



Inspired And Uncomfortable | Why Does God Seem To Want War?

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Good morning, Menlo Church! How are you guys doing? My name is Jevon, and I want to warmly welcome everyone joining us today in Menlo Park, San Mateo, Mountain View, and Saratoga, and everyone tuning in online. It's so good to have you with us.

As we continue in our series, I want to start by reminding everyone that this church is filled with people from diverse backgrounds, life experiences, and even theological perspectives. That diversity is a gift. It actually makes us stronger and helps us reflect the kingdom of God more fully.

Now, today we're stepping into a topic that requires a lot of nuance, courage, and humility, as we talk about the theme of war and the character of God. This message is definitely going to stretch us. I've already heard multiple pieces of feedback, and I'm not surprised by what's going to be in my email when I start my week tomorrow.

For some of us, this message will stir up strong opinions. Some of us will have deep questions. And others might even experience silent confusion. And that's actually okay. This is a space where we can bring our questions, our anger, our frustrations, and invite God to actually meet us in the complexity of topics like these.

The scriptures say that God resists the proud, but he gives grace to the humble. So, if you would, let's ask God, the God of all wisdom, to guide us in this moment. Would you join your hearts with mine in prayer?

God, we thank you for another opportunity to come and learn about you. God, this is not something to do with me, the communicator, but it has everything to do with your word. I pray, God, that as there are so many different distractions happening in our world, even in our personal lives, that you would speak to us today, that you would make it clear what you have to say to us. I pray for the people here today who will find what they hear very difficult and confusing, and they will have a lot of different emotions. And I pray, God, that you would meet them where they are.

God, I pray that we would be encouraged and that we would find your truth beautiful even though things can be difficult at times. We thank you for all these things. It's in Jesus's name we pray. Amen.

If you're with us today, welcome! We're in a sermon series called "Inspired and Uncomfortable." It's a conversation we're having, leading into some of the most difficult and often avoided questions in scripture and in churches—questions that don't just challenge our intellect but actually stretch our hearts and deepen our trust in Jesus.

Week one, we asked the question, "Does the Bible support slavery?"

The answer is no. And if it did, I wouldn't be here. So that would be pretty weird. It's okay to laugh, I understand. Then last week, Phil talked about "Does the Bible limit women?" And again, no, the Bible doesn't. The Bible actually elevates women.

Today, we're actually going to step into a question that creates a ton of issues, emotions, and even questions for a lot of people. The question is this: "Does God seem to want so much war?" The short answer is no. But then comes an actual deeper and more difficult question: "Did God command ancient Israel to kill men, women, livestock, and children of certain nations?" Yes.

We have to let that sink in. That's very uncomfortable. And if you're feeling some tension right now, or if you're feeling frustration or anger, you would not be the first, nor would you be the last. So, what do we do with this?

Here's what we're going to need. We're going to need to actually understand what we call the narrative arc of scripture to actually guide us. Because when we see the command that God uses about war in the Old Testament, it can feel very harsh until we actually understand its context. These weren't random battles. These were moments where lawlessness and people being absolutely crazy towards one another, destroying themselves, threatened to erase the very people through whom salvation would come.

From the patriarchs all the way to the prophets, here's the pattern that we see: In times of moral collapse, spiritual corruption, and geopolitical chaos, God sometimes uses war not to promote violence, but to actually preserve his covenant and to protect a pathway to the Messiah, who is Jesus. That doesn't make the reality of this conversation easier, but it actually gives us as finite people a peer into the mind of God.

Let's read Deuteronomy 20:10-18: "Now when you march up to attack a city, make its people an offering of peace. If they accept and open their gates, all of the people in it shall be subject in forced labor and shall work for you. If they refuse to make peace and they engage you in battle, lay siege to that city. And when the Lord your God delivers it into your hand, put a sword to all men in it. As for the women, the children, the livestock, and everything else in the city, you may take these as plunder for yourselves, and you may use the plunder the Lord your God gives you from your enemies. This is how you are to treat all the cities that are at a distance from you and do not belong to the nations nearby."

"However, in the cities of the nations the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance, do not leave alive anything that breathes.

Completely destroy them—the Hittites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, the Jebusites—as the Lord God has commanded you. Otherwise, they will teach you to follow all the

detestable things that they do in worshiping their gods, and you will sin against the Lord your God."

Followers and non-followers alike, when we read passages like this in these different texts from the Old Testament, it becomes very, very difficult for us to understand. For example, Richard Dawkins, a prominent scientist and outspoken atheist who has made a career of arguing about God and talking about God and his character, saying how cruel God is and how petty, morally bankrupt he is.

He actually wrote a book called *The God Delusion*. And in this book, he says this about God: "The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction." So, he already said fiction, y'all, that's messed up. "And then, jealous and proud of it, a petty, unjust, unforgiving control freak, a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser, a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously benevolent bully."

I apologize for me not being able to pronounce some of those words. I must have missed that episode of Sesame Street.

But when you read those things that Richard Dawkins is talking about, there's a problem. And some of you may be struggling with the same problem today like Richard Dawkins, because his interpretation of God due to passages like this in the Bible, they actually treat God's divine judgment and justice as if it were arbitrary violence. But then they ignore the broader narrative of history and God's mercy and his justice and his patience that actually shapes the story of the Old Testament and the New Testament.

Friends, I hope you hear this today: Like Richard Dawkins, we can actually sometimes see God's law but then miss God's love. We can see God's wrath but ignore God's rescue. We can actually see God's commands but then actually forget God's compassionate character and the love of a father that's actually behind them.

It's always easy to create a caricature of God as an angry, loveless figure stripped of mercy and grace. And that is actually a God that's created by broken hearts in the minds of us as humanity.

But the true God of scripture is both just and merciful. He's slow to anger and rich in steadfast love. The same God who judged Pharaoh chance after chance to stop his injustice is the same God who sent his son into the world to save the world but not to condemn it, but to redeem all those people who believe in him. Friends, don't let a caricature of God keep you from the character of God.

A caricature is a distorted image or an exaggeration of certain features while completely ignoring the others. And that's exactly what some people have done with God. They've taken snapshots of judgment and then they've cut out the scenes of his mercy. And then they've cropped out moments of grace and then filtered him through human fear or frustration.

You see, God commanded the destruction of the Canaanite nations not because he's cruel, not because he just wanted to hurt people, but because he is just. And just like he was patient then, he is patient now. And he's giving every person a chance to turn from sin and to trust in his ways.

The God of the New Testament is the same God as the Old Testament. He is and always will be a God of justice, just as he is one of grace and mercy. His heart has been and always will be forever towards mercy and grace.

But God's aim in the Old Testament, all the way until now, is not that people would perish, but that God would come to liberate us and that all those who are trapped in bondage and the decay of sin.

God's justice in the Old Testament is always measured. It's always purposeful, and it's always patient. He waits over 400 years before

actually judging the Canaanites. He pleads with Nineveh, a city about to be destroyed from their sin, and calls them to repent. God actually sends prophets, not just punishments.

And Psalm 103:8 says this: "The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love." Or Ezekiel 33:11 says: "Say to them, as surely as I live, declares the sovereign Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and they would live."

Or even in the New Testament, 2 Peter 3:9: "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand it as slowness. Instead, he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."

Now, some of you today will plead and ask for a God that we want, a God of justice. "Would you do right, God? The world's broken. We need a God of justice." Well, we all want a God of justice until he

actually brings it. Then all of a sudden, he's too harsh. He's too angry. He becomes too just for our comfort.

But let's be honest for a second. If God didn't act against evil, we'd call him absent or unkind. We'd call him unjust. And when he does act against evil, many of us call him unfair and put him on trial as if he committed a crime. Now, that says more about us than it does about him.

Here's the reality: God is not like us. He's not shaped by our opinions or our broken expectations of him. He is holy. He is infinite. And he is always right, even if we don't understand or agree. So maybe, just maybe, the problem isn't that God is unjust. Maybe the problem is that his justice just makes us too uncomfortable. But hear me, he doesn't need our permission to do what is right. He is God, and we are not.

When it comes to the topic of war, it doesn't take long for all of us to ask, "Why would God command that?" And I think it's a great, fair question, but the answer is actually multifaceted.

The first of the two answers can be found in Deuteronomy 20:18. It says, "Completely destroy the Hittites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, the Jebusites, and all that the Lord God has commanded you. Otherwise, they will teach you to follow all the detestable things they do, worshiping their gods, and you will sin against the Lord your God."

As we name these Canaanite nations—the Hittites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites—we have to understand this: these groups practiced deeply and were entrenched in sin for centuries of things like child sacrifice (Leviticus 18:21; Deuteronomy 12:31), sexual violence (Leviticus 18:3-30), occult practices (Deuteronomy 18:9-12), and systemic injustice (Leviticus 18). God actually waited for generations—over 400 years according to Genesis 15—before he actually acted in judgment against them. So

this wasn't random. He was actually enacting covenantal justice against spiritually sick and wicked cultures.

Now, we have a hard time understanding that. But we have to understand this: that God's justice is not human vengeance. His judgments are slow, patient, and redemptive, even when they're very difficult and hard to read. God didn't just act to punish evil. He acted to protect his people. You may still ask why. And I get it.

But let's look at the second layer of the why that God gives us in Deuteronomy 20:18. He says, "Otherwise, they will teach you to follow all the detestable things they do in worshiping their gods." You see, this wasn't about conquest or power. It was about spiritual protection and physical protection and redemptive preparation.

God was forming for himself a new and holy people, and through whom Jesus the Messiah would actually come. God used war for ancient Israel's survival, for Jesus's arrival.

It's important for us to actually understand that we see here that these are specific, time-bound commands tied to God's redemptive story. They are not a model for modern warfare or modern foreign policies. They're actually a warning against idolatry, injustice, and spiritual compromise. So, if you're struggling with these texts today, you're not alone. But don't miss this: The same God who judged the sin in Canaan also is the same God who took sin upon himself on the cross. And then on that cross, Jesus absorbed our violence to actually end violence.

God's command to ancient Israel to conquer certain nations was not about ethnic superiority or violent ambition, or power. It was actually about divine justice and covenantal fulfillment of his promises that he made to his people.

Now these people inhabiting the land were engaging in longstanding wickedness against God. And after centuries of patience, God used

ancient Israel as an instrument of judgment. Again, these were specific, limited actions tied to God's redemptive plan, not a model for conquest.

I know Phil already covered this in previous weeks, like when we come to the topic or the conversation of slavery. When we read the Bible and we see the word "slave" or when we see the phrase "how to treat a slave," we can't actually import our postmodern, 21st-century understanding into the text, or we will misread it or misunderstand it and we'll actually do great harm.

But it goes the same way when we have the conversation when we say Israel. People bring modern assumptions, politics, and theological misapplications to this very conversation. Now, that's understandable, but that's not always helpful.

Now, we do have to acknowledge something. It's very important for us to understand that the modern state of Israel was officially

established in 1948, largely as a response to the Holocaust after 6 million Jews were murdered. The world recognized the urgent need for a homeland where Jewish people could be safe from persecution.

When that became a reality after World War II, we see something very interesting. And why should we even bring it up? Because as followers of Jesus, we must be careful not to import the ancient biblical narratives of Israel into modern-day geopolitics. We need to make sure that we don't conflate the modern 2025 state of Israel and its actions as the ancient biblical Israel and its actions. If we do that, things like slavery and the limitation of women actually happen.

Unfortunately, this has already happened in regards to eschatology. If you don't know what that word is, it's a big word. It's real fancy, but it just basically means it's our theological understanding of the end times. Now, I went to Bible college, and my wife can attest, this was one of the things I argued about with my friends all the time. As you see in the picture, if you're unsure, I'm the one on the right. I know it's

hard to tell, I did have a mohawk. That's when I had hair. God bless us.

We would sit at these tables in Bible college and discuss these deep things of eschatology and argue over and think like we've solved thousands of years of church history arguments over the table of food, fun, and being loud. One of my friends, Ricky, always says, "Jevon, just because you're loud doesn't mean you're right."

But when it came to eschatology, I was really loud. So I just felt really, really right, and I've gone back and forth from different theological conversations and different places of where I've held to even theologically.

In this conversation, we have to understand that it's often been misused to conflate the modern state of Israel and the biblical ancient Israel.

There are four major views of eschatology that are widely held. The first is called premillennialism. Now again, these are large words.

People were talking about last service. They're like, "Hey, I don't know all these 'isms' and 'schisms' and 'wisms,' just track with me.

Everything's downloadable on the website."

And we'll go deeper into our podcast this week and delve deeper into these things more.

- 1. Premillennialism means that Jesus returns before a literal 1,000-year reign. Some versions like dispensationalism include a rapture and give modern Israel a role in prophecy.**
- 2. Then there's two, amillennialism, which wasn't what I believed in when you saw me in the picture from Bible college before. I've changed over the years now. And amillennialism is a view that I actually lean towards. It's the view that the millennium or the 1,000-year reign of Jesus on earth is actually symbolic and that Jesus is ruling and reigning through his people now.**
- 3. Third, there's postmillennialism. Now they believe that the world is transformed by the gospel of Jesus before he returns. Meaning they believe that you have to preach the gospel, the**

good news of Jesus, to all four corners of the earth until every single person hears it before Jesus can actually return for his second coming.

- 4. And then four, it's called preterism. Preterism believes that many prophecies were actually fulfilled in the first century, especially around the destruction of the temple of Jerusalem in AD 70.**

Remember, this is a series where we're having to learn not to import our modern lenses to ancient texts and to actually let the Bible interpret the Bible with proper hermeneutic principles. If you don't know what hermeneutics is, hermeneutics is the art and science of biblical interpretation. So how do we read the Bible?

So if we got slavery and if we also got the limitation of women from actually importing our modern lenses to ancient texts, let's highlight three common distortions that have actually grown out of misapplied eschatology and end-times thinking.

- 1. First is misapplied dispensationalism. Now, there are some Christians who actually support everything that the modern state of Israel does, believing that it will actually speed up Jesus's return.**
- 2. The second is called political Zionist evangelicals or could also be known as American Zionist evangelicals. Now, there are some Christians who quote Genesis 12 and say, "God will bless those who bless you," as if it were actually a foreign policy mandate in regards to wars in the Middle East. But that reality is that that promise was actually fulfilled in Christ and he calls us to justice, not nationalism.**
- 3. Or third would be called replacement theology. Now these are other Christians who say that God is done with his remnant of covenant people. But there is actually a reality that in Romans chapter 11 reminds us that God doesn't cancel covenants. He actually completes them.**

Now I know this might be uncomfortable for some of us to hear. But to my replacement theology friends, God doesn't erase his covenant people. He actually fulfills his promises through Jesus.

To my American political Zionist friends, Genesis 12 was not written to us today as a blueprint for foreign policy and strategy. It's about a covenant that points to Jesus in his work to bless the nations.

So to my dispensationalist friends, regardless of what you hear on the radio or see on TV or Fox News, CNN, or whatever political space or news station that has their particular leaning or neutrality, Jesus is not coming back so we can fan the flames intentionally of war. He's actually coming back to put them out.

And if we are not careful or understanding of the context of what's happening in the Old Testament, then we will miss one of the most important aspects of God commanding ancient Israel to destroy the people in the land, which is actually that there is a spiritual war

behind the physical war. You see, this physical war and this spiritual war are actually layered upon each other.

According to passages like Genesis 6, Deuteronomy 32, and Psalm 82, it says that “‘The Sons of God’ were actually spiritual beings created by God, assigned to oversee the nations after the destruction of the Tower of Babel.” And many of these spiritual beings rebelled against God, leading all of those nations that they were leading into deep corruption, idolatry, and violence and oppression, which we just read about in Deuteronomy 20.

These fallen spiritual beings weren't just passive observers. They were actually actively deceiving and enslaving humanity through false worship and moral decay. By the time of Israel's conquest, many of these nations had been led astray by these spiritual powers, and their lifestyle and their worship of false gods actually reflect their corruption.

Now, Paul, a rabbi and a church leader in the New Testament, calls these evil forces principalities or powers. Ephesians chapter 6:12 says that “Our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”

God's judgment was not just against human sin but also against the dark powers that were actually influencing the world. In this war, it is clear that ancient Israel's battle wasn't just with people. It was part of God's war against spiritual forces behind their rebellion.

But when we see in Genesis chapter 3, the account of the fall where it says that Satan, one of those ones who rebelled against God, was in the garden, and his sin of rebellion and the deception of Adam and Eve and their rebellion hurled a perfect world of peace that God created into one of brokenness and death.

And in that rebellion, in order to protect mankind from living disconnected from God forever, he removed them from the garden. Now, God does this as a loving act. Now, there were consequences for their actions, but not just for them.

Genesis 3:13-15 records what theologians would call the first gospel. That means that this is the first message of good news. That's why you'll hear people of Jesus or followers of the way talk about the good news because it's about Jesus coming to fix all the brokenness of sin and his plan for destroying all the brokenness. It says this in Genesis 3:13-15 that the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me and I ate."

"The Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals. You will crawl on your belly, and you will eat dust all the days of your life. And I will

put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers, he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

Now, if you're unfamiliar with these verses or wondering what they all mean, it's actually God saying that there will be constant hostility between the serpent, between Satan, between humanity, that there is a spiritual conflict that actually runs through the whole Bible, and that God's actually destroying the powers of darkness.

Now, when God says, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers, he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel," what this means is that the serpent's offspring, meaning all those who follow Satan's rebellion, and the woman's offspring are ultimately pointing to the one single descendant, which is Jesus. God says to Satan, the liar and the deceiver, that he will crush your head.

God is telling Satan that Jesus, the seed of the woman, will destroy him by a mortal, decisive, and fatal blow. And in that process, Satan would strike Jesus's heel. But in striking Jesus's heel, it would not be a real fatal wound, pointing to actually Jesus on the cross, what his suffering that he would actually endure. Now though Satan would kill Jesus on the cross, in the process Jesus would ultimately destroy Satan by one decisive blow, crushing his head.

Friends, Jesus bore the pain of sin at that cross. He was struck. But in rising from the grave, he crushed Satan's head once and for all. The Bible tells us that in the last days, Jesus will return not as a suffering servant, but actually as a conquering king.

Revelation 19 says that he comes riding on a white horse, waging war, not here to create chaos, but to crush it, not to perpetuate violence, but to end violence forever. God used war in the Old Testament to protect the path to Jesus. And he will do the same one last time where he will usher in the new reign of Jesus.

Now, that's not a call for us to be warmongers. It's actually a call for us to be watchful. It's a reminder that God fights not for destruction but for redemption, always for the sake of people and the arrival of his peace.

Some of us today have crafted a God of our own making. A God who agrees with us, affirms us without a challenge, and always puts us at the center. We've let our passions, our status, our desires, our politics, our money, or even our trauma at times sit on the throne of our hearts.

We've actually invented a god who rubber stamps just our agenda. And if that god doesn't deliver, we simply make a new one. Or worse, we actually try to assassinate the character of the true God who has revealed himself in scripture because he's not the God that we want.

But hear me today: God has clearly revealed himself in scripture. Whether you agree with it or not, you have to take it or leave it. He will not share the throne of your heart with any other false caricature of God or false god that you've created.

The false gods overpromise. They underdeliver. They rob you. They extort you. They leave you trapped. But many of us are in bondage. And we need a liberator.

Now, some of us might be thinking, "I'm good. I run my own life. I don't believe in the God of the Old Testament. A little too different for me. I'd rather have like my Jesus wearing a tuxedo shirt that says 'I'm here to party but not to party.'" It's a *Talladega Nights* reference if you didn't know.

But a lot of us have our own caricatures and how we like to have our Jesus. But I want you to know that here today, God is inviting you to

be free of your own caricature and false god that you've created of him or that others have built.

The good news of God is that he has declared war on spiritual forces that keep us trapped in death. He has waged war on sin and rebellion, and he has defeated them through the cross, proving his victory and his resurrection. God fought for your heart. He died the death that we all deserve so that you could be free.

Now in this war, God offers peace to those who transfer trust of themselves to trust in him. The battle has been won because Jesus has done it.

Jesus's heel was bruised so your brokenness could be healed. You are never too far gone. You are never beyond God's reach. Jesus's heel was bruised and broken so that we could be healed. You're never beyond the reach of God's love. He loves you, friends. Even at your worst, he offers you his best.

He's here today. Today is an opportunity for us to remember that the same God who set the captives free by doing justice is the same God who's here to defeat every enemy who was enslaving and harming you from sin and shame and spiritual bondage and the condemnation that keeps you.

God doesn't just fight for you. He has won. He forgave us all our sin. He canceled our record of debt and he stood that all stood against us with its legal demands. He took it away by nailing it to the cross and “having disarmed the powers and the authorities. He, God, has made a public spectacle, triumphing over them by the cross. (Colossians 2:13-15)

Now there's coming a day when lawlessness, friends, will rise up again. And just like before, God will not stand idly by. The Bible tells us that in the last days, Jesus will return not as a suffering servant, but as a conquering king. Revelation 19 says that he will be coming

on a horse, waging final war, not to create chaos, but to crush it. Not to perpetuate violence, but to end it forever.

As we partake of communion today, it's an opportunity to remember the war that Jesus's body was destroyed for and in; that his body was broken for us, that his blood was shed on the cross. So friends, I ask you today, whether you agree with who he is or who he says he is or not, will you make that decision to trust in that same God of the Old Testament, that same God of the New Testament, with your heart.

Let Jesus fight and finish the war for you. And when you're watching TV this week, remember who has won the war and why did he do it? His name is Jesus. And he did it for you. Would you pray with me?

God, these are hard and difficult things, but the good news is that you have done it. You have won. You have completed all of these things. You've destroyed sin, sickness, and death. There are things that are

so difficult for us to hear at times. There are things that we would rather, or there are preferences that we would rather you be like.

But God, you are other. And I pray, God, that we would not try to reduce you down to our level, but that we would remember that you came near to us. We thank you for all of these things. It's in Jesus's good name we pray. Amen.

RESOURCES:

Podcast

- The Bible Project: Spiritual Beings Series
[Link](#)

Books

- Reading While Black - Esau McCaulley
[Link](#)
- *African American Reading of Paul: Reception, Resistance & Transformation* - Lisa M. Bowens
[Link](#)
- The Watchers: In Jewish and Christian Traditions - Angela Kim Harkins, Kelley Coblenttz Bautch, John C Endres
[Link](#)

- God And the Canaanite Genocide - C.S. Cowles, Eugene M. Merrill, Daniel L. Gard, Temper Longman
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- *Is God a Moral Monster?* – Paul Copan
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- *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* - Gordon Fee
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- When Giants Were Upon The Earth: The Watchers, The Nephilim and the Biblical Cosmic War of the Seed - Brian Godwa
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