Revelation, on the other hand, is full of the wrath of God and war, as it describes the events at the end of human history. Look at **Revelation 19:11-21**. Who is seated on the white horse and what two things does He do in righteousness? (verse 11)

Who are following Him on white horses? (verse 14)

What is the purpose of the sharp sword coming from His mouth? (verse 15)

Justice will be righteously administered to the wicked. Praise the Lord, when this last battle is complete, the enemy and his followers are forever defeated and thrown into the lake of fire. War is over, and the Prince of Peace rules. If the contents of this lesson are hard for you to accept, continue to study the whole scope of Scripture. Ask the Lord to help you grow in respect and gratitude for all aspects of His character, including His righteousness which causes Him to act in justice.

For further study, consider the following resources:

<http://www.rationalchristianity.net/genocide.html> "Genocide in the Old Testament"

<http://www.answersingenesis.org/articles/2012/05/01/contradictions-war-and-peace> "Is God a God of War or a God of Peace?"

<http://carm.org/bible-difficulties/genesis-deuteronomy/lord-god-peace-or-war> "Is the Lord a God of Peace or of War"

A “JUST” WAR?

Historically, there have always been some Christians like the Quakers and Amish who favored pacifism, including two early church fathers, Tertullian and Origen. Although our government gives liberty for individuals to choose that personal view, imagine what would have happened in the world if nations had not stood up to Hitler. Similarly, if America and other democratic nations today were to suddenly declare themselves pacifists who would not defend their nation from invaders, how long do you suppose it would take for the entire world to be in the hands of Muslims? How could we share the gospel and worship the Lord in liberty if all nations of the world forbade Christianity?

Pacifism is opposition to war or violence as a means of settling disputes; specifically refusal to bear arms on moral or religious grounds. (Merriam-Webster dictionary online)

In general, a more typical response of Christians is the belief that war is terrible and undesirable, but at times necessary. This is called the “Just War” view. When an aggressor attacks a country and prevents its citizens from living in peace, military response is usually expected. Over the centuries advocates of the theory have developed questions that are considered relevant in deciding whether a war is just or not. Below are a few of them.*

1. Just cause (reason for war morally right, like defending a nation, Revelation 19:11).
2. Made by competent authority (actual leadership of a nation, Romans 13:1).
3. Comparative justice (actions of enemy morally wrong; motive of own nation morally right, Romans 13:3).
4. Right intention (protect justice and righteousness, not to steal resources or eliminate a hated people group, Proverbs 21:2).
5. Last resort (have tried every other means to resolve conflict, Matthew 5:9; Romans 12:18).
6. Probability of success, Luke 14:31.

“In order for a war to be just three things are necessary. First, the authority of the sovereign. Secondly, a just cause. Thirdly, a rightful intention.” —Thomas Aquinas

**I am indebted to the ESV Study Bible’s Biblical Ethics section on war for the questions used to determine a “just” war and other facts in this section.*

Consider some of these facts from Scripture that support the idea that the Lord is not opposed to just war or warriors who defend their country.

1. David—beloved king, harpist, writer of psalms, “man after God’s own heart”—was a brilliant warrior. **Read Psalm 18:31-50**, a song to the Lord when David was delivered from the hand of his enemies and Saul. Remember that the Lord chose this psalm to be included in His Holy Word for our edification.

What military ability did David attribute to the Lord in verse 34?

In verses 37-42 did David, the Lord’s anointed to be Israel’s king, take a pacifist view toward his enemies? List some phrases that demonstrate his actions toward them.

To whom did David give credit for his victory in verses 46-48?

Do you find it ironic that David talked about the Lord rescuing him from the “man of violence” in verse 48, considering what he did to his enemies? Think about the origin of the conflict between Saul and David, though. Who started it? (See I Samuel 18, if you do not know the story.)

2. Moses, too, received many direct instructions concerning warfare. Deuteronomy 20, one whole chapter of the law given by Moses, is devoted to what topic?

Read Numbers 31:1-12 which records one of the last tasks the Lord gave Moses before his death. For context, the Midians were a people who, earlier in Numbers 25 under the influence of Balaam, convinced the Israelites to worship the false god Baal. What was the Lord’s direct command to Moses about them?

3. Another hero of the Old Testament, Gideon, was a very reluctant but eventually obedient warrior. Judges 6 and 7 recounts God calling him to lead Israel in battle to rescue them from the oppression of the Midianites. Gideon was doubtful, but the Lord said what to him in [Judges 6:14-16](#)?

Who was sending Gideon? Who would be with him?

Later, right before the battle, the Lord told Gideon to *REDUCE* the size of his army from 22,000 to only 300 men. What reason did the Lord give Gideon for the dramatic reduction in size? [See Judges 7:2](#). Who should receive the praise for their success?

How did the battle cry in Judges 7:18 reveal for whom the battle was to be fought?

“The purpose
of all wars is
peace.”
Augustine

4. Our study of godly warriors involved in just wars would not be complete without looking at the only recorded woman who accompanied Israel into battle, the female judge Deborah! [Read her story in Judges 4:4-14](#). In verse 6, who did Deborah say should have taken the Israelites into battle against Sisera?

What strange request did Barak make of Deborah in verse 8?

According to Deborah, in verse 9, who would get the credit for the Israelites' victory? Do you get the impression that she felt Barak's actions and requests were worthy of a military leader?

5. Verses 17-22 describe the assassination of the leader of the enemy forces. Jael, another woman, is responsible for Sisera's gruesome death. Does she seem overwrought by her actions, or rather matter-of-fact when she leads Barak to his dead enemy?

According to verse 23, Jael was an instrument in whose hand to subdue the enemy?

Clearly, the Lord is given credit for the amazing military victories achieved by David, Moses, Gideon, and the team of Barak and Deborah. He promised and provided victory in these just causes so that His people could live in peace instead of be menaced by the enemies around them. It seems reasonable that throughout history His hand has brought victory to the righteous on many occasions. Yes, many ungodly men have waged war and won for ungodly purposes, but even those the Lord will avenge one day.

OUR JUST RESPONSE

But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream.
Amos 5:24 (KJV)

As we near the end of this study on war and justice as portrayed in the Bible, let's make it practical in our everyday lives. Does our Lord's just character and His support of just causes give us the right to personal revenge when someone wrongs us? What should our attitude be toward our military and government authorities who seek to guard our liberty? As Christian women, what are some of the unique opportunities we have to show Christ's mercy and justice in our war-torn world?

Personal vengeance—yes or no?

Biblically, there is a marked difference between a nation's duty to uphold justice and defend her people and the response Jesus expects from us as individuals when we are wronged. We are not permitted to take vengeance on our enemies, but called to a much higher standard in personal conduct toward one another.

Read Romans 12:14-21. If possible, as far as it depends on you, how are you supposed to live, according to verse 18?

Vengeance for wrong-doing will be carried out, but who should do it?
(verse 19)

The Lord expects us to treat our enemies in what way? (verse 20)

Jesus modeled perfectly for us what He taught in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:38-48) about retaliation and loving our enemies. As the old hymn put it “He could have called ten thousand angels to destroy the world and set Him free...but instead He died for you and me.”

Write out 1 Peter 2:23-24 which beautifully describes how Jesus responded to His enemies, and ask Him for strength by the Holy Spirit to respond in similar ways.

“Even as the angry vengeful thoughts boiled through me, I saw the sin of them. Jesus Christ had died for this man; was I going to ask for more? Lord Jesus, I prayed, forgive me and help me to forgive him...Jesus, I cannot forgive him. Give me your forgiveness...And so I discovered that it is not on our forgiveness any more than on our goodness that the world’s healing hinges, but on His. When He tells us to love our enemies, He gives along with the command, the love itself.”
(Corrie ten Boom from *The Hiding Place*).

The Role of Government Authority

Wait a minute, you may be thinking. Is the Lord saying I should do nothing if my daughter is raped or a business partner empties our joint bank account and hits the beaches in Hawaii? Thankfully the Lord gives us further guidance in Romans 13 and other places which responds to these kinds of abuses. The passages in Romans 12 and Matthew 5 tell us not to respond in kind—you murdered my son, I’ll murder yours. They do not mean that we will never use government court systems or church discipline efforts to prevent further abuse or right wrongs.

Meditate on Romans 13:1-7. Some Bible scholars believe the reference to the sword in verse 4 refers to capital punishment (Genesis 9:6). Perhaps you have never thought of our police, military, or other civil authorities in this way. In verse 3, who should be terrified of them?

How should a citizen keeping the law view the civil authorities, as seen in verse 3?

How does Paul describe a civil authority in verse 4 and 5? Whose servant is he?

What is the ruler's role, according to verse 5?

Some people seem to think of the Lord Jesus as a pacifist who disapproved of government, weapons, and the military. A couple of interesting verses in the gospels give us some hints otherwise.

Look at Luke 3:14, a verse describing Jesus' interaction with some soldiers. Notice that Jesus did not tell them that their profession was wicked and they should abandon it. Instead He told them how to act justly in their role. What advice did He give them?

In the Garden of Gethsemane before Judas betrayed him, Jesus had an interesting discussion about swords with his disciples in Luke 22:35-38. As His time was fulfilled to die on Calvary, things were going to be difficult for them. What did He recommend they sell and buy in verse 36?

What do we discover the disciples already had in verse 38, and did Jesus seem surprised that they were in possession of the weapons?

Mercy and Justice in Action

Christians have always shone in their conduct, in regards to fighting for justice and showing mercy in our war-torn world. Women like Clara Barton and Florence Nightingale championed the care of soldiers of both warring sides, and influenced the creation of organizations like the Red Cross. Amy Carmichael spent her life and health rescuing girls from prostitution in India; Gladys Aylward poured her heart into the orphans of China; Mary Slessor rescued twins left to die in the jungles of Africa. All three of these women were also respected by local governments and used to settle disputes or otherwise help end barbaric customs.

“A church that does not exist to reclaim heathenism, to fight evil, to destroy error, to put down falsehood, a church that does not exist to take the side of the poor, to denounce injustice, and to hold up righteousness, is a church that has no right to be. Not for yourself, O church, do you exist, and more than Christ existed for Himself.” (Charles Spurgeon)

Mercy is Abraham Lincoln’s treatment of the South after the Civil War. It is American airplanes dropping food to the Germans after we destroyed their cities in World War II. It is Corrie ten Boom forgiving the Nazi soldiers who tortured and shamed the female prisoners in concentration camp. It is William Wilberforce fighting for decades to abolish slavery in England. It is treating POWs with humaneness, instead of the torture used by the Germans or Viet Cong or Kmer Rouge or al-Qaida. It is American soldiers giving shoes and gloves and candy to Iraqi and Afghan children. This kind of treatment and mercy and generosity finds its source in the compassion of God and forgiveness in Jesus Christ.

Many current organizations address issues of justice and mercy. Mothers Against Drunk Driving seeks to prevent the ravage of alcohol abuse; Hope Clinics and Concerned Women of America protect the unborn and give options to women considering abortions; World Vision provides for the uncared children of the world; International Justice Mission “rescues victims of violence, sexual exploitation, slavery and oppression;” The Salvation Army and

rescue missions reach out to the homeless; The Voice of the Martyrs informs and serves the plight of the persecuted Church; Prison Fellowship ministers to those in jail. Hundreds more organizations could be listed that perhaps were not founded by Christians, but which many Christians support like Wounded Warrior Project and US Wounded Soldier Foundation.

Every Christian woman can share Christ's mercy by helping in one of the causes above or others in her church and neighborhood. No one can do everything, but everyone can do something. Perhaps it is time to emerge from our protected cocoons and touch the hurting in our sphere of influence. Prayerfully consider the biblical examples below and ask the Lord to guide your actions, not from a sense of guilt but from a heart that loves justice and mercy.

Hebrews 13: 3 asks us to remember what people?

Dorcas (or Tabitha) was treasured in her Christian community for what acts of service in Acts 9:36-42?

The early church in Acts clearly felt the responsibility to help and deal equitably with widows. **Read Acts 6:1-7** and see the problem they were having. What was the problem and how did they solve it?

Let's finish our study by looking at Jesus' words in **Matthew 25:34-40**. The King commends the righteous for what various acts of mercy in these verses?

When the righteous were meeting these different needs, to whom and for whom were they really doing it? Does this help you when you have opportunity to show compassion to someone who is not easy to love?

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