

Sabeel Advent Bible Study 3

Militarism and Apartheid: Renouncing Violence in the Name of God

Introduction

The exploitation of the Bible to normalise segregation was never undertaken in isolation but invariably retrospectively by European colonialists to justify their subjugation of dependent people and the theft of their lands. In this regard, apartheid was and remains not about maintaining racial purity as rather with maintaining racial supremacy which can only be achieved by the use of military force.

Christian Zionists therefore typically draw upon biblical narratives of apparently divinely sanctioned wars and conquests to justify Israel's subjugation of the Palestinians and preemptive military strikes against her Arab neighbours. Deeply skeptical of any breakthrough in the peace process they anticipate a major end-time conflict between God's 'Chosen people' (Israel) and the nations that oppose her.

Bible Study

1. What does the New Testament teach about the nature of conflict?

"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore, put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." (Ephesians 6:11-17)

2. Who is our enemy, and by implication, who is not our enemy?
3. What are the weapons we should rely on?
4. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus describes the blessings accruing to those who obey his teaching. Jesus explicitly addresses the need for peacemakers in the Beatitudes.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because

great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” (Matthew 5:9-12)

5. What are some of the characteristics of peacemakers?
6. Why would peacemakers be identified as children of God?
7. What are some of the costs and rewards of being peacemakers?
8. When some Christian leaders are lobbying for greater military intervention in the Middle East, what does Jesus command his followers?

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Matthew 5:43-48)

9. How could this personal ethic when applied transform tensions between people?
10. How should we live in the light of the imminent return of Jesus?

“Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him. “Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns.” (Matthew 24:42-46)

11. How can we ‘speed’ to Lord’s return?

“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming.” (2 Peter 3:10-12)

12. In the Book of Revelation, there is a glorious heavenly vision of a restored humanity ethnically, linguistically and culturally diverse yet standing together not segregated, one in heart, soul and mind.

“After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding

palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." (Revelation 7:9-10)

If this is what heaven will be like, how can we best align ourselves with where we are, God willing, headed?

13. What is the ultimate vision of the future in the Bible?

"Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." (Revelation 21:1-4. See also 21:22-27)

"Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever." (Revelation 22:1-5)

14. How should this vision shape our convictions and priorities?

Only a biblical vision of God and His purposes for our world, revealed fully and finally in the Lord Jesus Christ can deliver us from the illusion of racial purity, the idolatry of racist supremacism and justification of violence to achieve the purposes of God

Conclusion

It is sobering to realise that the segregationist policies designed to preserve European 'racial purity' in the USA, also inspired fascism in Germany and apartheid in South Africa. Twenty years ago, Archbishop Desmond Tutu said,

*"The end of apartheid stands as one of the crowning accomplishments of the last century, but we would not have succeeded without the help of international pressure... If apartheid ended, so can the occupation, but the moral force and international pressure will have to be just as determined. The current divestment effort is the first, though certainly not the only, necessary move in that direction."*ⁱ

Sabeel-Kairos UK : A Christian Response to Israeli Apartheid

The following statement was endorsed by the Trustees of Sabeel-Kairos UK with the support of Sabeel Jerusalem and Kairos Palestine and was published at the annual Sabeel-Kairos UK conference on 24th September 2021.

‘Having considered a Christian response to Israeli apartheid, we affirm that all people are created equally in the image of God; we commend the B’Tselem and Human Rights Watch documents designating Israel as an apartheid state; we repudiate all forms of racism and discrimination; and we recommit ourselves to working for justice, peace and reconciliation in Israel/Palestine.’

ⁱ Desmond Tutu, “An international campaign : Build moral pressure to end the occupation” *International Herald Tribune* (June 14, 2002) <https://www.nytimes.com/2002/06/14/opinion/IHT-an-international-campaign-build-moral-pressure-to-end-the.html>