

PERSPECTIVES ON WAR

A combined meeting of the various biblical and theological study groups in the Tyndale Fellowship was held at High Leigh in July 1984 to study the theme of war and peace from different angles. We are grateful to the Tyndale Fellowship for permission to present four of the main papers here to a wider circle. The Old Testament material is treated by the Rev. F. D. Kidner, formerly Warden of Tyndale House, Cambridge, and author of numerous books, including his outstanding contributions to the series of Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. The New Testament material is discussed by the Editor of *The Evangelical Quarterly*. Mr. D. F. Wright, Senior Lecturer in Ecclesiastical History in the University of Edinburgh and a specialist on Augustine and the Reformers (on which his publications include his edition of the *Common Places of Martin Bucer*), looks at some aspects of the history of Christian attitudes to war. Finally, Dr. G. L. Carey, Principal of Trinity College, Bristol, and author of *I believe in Man* and *The Meeting of the Waters* (forthcoming, June 1985) discusses some of the problems of interpretation raised by the biblical material. Readers who are interested in the application of the biblical teaching to specific contemporary problems in the area of war and peace should turn to Dr. J. R. W. Stott's latest book, *Issues Facing Christians Today* (Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1984) which contains—along with much else—the substance of his closing paper at the conference.

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Old Testament Perspectives on War

In this paper I shall try to answer the following questions:

1. What kinds of war, in the main, are found in the Old Testament?
2. What was the nature and purpose of the *hērem*?
3. What constituted 'holy war'?
4. Did the monarchy secularise war for Israel?
5. What lessons for the present era should be drawn from the Old Testament?
6. What is the Old Testament's vision of peace?

I. The main kinds of war in the Old Testament

Broadly speaking, one can classify these wars as those of, first, aggression (whether in pursuit of land or loot or revenge or self assertion); secondly, of defence or liberation; and thirdly, of divine judgment. Israel had experience of all three.

Of the first kind, aggression, David provides us with a glaring example within Israel in his period at Ziklag, when he and his six hundred men not only went out raiding for plunder, but massacred whole communities to cover their tracks and to sustain their deception of the Philistines (1 Sa. 26:6-12). If that piece of history is recorded without comment (since comment, we may suppose, would be superfluous), the picture is painted rather differently when David, as king, fought his way to an empire which included territories which had been emphatically denied to Israel in God's charge to Moses.¹ These conquests, harsh and expansionist as they were, are recounted with evident approval, to judge by the refrain which punctuates them at two points: 'And the LORD gave victory to David wherever he went' (2 Sa. 8:6, 14). Indeed the Torah itself had envisaged offensive battles far from home, and had decreed (or at the very least, acquiesced in²) death for the defenders on a scale which makes David's treatment of the Moabites seem generous by comparison, when he measured two-thirds of his captives to be put to death (2 Sa. 8:2; *cf.* Dt. 20:10-15).

Against this apparent approval of some wars of expansion we must set, *e.g.*, Israel's indictment of the Ammonites in Amos 1:13 for their brutality 'that they might enlarge their border', and the scathing oracle against Assyria in Isaiah 10:5ff. for its lust for conquest. Whatever conclusions we are left to draw from these divergent judgments must be tentative. Perhaps the safest comment to apply to Israel in common with its neighbours is the double-edged verdict on Assyria: that on the one hand the aggressor is 'the rod of (God's) anger against a godless nation', while on the other hand 'he does not so intend, and his mind does not so think'; furthermore, that his own turn will come for judgment (Is. 10:25-27). Judgment indeed arises, we learn, from the very nature of violent conquest, as the five 'Woes' of Habakkuk 2 make plain elsewhere. This, incidentally, is unobtrusively spelt out for David and his successors by the troubled aftermath of his empire-building, when territories that had been

¹ *Viz.* Edom, Moab and Ammon (2 Sa. 8:12), spared on grounds of kinship through Esau and Lot: Dt. 2:4f., 9, 19.

² See below, 15.

regarded simply as sources of tribute released the pent-up anger that they had nursed. Was Israel meant, instead, to be a blessing rather than a burden to these subject-peoples?

In this whole area we need to recognise the narrow limits of our knowledge, both of the régimes that fell and of those that replaced them; above all, of the complexity of God's ways in testing, punishing and shaping one imperfect nation by means of another.

Fighting for defence or liberation (our second category) is easier to accept than adventures in aggression; and it was for this that the Spirit of God came upon the Judges. A remark in passing in Numbers 10:9 assumed that when Israel was settled in Canaan this would be the kind of war she might expect:

'When you go to war *in your land* against the adversary *who oppresses you*, then you shall sound an alarm with the trumpets, that you may be remembered before the LORD your God, and you shall be *saved* from your enemies'.

Even defence, however, could whet the appetite for blood, as the book of Esther reveals in its record of the queen's plea for a repitition of the day of slaughter (Est. 9:11-15). And even freedom was not an inalienable right, as Jeremiah had to tell his nation and its allies, when he handed out symbolic yokes to them all, with Yahweh's message:

'Now I have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar . . . , until the time of his own land comes. Bring your necks under the yoke of the king of Babylon, and serve him and his people, and live'.
Jeremiah 27:6, 7, 12.

It was this decree, not simply a calculation of the military odds, that motivated Jeremiah's call to cease resistance in the siege.

Our third category was the war of divine judgment. We have already seen that judgment could be a hidden dimension in any war; but in the conquest of Canaan it was explicit, both in the announcement to Abraham (Gn. 15:16) and in the preaching of Moses; and to this was added the sentence on Amalek for attacking Israel at Rephidim,³ and on the Midianites for the seduction at Baal-Peor.⁴ Putting these examples together, these were judgments for flouting God's laws and for attacking God's people. The flouting was, in our terms, both religious and moral: religious 'abominations' (*tô'ēbot*) ranging from occult practices to child-sacrifice,⁵ and moral abominations particularly in the realm of

³ Ex. 17:8-16; Dt. 25:17-19; 1 Sa. 15.

⁴ Nu. 25:16-18; 31:1ff.

⁵ Dt. 18:9-14; cf. Dt. 12:31; Lv. 18:21; 20:2-5; Ezk. 23:37.

sexual behaviour.⁶ The penalties against Amalek and Midian, by contrast, seem to be exemplary, to give terrifying force to the warning, 'Touch not my anointed ones' (*cf.* Ps. 105:14, 15 concerning the patriarchs).

In all these divinely ordered massacres, the action was so horrific, and death on this scale by primitive weapons so fearsome, that we are forced to ask what we are to make of it as revelation. Since these were confessedly special cases, distinguished from other categories of war⁷ and from acts of merely human vengeance,⁸ they were not laid down as military norms even for Old Testament times. What they teach (as I shall argue later, in section 5) is theological; and it is taught with maximum force, namely: (a) God's intolerance of what is false; and in particular, false gods, occult practices and sexual perversions; (b) His jealous care of His elect; (c) the solidarity of human societies, whereby the innocent suffer (not necessarily by accident) in the temporal judgments brought upon the guilty, and the present inherits the legacy of the past (*cf.*, *e.g.*, 1 Sa. 15). At the same time we can note, (d) the way of escape which could exist for those who seek it (exemplified by Rahab); and the benign aspect of solidarity, whereby God is prepared to spare a whole city for the sake of ten righteous souls (Gn. 18:32) or even for the sake of one (Je. 5:1), and whereby a covenant made with one generation is inherited by children's children.

II. The Nature and Purpose of the *Ĥērem*

The herem is the context of most of the massacres. The word, with its companion verb, denotes what is handed over irretrievably to God; and while it comes to be a synonym for utter destruction it seldom loses its strongly religious flavour. This can be illustrated by its occurrence among the domestic laws of Leviticus 27 which covered various deeds of transference from man's sphere to God's. In the ordinary way, whatever one dedicated to the LORD could be redeemed by a suitable payment; but whatever was handed over as a *ĥērem*, 'whether of man or beast or . . . inherited field', was beyond redemption and was 'most holy' (lit., 'holy of holies') 'to the LORD' (Lv. 27:28). This is followed by the chilling instruction that no human *ĥērem* can be ransomed: 'he shall be put to death' (v.29); and it is clarified by Exodus 22:20

⁶ Lv. 18, *passim*.

⁷ *Cf.* Dt. 20:10-15, 16-18; 2 Ki. 6:21-23; 2 Ch. 28:8-15.

⁸ *Cf.*, *e.g.*, Ezk. 25:12-17, where human vengeance is seen as an offence attracting that of God, to whom vengeance belongs.

(19, Heb.) which decrees this fate for an apostate and uses the *hērem* terminology (as does also Dt. 13:15 in a whole chapter of such cases in Israel).

Clearly the word 'holy' is used of the *hērem* with no ethical content: only that of total sequestration. The false god's hardened devotees, claimed for Yahweh in these terms, He claims as a 'consuming fire'; and what He proclaims is a holiness which can make no peace with any rival 'holiness'. This concept of incompatible loyalties was not confined to Israel: it has been expressed in the tag, 'one god's *qōdēs* is another god's *hērem*'; yet it may be significant that when king Mesha of Moab put an Israelite city to the *hērem* he dragged the vessels of Yahweh before his god Chemosh—presumably to subordinate and annex them rather than destroy them. Yahweh, by contrast, would have no truck with other cult-objects. They must be burnt; and David carried out that command when he captured the idols of the Philistines at the battle of Baal-Perazim (2 Sa. 5:21; 1 Ch. 14:12; cf. Dt. 7:25).

In passing, although our concern here is theological rather than historical, it may be worth mentioning the fact that when the book of Joshua speaks of exterminating a city's population, it admits both tacitly and, at one point at least, explicitly, that there could be nevertheless numerous survivors. No one who was taken was spared, and in that sense the slaughter was total; but Joshua 10:20 speaks in the same breath of this totality 'until they were wiped out') and of the fugitives who escaped to safety. That this was no isolated case is clear from the list of cities subjected to the *hērem* but either recaptured with difficulty later in Joshua's lifetime, as in the case of Hebron and Debir (Jos. 10:36-39; cf. 15:13-17), or successfully resisting occupation for generations.

III. 'Holy War'

The expression 'Holy War' is not strictly biblical, and it can give the impression that only certain types of war were holy (for example, those that involved the *hērem*), or that Old Testament wars were fought to make converts by the sword, in the manner of the Islamic Jihad. Instead, it was normal for any army to take the proper steps to see that heaven would be propitious. So, where our versions speak of Israel or her enemies 'preparing' war or warriors, the actual term is almost invariably not 'prepare' but 'sanctify'.⁹

⁹ Je. 6:4; 22:7; 51:27, 28; Joel 3:9 (4:9, Heb.); Mi. 3:5; cf. 'my consecrated ones', Is. 13:3.

For Israel there was a variety of procedures, some more regularly observed than others. It was important to enquire of the LORD through a priest or prophet whether and how one should proceed,¹⁰ and to offer sacrifices and prayers,¹¹ sometimes with fasting.¹² Deuteronomy 20 provides for a priestly exhortation, followed by an address by officers releasing those whose hearts were not wholly in the enterprise for any reason. (This, as Pedersen has pointed out,¹³ was probably not so much a humanitarian as a psychological and spiritual provision, to eliminate any breach in the integrity of the fighting force.) At the cultic level, ritual cleanness must be observed, even for a minor assignment, as David's conversation with Ahimelech implied in 1 Samuel 21:1-6. For an army in camp, the instruction of Deuteronomy 23:9ff. that 'you shall keep yourself from every evil thing' was interpreted comprehensively, citing matters of ritual, of hygiene and of general seemliness—all this on the grounds that 'the LORD your God walks in the midst of your camp'. His presence might be signified (or summoned), at least on some occasions, by the ark,¹⁴ and His help bidden by an alarm sounded on the priestly trumpets of silver, 'that you may be remembered before the LORD your God, and you shall be saved from your enemies' (Nu. 10:9). In addition, there was the victory shout (*e.g.* Jos. 6:16; 2 Ch. 13:15), and on various occasions special acts of invoking God's authority (as at Rephidim when Moses held the rod of God above the battle) or expressing confidence in what God was about to do (as on the day when Jehoshaphat's Levites went before the army singing praises in full canonicals, 2 Ch. 20:21ff.).

In short, war as a holy exercise had its set-piece rituals, but the gravity of what was often at stake seems to have kept the invocations of God's help alive and urgent.

IV. Did the monarchy secularise war for Israel?

One of the changes which Samuel warned Israel to expect under a king was the recruiting of a standing army:

He will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots, and to be his horsemen . . . ; and he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some . . . to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. 1 Samuel 8:11, 12.

¹⁰ *E.g.*, Jdg. 1:1; 20:18; 2 Sa. 5:19, 23; 1 Ki. 22:5ff.; *etc.*

¹¹ *E.g.*, Ps. 20; 1 Sa. 13:9ff.; 2 Ch. 14:11; *etc.*

¹² 2 Ch. 20:3.

¹³ *J. Pedersen, Israel, III & IV (OUP, 1940), 9.*

¹⁴ 1 Sa. 4:3ff.; 2 Sa. 11:11; 15:24ff.; *cf.* Nu. 10:35; 14:44.

And so it happened:

. . . when Saul saw any strong man, or any valiant man, he attached him to himself.

1 Samuel 14:52.

And [under David] Joab the son of Zeruiah was over the army . . . , and Benaiah . . . was over the Cherethites and Pelethites.

2 Samuel 8:16, 17.

Before the end of David's reign we are reading of power struggles over such appointments.

It was a sharp contrast to the charismatic leadership and local calls to arms of earlier days; and Israel's demand for the change was made in a rebellious and faithless spirit. But what are we to make of the new system itself?

At more than one level the new military style was a threat to Israel's character, substituting professionalism and the latest weaponry for spontaneous leadership and naked faith. It began to turn a federation of tribes into an increasingly impersonal and burdensome state, saddled with the expense of garrisons and a full-time chariot force, and tempted into military adventures with dubious allies. All of these things attracted the protests and warning of the prophets, who saw their people flitting from one protector to another,¹⁵ putting their trust in anything but God,¹⁶ and throwing their money away at times on armaments which even common sense would have queried—for we find envoys of Judah carrying treasure to Egypt, in desperation, for chariots which were little suited to its hills, but which seemed to them more real than the Creator.¹⁷ On this typical episode, de Vaux remarks: 'The country did not benefit thereby, for in 701 Sennacherib captured every town in Judah except Jerusalem without fighting a single battle in which chariots were engaged'.¹⁸

Such, then, were the snares of the new order, and the lapses of Israel from the way of faith. But the very fact of the prophets' impassioned pleas bore witness to the possibility of rising above these temptations; moreover it would be simplistic to seize upon one period of Israel's history—that of the Judges—as the model for all time. Granted God's permission to form a kingdom, the loose structures and local initiatives of former days would have contradicted what He now allowed. The old informality had been suited to its own day, but it had itself replaced the much tighter

¹⁵ Ho. 7:11, 12.

¹⁶ E.g., Is. 8:19; 30:15.

¹⁷ Is. 30:6; 31:1-3.

¹⁸ R. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel* (Darton, Longman and Todd, 1961), 224.

structure, equally God-given, of the Exodus and the Conquest age. Israel had come out of Egypt in an approximation to battle order,¹⁹ and its tribes had camped round their standards and moved in a set order of march. Twice there was a census taken of each tribe's fighting men (Nu. 1 and 26); and when the time came for the invasion it was the entire force that was committed. God's instructions at this stage were the opposite of those that He would give to Gideon, for when Joshua sent a small contingent against Ai he was reprimanded. 'Take all the fighting men with you' (Jos. 8:1)—for it was for God, not man, to choose whether He would save 'by many or by few'.

When we look at the whole span of Israel's fighting history, we find in fact no one period either to idealise as an age of faith or to condemn outright as one of secularism. In the wilderness, those who had sung to the LORD as their strength and salvation would soon be at odds with Him, even to the extent of going into battle consciously without Him (Nu. 14:40-45). Under the Judges, miraculous victories were interspersed with internecine quarrels. The wars of David, as we have seen, varied between sheer brigandry and responsible campaigning; while some of his successors would rise to heights of soldierly faith unsurpassed by those of their charismatic predecessors, and would follow the procedures laid down for sanctifying war. King Abijah of Judah, to take an obscure example, went into battle preceded by priests with their battle trumpets; whereupon his men, finding themselves ambushed and outnumbered, 'cried to the LORD', the priests blew the trumpets, the battle shout was raised, and they were given victory, 'because (we are told) they relied upon the LORD' (2 Ch. 13:12-18). Further exploits of faith adorn the stories of Asa, Jehoshaphat and Hezekiah. Even the notorious Ahab is found taking detailed advice from a prophet of Yahweh for two successful battles against Ben-hadad (1 Ki. 20:13-15, 22, 28). True, all these kings would undo their good work by foolish adventures on their own account; but they were not the first to do so, nor does the Bible see them as prisoners of a faulty system. Characteristically, the book of Judges had revealed the shame as well as the glory of the age when 'there was no king in Israel', ending its story not only with the prevailing anarchy but with the casuistical decisions of those who had fought a holy war to an embarrassing conclusion (Jdg. 21). With equal honesty the

¹⁹ Such is the meaning elsewhere of *h^amūšim* (Ex. 13:18). *NEB* renders this 'the fifth generation' at this point, but accepts its military sense in all other passages. For the suggested derivation of the word, see K-B or de Vaux (*op. cit.*, 217).

ensuing story of the monarchy exposes not only the pride and worldliness which were the snare of kings, but also the determination of God to set a man after His own heart on the throne, and to make the title of king, as the LORD's anointed, the very hope of the future. We must emphasise that attitudes, not structures, were crucial in each successive age, and that these varied, not so much from age to age as from one lifetime to another, and indeed from year to year — such is the volatility of our human material.

V. Lessons for the present era

To draw valid conclusions from the Old Testament we must first remember that in ancient Israel, church and state were one; whereas now the two have had their spheres and functions and appropriate means of action differentiated within God's overarching rule. In the Old Testament the faithful are urged to have 'God's high praises in their throats and two-edged swords in their hands, to wreak vengeance on the nations . . . , to execute on them the judgment written' (Ps. 149:6, 7, 9); but in the New it is for the civil ruler to 'bear the sword' as 'the servant of God to execute his wrath on the wrongdoer' (Ro. 13:4).

Further, in seeking military precedents to apply to the civil power, we have to make an additional distinction, in that we allow for the fact that the Israel of the Old Testament stood in a unique relation to God. Its wars (at least ideally) were 'the wars of the LORD' (*cf.* Nu. 21:14), who walked in the midst of the camp (Dt. 23:14) and went forth with its armies as captain of the host (*cf.* Jos. 5:14). What was laid down for this people was specific to them and to their time, and was rooted in the Sinai covenant. Since the New Covenant is made with no sovereign state but with a company drawn from every tribe and nation, the true successors of these warriors will be not national armies but the church; and the true equivalents of these wars and weapons will be those that belong to the centre of operations, the heavenlies. We have already looked at some of the theological lessons to be drawn from these earthly teaching-models, all of which are recorded 'for our instruction, upon whom the end of the ages has come'. The very power of these examples to shock and appal us as history is perhaps their most important characteristic as theology, since here we find the ferocity of the spiritual war made unbearably real to us. No eloquence could drive home more powerfully the fact that God's war now, and His judgment to come, are alike total: that for us the world, the flesh and the

devil are enemies to fight to the death, and that the last judgment will make this *hērem* absolute.

But while the antitype of the wars of judgment is the spiritual conflict and its final outcome, this does not mean that we can draw no lessons from the Old Testament about earthly war. Dr. John Stott has posed the question, ‘What parallels has “holy war” to “just war”?’; and although my short answer to that would be ‘Few, if any’—for the *ethical* content of holiness is not prominent in the regulations for sanctifying war—there are certainly points of contact between some clauses of the Just War doctrine and the implications of scattered incidents and pronouncements in the Old Testament. I doubt if the Schoolmen and their successors drew their teachings from this material, and I will point out some areas in which the two go their separate ways. Nevertheless the Just War stipulations will make a convenient framework for this part of the discussion. They can be summarised as requiring:

- (i) A just cause
- (ii) A lawful authority (*e.g.*, a sovereign state)
- (iii) A just intention
- (iv) No other way of securing justice
- (v) The use of right means
- (vi) A reasonable prospect of victory
- (vii) The good of victory to outweigh the damage of war.

To start with a contrast between the two worlds of thought, the Just War doctrine requires that those who contemplate hostilities must weigh up matters of equity (a just cause), of motive (a just intention) and of probability, both military and social (a likely victory and a victory worth having); whereas Israel was simply required to seek a Yes or No from the LORD. Again, there is little emphasis in the Torah on peaceful negotiation before resorting to a holy war. The call to a city, in Deuteronomy 20:10, 11, to surrender and be enslaved, or else to face a massacre of all its males, can hardly be called pacific. Furthermore, the concern of Just War exponents with the use of ‘right means’ moves in a different dimension from the preoccupation of the Torah with ritual purity and with wholeheartedness.

Moving from the Law to the Prophets and the Chronicler, however, we can find a few points at which Israelites and Schoolmen think alike—though I doubt if this is more than a coincidence. First, concerning a ‘just cause’ and a serious attempt to negotiate rather than fight, we hear Jephthah arguing the case for Israel against the Ammonites at some length, concluding with the claim: ‘I therefore have not sinned against you, and you do me

wrong by making war on me; the LORD, the Judge, decide this day between (us)' (Jdg. 11:27 [12-33]). Only when this protest is rejected does Jephthah join battle. Secondly, as object-lessons on the folly of an unjustified war, we have the story of the belligerent Amaziah courting his own overthrow at the hands of Joash of Israel (2 Ch. 25:17ff.); and more tragically, of Josiah's challenge to Pharaoh Neco when he likewise lacked any just cause, just intention or reasonable hope of victory (2 Ch. 35:20ff., esp.22). When, on top of such follies, an oath of fealty would be broken by a war of independence (as in Zedekiah's breach with Babylon), Ezekiel expresses Yahweh's sense of outrage:

Can a man escape who does such things? Can he break the covenant and yet escape? . . . As I live, surely my oath which he despised, and my covenant which he broke, I will requite upon his head.

Ezekiel 17:15, 19.

Thirdly, on the requirement of employing the right means, we can note that the moralists' concern to keep the evils of war within bounds chimes in with the opening oracles of Amos, whose main thrust is against the gratuitous cruelties of his contemporaries. It is also anticipated in the Torah's prohibition of scorched-earth tactics against a besieged city (Dt. 20:19, 20)—although this was countermanded on one presumably exceptional occasion by the prophet Elisha (2 Ki. 3:19, 25). Yet under this heading of limiting the cruelties of war, the age of Elisha produces another divergence from the Torah, the law of Deuteronomy 20—this time in the direction of mercy—when the prophet reminds the king that it is unthinkable to kill one's military prisoners (2 Ki. 6:22). This makes one look again at the law in question (Dt. 20:12-14), with its apparent command to kill every male of a besieged city, while merely appropriating the women and children. Was this in fact a concession rather than a command (syntactically similar to the passage in Dt. 24:1-4 on the irreversibility of divorce²⁰), *limiting* the slaughter to those who, unlike the women and children, could not readily be integrated into early Israel? Elisha's remark indicates that, like many another law, that of Deuteronomy 20 was understood as a baseline or staging-post rather than a terminus; and his words are

²⁰ Verses 12-13, like 24:1-3, could be an extended protasis (an if-clause in the imperfect, followed by a series of perfect consecutives), and verse 14 the apodosis. Thus: 'And if it makes no peace with you, but makes war with you and you besiege it, and the LORD . . . gives it into your hand and you put all the males to the sword, yet the women (*etc.*) you shall take as booty for yourselves . . .'.

borne out by the reputation which the kings of Israel enjoyed abroad as 'merciful kings' (1 Ki. 20:31).

Moving on now from comparisons with the Just War formulations, we need to ask what other features and principles of war emerge from the Old Testament. I shall call attention to only three.

First, the sheer ubiquity of the subject. War appears as so much a fact of life that the history of Israel is largely military history, her victories and defeats running parallel with her spiritual vicissitudes. It seems to go without saying that one of a ruler's chief preoccupations had to be with defence. The LORD's anointed was his people's 'shield' (Ps. 84:9), 'he of whom we said "Under his shadow we shall live among the nations"' (Lam. 4:20).

Secondly, however, we are made to realise that 'by strength shall no man prevail' (1 Sa. 2:9). We listen to Isaiah, speaking to more generations than simply his own:

You looked to the weapons of the House of the Forest, . . . and you broke down the houses to fortify the wall. You made a reservoir between the two walls . . . But you did not look to him who did it, or have regard for him who planned it long ago.

Isaiah 22:8-10.

For the Old Testament takes a high view and a long view of a nation's fortunes, calling victory 'salvation', and seeing 'rest' from one's enemies as a gift from God: not a purchase from one's allies (*cf.* Asa's hollow bargain with Ben-hadad, 2 Ch. 16:2ff., 9) or a prize that one can hug to oneself.

But thirdly, the fact that security comes from God alone is not seen as an invitation to a people to drop its guard. King Asa, in a better moment, saw peace as a gift to be used responsibly and warily:

Let us build these cities, and surround them with walls and towers, gates and bars; the land is still ours, because we have sought the LORD our God; . . . and he has given us peace on every side.

2 Chronicles 14:7.

And Nehemiah put the matter with almost Cromwellian brevity:

We prayed to our God, and set a guard . . . day and night.

Nehemiah 4:9.

The question remains, however, what right has a modern state to look to God in these ways, in the context of its own wars and crises? We have already been reminded that Israel's successor in God's wars of judgment is the church, fighting at a different level and with different weapons. But the wars of Moses and Joshua,

which had this character of judgment, were followed by the kinds of conflict which have been the common lot of all peoples, throughout the rest of Israel's history. Her calling as a kingdom of priests did not remove her from the realities of coexistence with her neighbours at a mundane level, or leave us with nothing to learn from this human scene, presented to us in much detail. But we can be more specific, for God Himself reminded Israel that the fortunes of her fellow-nations meant as much to Him as did her own.

Are you not like the Ethiopians to me,
 O people of Israel, says the LORD.
 Did I not bring up Israel from the land of Egypt,
 and the Philistines from Caphtor
 and the Syrians from Kir?

Amos 9:7

It is not for nothing that He inspired prophet after prophet with oracles on the political prospects of petty kingdoms and great powers; and if these have all too often the sound of a tirade, it is not through unconcern. There is the sound of our Lord's lament for Jerusalem in Yahweh's elegy for Moab:

My heart cries out for Moab;
 . . .
 I weep with the weeping of Jazer
 for the vine of Sibmah;
 I drench you with my tears,
 O Heshbon and Elealeh.

Isaiah 15:5; 16:9.

If peoples, and not merely individuals or the covenant-community, are of such lively concern to God, we are being more spiritual than He if we have scruples over calling our nations to prayer for help in times of trouble. To take a recent example of such heart-searchings, there were some doubts, a few years ago, over the propriety of using the phrase, '*If my people . . .*', as a summons to intercession for this nation. The promise to Solomon was:

If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

(2 Ch. 7:14)

Quite correctly, it was pointed out that no modern state can be addressed as 'My people, called by my name'. But what that scruple overlooked was the closely similar word that came to Jeremiah at the potter's house, with the pivotal phrase, '*If that nation . . .*'.

If at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, and *if that nation . . .* turns from its evil, I will repent of the evil that I intended to do to it.

Jeremiah 18:7, 8.

That is a charter, it seems, for ‘any time’, any nation, threatened with any degree or kind of judgment. The lessons that Israel learnt or failed to learn are not buried in the past or levitated out of this world.

VI. The Old Testament’s vision of peace

In summary, the prospect is a *pax divina*. In the first place, it is peace between God and man, secured by atonement, not attainment. The *músar š’lómēnú*, ‘the chastisement of our peace’, or, ‘that brought us peace’, is seen to fall upon the one who was wounded for our transgressions.

But secondly, peace externally and extensively is to be secured by divine onslaught, pictured in several passages with great energy and finality:

He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth;
he breaks the bow, and shatters the spear;
he burns the chariots with fire!

Psalm 46:9 (10, Heb.)

The promise of the ‘prince of peace’ is accompanied by a similar vision of such a bonfire:

For every boot of the tramping warrior . . .
and every garment rolled in blood
will be burned as fuel for the fire.

Isaiah 9:5 (4, Heb.)

Similarly, with the prospect of the peaceful king in Zechariah 9:9 there is the programme of verse 10:

I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim
and the war horse from Jerusalem;
and the battle bow shall be cut off,
and he shall command peace to the nations;
his dominion shall be from sea to sea,
and from the River to the ends of the earth.

Thirdly, the disappearance of weapons is pictured in gentler terms by their conversion to peaceful uses in God’s reign, in the well-known twin oracles of Isaiah 2:2-4 and Micah 4:1-4. For us, there is a striking contrast to observe between our efforts to achieve disarmament as a means of peace, and this prospect of it

as a spontaneous *consequence* of peace, just as peace itself is presented as the consequence of justice, both in this oracle and in Isaiah 32:16, 17:

Then justice shall dwell in the wilderness,
and righteousness abide in the fruitful field.
And the effect of righteousness shall be peace,
and the result of righteousness quietness and trust for ever.

Lastly, the terms we have just quoted, namely 'peace' (*šālôm*), 'quietness' (*hašqēṭ*) and 'trust' (*beṭaḥ*), together with such synonyms as 'rest' (*naḥat*) and 'ease' (*šalwâ*), are made vivid with poetic pictures of domestic prosperity ('every man under his vine and under his fig tree', Mi. 4:4), of the world no longer in travail ('the wolf . . . with the lamb', Is. 11:6ff.) and, perhaps most engagingly of all, of cities that are no longer harsh or ravaged:

Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem; . . .
And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing. . .
Zechariah 8:4

We might almost be forgiven for responding to that picture more eagerly than to the imagery of the Apocalypse which complements it:

The street of the city was pure gold, transparent as glass.

Happily, the reality will outstrip all our synonyms and etymologies for peace, and our most theological and most idyllic pictures. What God has prepared for us lies well beyond even these converging lines.